



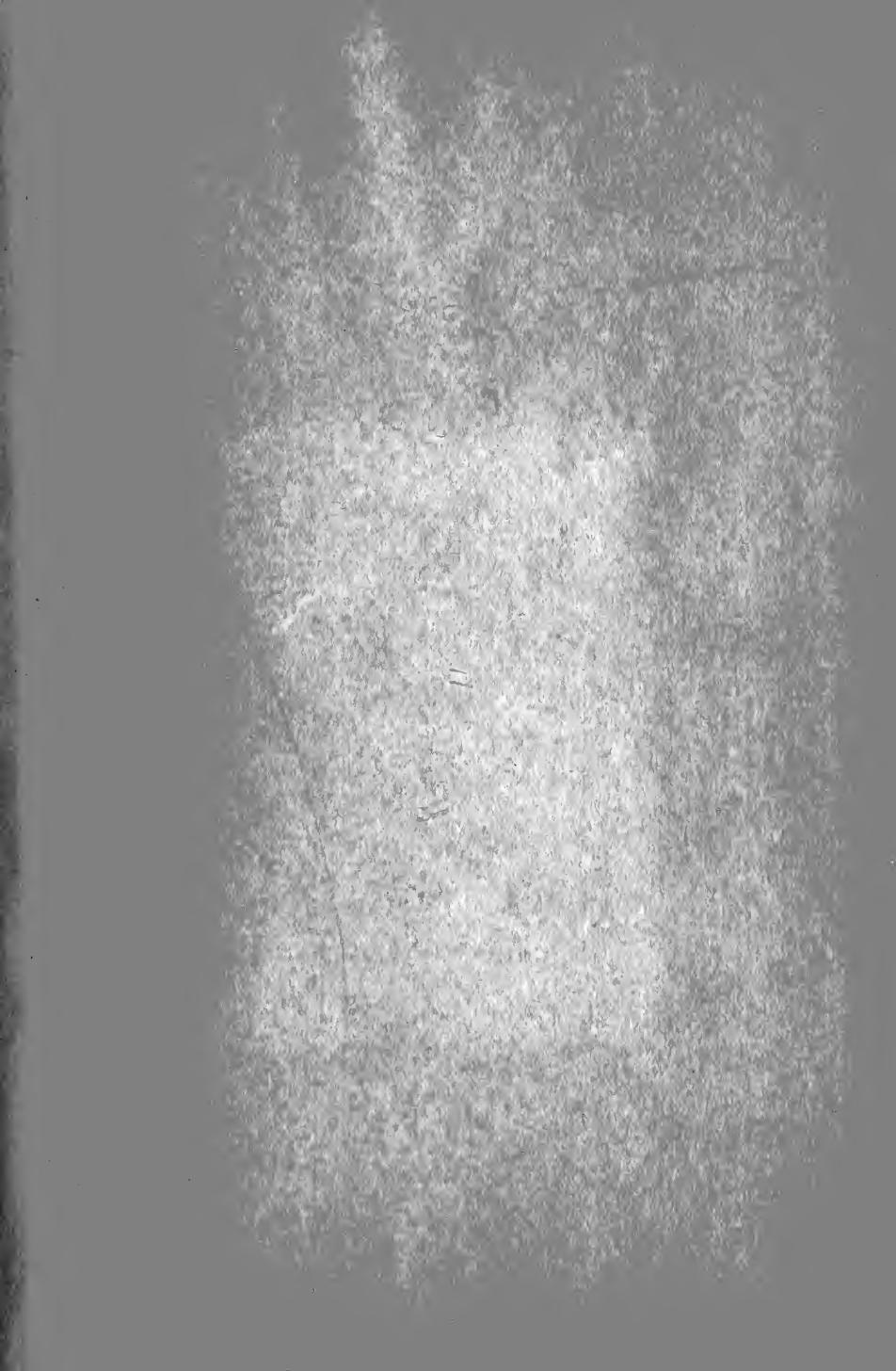


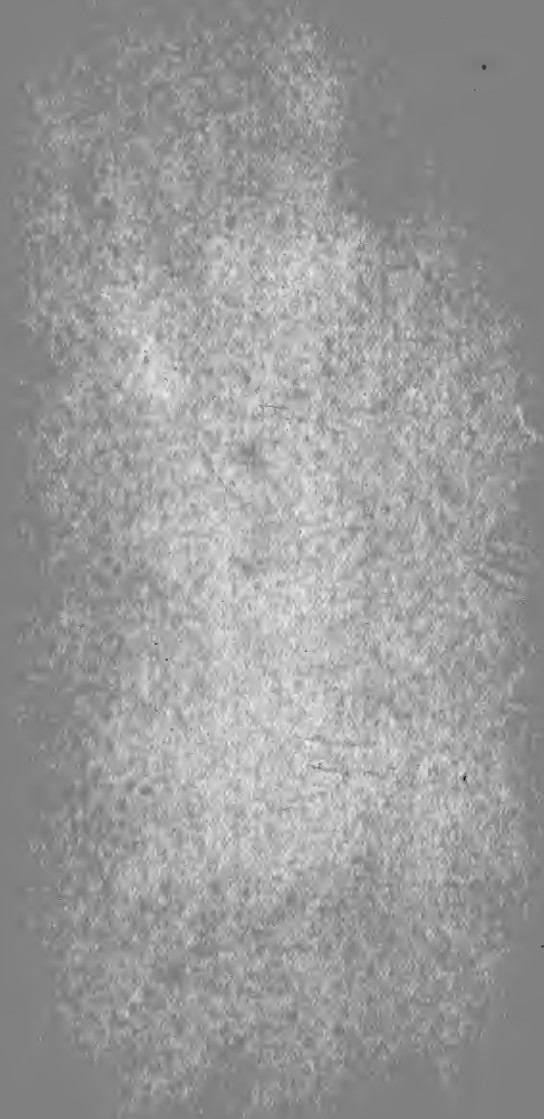
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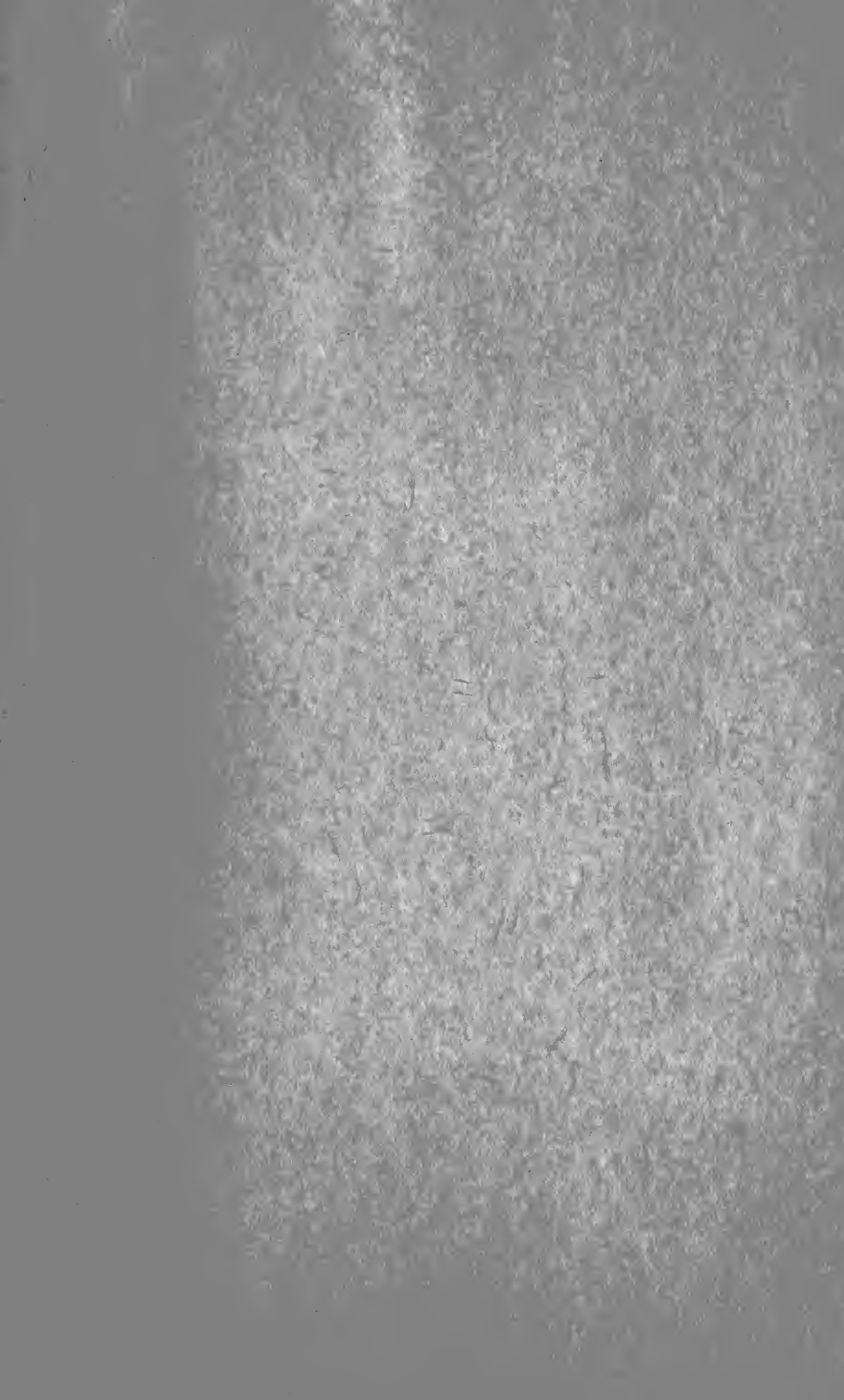
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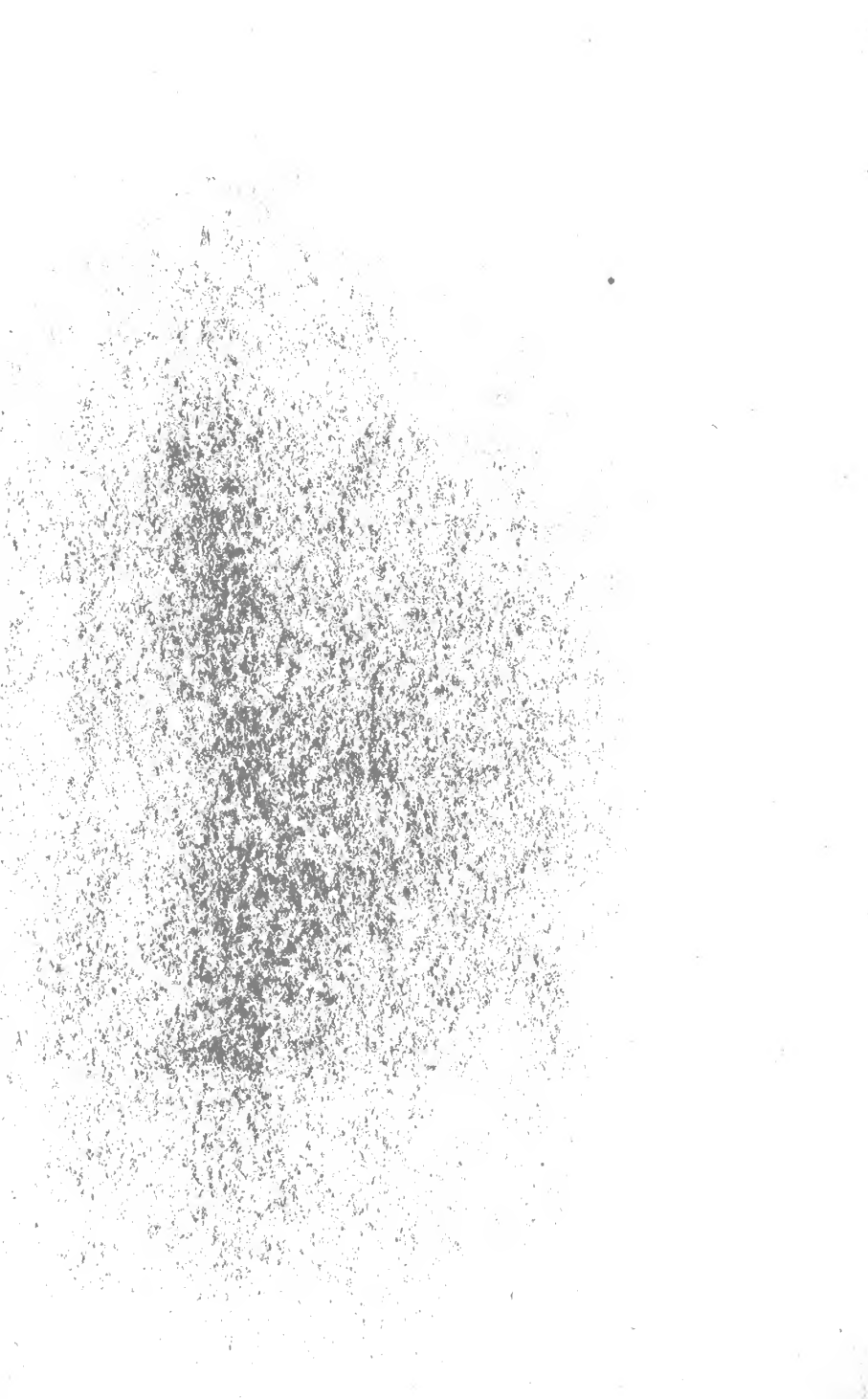
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# CONSIDERATIONS ON ETERNITY

FROM THE LATIN OF  
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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

**T**HIS preface will not begin with an apology for the publication of another book on eternity. For no apology is needed. Anything that will lead men to think of their eternal destiny should be accorded a welcome. I was told, only a short time ago, "there is too much eternity, eternity, about this book." But how can this be true when we are all rushing on to eternity, and always liable to be seduced by the devil into the eternity of the damned? Failure to reflect on eternity has at all times in man's history been a fundamental cause of sin. There are always many, alas too many, who, if they do not actually deny an eternal life, yet live as if they had no belief in it. "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin" (Ecclus. vii. 40). The consideration of eternity is as necessary in one age as in another. The present day is no exception. "With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart." (Jer. xii. 11.) God has prepared for the good an eternal reward, and for the wicked an eternal punishment. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

(Mat. xxv. 34.) "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mat. xxv. 41). These are the words of Christ Who is to come to judge both the living and the dead. Is it not worth our while to meditate and reflect upon them?

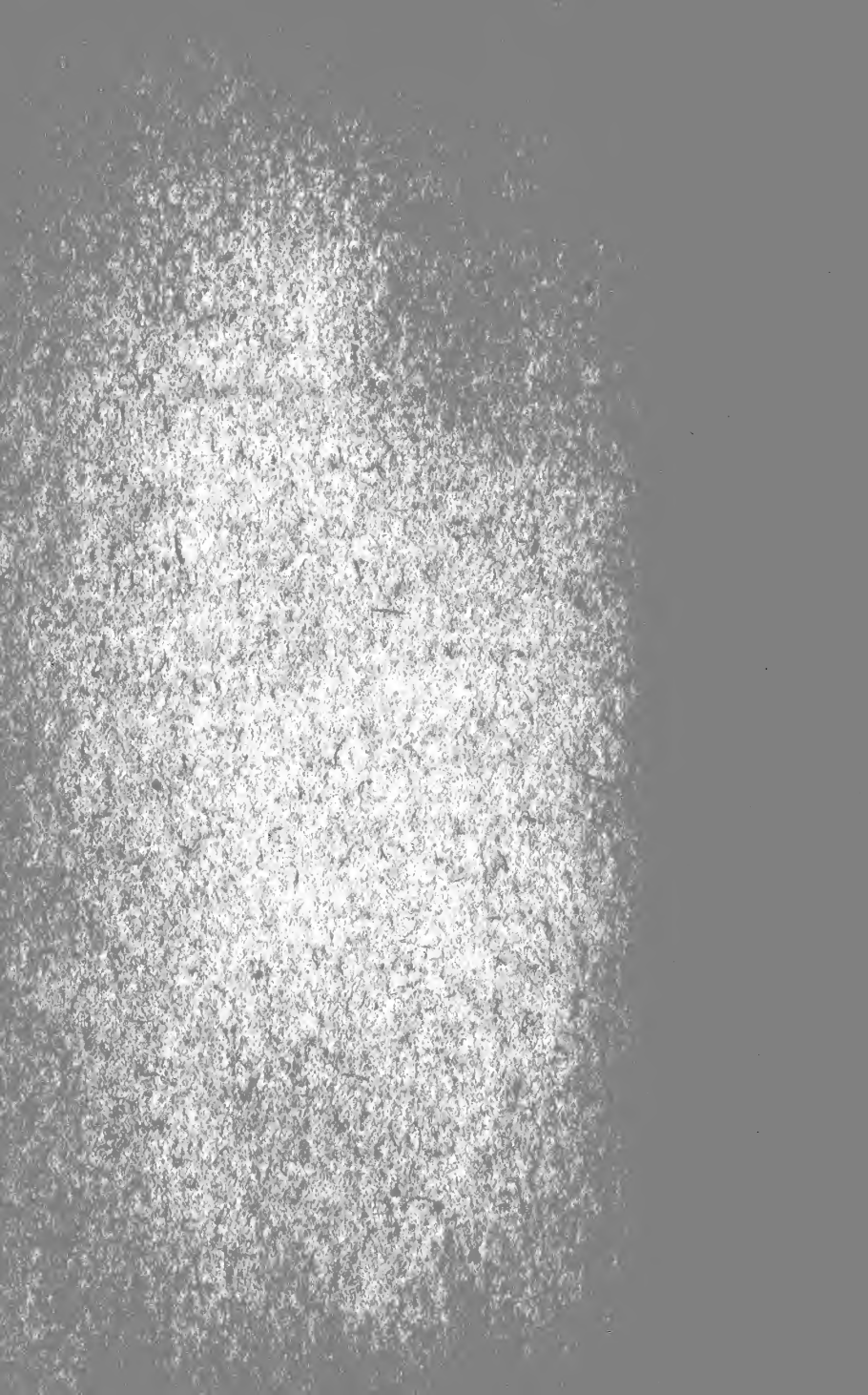
Most Catholic homes are too poorly equipped with Catholic books treating of man's deepest concerns. And what can be of deeper concern to a man than how he shall spend eternity? "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (Mat. xvi. 26.) We of this day need the spiritual strength to be derived from such a book as this to resist the frivolous and sinful tendencies that threaten to carry us away.

Dear Reader, you and I, willing or unwilling, are one day to be ushered into the realm of eternity. We know what it is. God, the infallible Truth, has declared it to us in unmistakable language. Reflect seriously, then, on the considerations here presented. Learn to love this book. Let it be a fountain from which you will drink often. It will help you to gain eternal life, to escape eternal death. You may not find it necessary to inform you of the struggle waged by the Powers of Darkness against the Powers of Light for the possession of your soul. But you will find it an encouragement

to put all your strength on the side of the Powers of Light.

"Considerations on Eternity," the work of the learned Jeremias Drexelius, S. J., is a classic on the subject. The praise and gratitude of Catholics are due to Sister Marie José Byrne for this new and excellent translation.

FERDINAND E. BOGNER.





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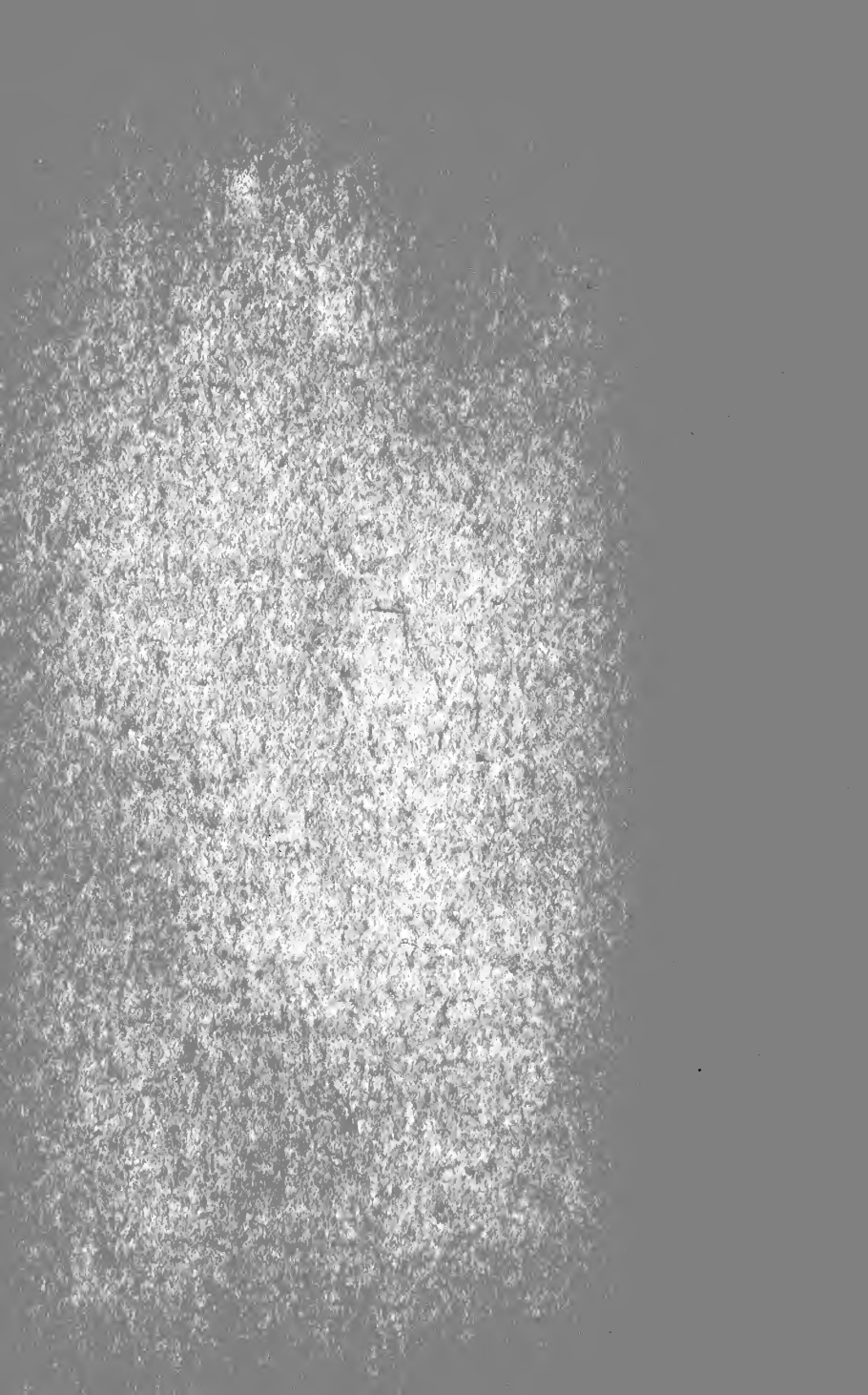
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# Considerations on Eternity

## CONSIDERATION I

### WHAT IS ETERNITY?

CICERO (De Nat. Deor. I, 22, 60) tells us that when Simonides was asked by Hiero, King of Sicily, what God is, he requested one day for the consideration of the question. When that day had passed, he said that the matter was not yet clear to him, and desired two days more for the same deliberation. These two days also having elapsed, he demanded three. Finally he made this reply only: the more he thought on the subject, the more it seemed to him deserving of thought; less and less clear did the matter appear to him, the longer he labored in its consideration. As we set about to meditate on eternity, the first question that presents itself for investigation is this: What is eternity? Boethius (De Consolat. Bk. V, Prosa 6) says that it is the entire and at the same time the perfect possession of everlasting life. No one will take exception if we say that this cannot be known, and that the more it is examined, the more there remains to be examined. For how can that be defined which has no limits?

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But if any one should insist, and desire even a shadowy outline, we think that this can be given more easily by negation than by affirmation. Thus, Plato in the "Timæus" says of God: "I do not know what God is; I know what He is not." Thus also, St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (Serm. 64 De Verbis Domini), describes that true beatitude which obtains among the heavenly beings by removing from it all notion of evil. "More easily," he says, "do we discover what is not there than what is." In heaven there is no pain, no sadness, no poverty, no weakness, no disease, no death, no evil. We can speak in similar terms about eternity; for, whatever we see in this life and perceive by our exterior senses is not eternal. "For the things which are seen," says St. Paul, "are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. IV, 18). Accordingly, we may say: "This joy of mine, this pleasure and delight, this treasure, this honor, this proud edifice, this life of mine, are transient and perishable, they are not eternal." In what direction soever we turn our finger, we point to things that will perish.

Such expressions as these are common: "This structure is eternal; this monument immortal." So, also, the impatient man complains that his sufferings are eternal. But too short are these eternities which it is easy to comprise in words; whatever we say about the real eternity we shall understate. St. Augustine says: "You may say whatever you wish

about eternity; and for this reason you may say it, because whatever you say you state less than the reality. But you must necessarily say something, that you may have some foundation for meditating on that which cannot be expressed" (In Ps. LXIII). Trismegistus in his "Asclepius" says: "The soul is the horizon between eternity and time; for inasmuch as it is immortal, it participates in eternity; but inasmuch as it has been infused by God in the body, it participates in time."

But before we go further, let us, for the sake of preserving order, see what men of ancient times, the Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and others, thought about eternity. They certainly recognized it and described it in various ways.

## I

### VARIOUS NOTIONS AND SYMBOLS OF THE ANCIENTS REGARDING ETERNITY

In the first place the ancients represented eternity by a ring or circle, which is without beginning and end: in no part of itself does it begin, in no part end, which is a characteristic of divine eternity. Thus, since God is eternal and His continuous existence is properly called eternity, to the Egyptians a circle symbolized God. The Persians formerly believed that they were showing God the

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highest possible honors, when they climbed a very lofty tower and invoked Him as the circle of the heavens. And it is set down in the customs of the Turks (as Pierius explains somewhat fully) that the following proclamation was shouted early in the morning from a very high watch tower: "God always was and always will be"; and that at the same time they saluted their own Mahomet. The Saracens also called God a circle.

That well known Mercurius Trismegistus, whom I have mentioned (and who wrote more books than any other man, if we believe Seleucus and Menæcus), said that God is an intellectual sphere, whose centre is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere, because nowhere do the majesty and immensity of God terminate. For this reason the ancients built round temples to their gods. Thus, Numa Pompilius is said to have consecrated at Rome a round temple to Vesta. Thus, also, Augustus Cæsar is said to have dedicated in the name of Agrippa a round-shaped temple to all the gods and to have named it the Pantheon. Hence, too, Pythagoras, in order that he might show that God is eternal, commanded that his disciples adore Him by a circular motion of the body. It was also ordained by Numa, according to the testimony of Brissonius, that those about to worship should turn round in a circle. Therefore, according to the ancients God is a circle, but a circle without periphery or circumference,



whose centre is everywhere, since God is at the same time the beginning and end of all things. Most justly does Job exclaim: "Behold God is great, exceeding our knowledge; the number of His years is inestimable" (Job XXXVI, 26).

Secondly, the ancients represented eternity by a sphere and a globe. Thus, a coin was struck in honor of the Empress Faustina with the following form and image: The empress was seated upon a globe, stretching forth one hand and holding a sceptre in the other; the inscription on the coin was *ETERNITY*.\* Hence many of the ancients believed that the world because it was round was eternal; to whom St. Basil fittingly replies: "Granted that the world is round, yet the beginning of a circle is the centre."

Thirdly, to the ancients eternity was symbolized by a chair, by which they signified eternal rest. The Nasamones, a people of Africa, usually not only died seated, but also wished to be buried in this posture, as if they had already reached eternity and that long cessation from labors. So, sometimes even today kings and emperors are buried in sub-

\* The figure here described is not that of the Empress, but the personified conception of *Æternitas* (eternity). Such personification of abstract qualities was common among the Romans, and many examples of it occur on coins: e.g. *Pax*, *Abundantia*, *Providentia*, *Pudicitia*, *Lætitia*. Another coin of the same Faustina bears on the obverse a profile portrait of the Empress and on the reverse a figure of *Pietas* sacrificing at an altar.—Tr.

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terreanean vaults, seated in silent and mournful majesty. It was also a practice among the Romans to support metal statues of their dead emperors on chairs of like material, since they were now in the enjoyment of eternity.

There are men who frequently reason thus with themselves: "Behold, since I am so long a time sorely hampered and crushed by cares and labors, why do I not take a respite? why not pause a little? why not end these long and troublesome labors? Long enough have I labored; let others, too, labor as much as I. Therefore, I shall now rest and cease." And so these men set chairs for themselves and proclaim holidays, but which, alas, will not be of long duration! They place a chair, they eagerly seek rest, but neither in the proper place nor at the proper time. How truly and how solemnly does that golden book, "The Imitation of Christ," din these words in our ears: "Dispose and order all things according as thou wilt and as seems best to thee, and thou wilt still find something to suffer, either willingly or unwillingly; and so thou shalt always find the cross"; and "The whole life of Christ was a cross and a martyrdom; and dost thou seek for thyself rest and joy?" (Imit. Christ. Bk. II, Ch. 12.) Therefore, our chair must be placed in heaven, not here. In the midst of so many disturbances it will not stand unmoved; and though all other things should spare this chair, death will

finally overturn it. No true rest is to be hoped for but that which is eternal. Nevertheless, if there is any rest in this life it will be this: to commit one's whole self and all one's possessions entirely to God and the will of God, to trust entirely to Him, to consider all other things as vain. Thus for our instruction Ecclesiasticus says: "Trust in God and stay in thy place" (Ecclus. XI, 22). Apart from this peace of mind there are only troubles, only a sea and mighty waves, and a hell on earth. But let us return to the ancients.

Fourthly, eternity was shadowed forth by the sun and moon according to the ancients. The sun always comes to life again, although it seems to die daily and to bury itself; it always rises again, although it daily declines and sets. So also the moon always increases and waxes after its monthly waning. Well does Catullus say (Carm. V, 4-6): —

The suns may sink to rest and rise again:  
But we, when once our too brief light has set,  
Through one unending night fore'er must sleep.

In hell this night will certainly be eternal, but without sleep. There none sleep, because they have slept here when they should have watched. There then they watch after a short sleep in their sins, which they themselves, had they been able, would have made very long, nay eternal. Far different is the case in heaven. The Church sings of the

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martyrs of Christ: "Perpetual light will shine upon Thy saints, and eternal ages will be theirs. Here is rest, here delight, after labors and watches of no long duration."

Fifthly, eternity was symbolized to the ancients by the basilisk. This is the most poisonous of all animals, and the only one, according to Horus Niliacus, that cannot be killed by human power and might. Indeed, so virulent is it, that it kills plants by its breath alone, puts other animals to flight even by its hiss, and causes birds to become silent as soon as it is heard approaching. Aelian relates that in the desert of Africa a beast of burden had died, and around its corpse, as at a banquet, several serpents had gathered; but driven away merely by the hiss of a basilisk, they hid themselves in the sand. Eternity, which will be passed either in joys or in torments, can be shortened and lessened by no one, much less abolished or avoided. Not strange is it then, if all who possess right reason are terrified by meditating upon it even slightly. Infinite are the coils of this basilisk; immense and inextricable its rings and windings. Ah, terrible dragon!

Here let us turn to ourselves for a short time. It sometimes happens, when a man looks into himself and examines his conscience for the purpose of making confession, that he finds teeming nests of serpents and whole swarms of vipers, and he wonders within himself, saying: "Pray, whence so

much poison in my heart? Whence so many fat serpents, so many grievous, so many mortal sins? Whence so great a throng of lizards, whence so many base and licentious thoughts? I myself shudder at so numerous a pest." Be not surprised; we shall easily reveal the cause of the trouble. A damp and neglected place is excellently suited to generate serpents. Behold then the double cause: the moisture of the place, and the negligence of those who ought to care for it. It is precisely the same in the human soul: if almost all one's care is spent upon the body, if it is treated delicately, nourished sumptuously, sated with dainties, soothed with pleasures, we must admit that the soul which inhabits it dwells in moisture. If to this are added carelessness and neglect of heavenly things; if scarcely any thought of salvation is entertained, provided only the body be safe and in good condition, whatever becomes of the soul; if, finally, confession is infrequent and generally perfunctory, what wonder that many serpents are produced here, many deadly faults are found? But, my Christian friend, send this basilisk into your heart, admit the thought of eternity, and you will perceive that these poisonous beasts will gradually vanish. You yourself admit that your heart swarms with these serpents; therefore, it is a sign that heretofore you have rarely or never thought of eternity. Amend, and even now begin constantly to revolve this

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thought in your mind: "Momentary is that which delights, eternal that which tortures."

Sixthly, eternity was depicted in the following manner. There was represented an immense and terrible cave, which was encompassed by a serpent holding its tail in its mouth. At the right of the cave stood a youth of beautiful and ruddy countenance, having in his right hand a bow and two arrows, and in his left a harp. Opposite him, at the very entrance of the cave, sat an old man, who, fixing an attractive gaze upon a tablet, kept writing whatever was indicated either by the movement of a celestial globe or by the youth standing near. At the left of the cave sat a gray-haired matron with animated countenance. At the door of the cave was an ascent of four steps, the first of iron, the second of bronze, the third of silver, the fourth of gold. Playing and romping on these some children moved here and there, fearless of falling and of dangers. Such is the picture; its meaning is as follows: The cave signifies the incomprehensibility of eternity; the serpent enfolding its circumference, time; the youth, God, in whose hand are heaven, earth and hell: earth and hell receive the arrows of the Divinity; heaven knows only the harp and joys. The old man signifies destiny, or what God has predestined from eternity; the woman, nature; the separate steps, the separate ages and centuries. The children playing on the steps symbolize created

things, especially man, trifling in the affairs of his salvation and jesting at the very entrance to eternity.

Alas, O mortals, long enough have we trifled in the midst of the very greatest dangers; we are very near eternity, we stand on its threshold while we live. By the very slight movement of death we are engulfed in eternity. It is not necessary that death fight against us with great strength or for a long time: in a moment we are precipitated, and we roll from these steps into the ocean of eternity. Consider, you who are amusing yourselves on these steps and who think of all else but eternity, that perhaps today or tomorrow you will be there.

## II

### THE SECRET MEANING OF SCRIPTURE REVEALED

The sacred pages will not inaptly supplement with divine truth the foregoing chapter on symbols and types of eternity.

When Nabuchodonosor, King of Babylon, had ordered the three Hebrew youths who had refused to comply with his impious commands to be cast into the burning furnace, the flame over the furnace arose forty-nine cubits — a circumstance altogether wonderful and not without a certain mystery. Who so accurately measured the soaring height of a most

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devouring flame? Who ascended thither and applied a measuring rule, and detected not fifty cubits, but only forty-nine? Indeed, we are not accustomed to speak thus; we usually count twenty, thirty, or fifty cubits, even though the actual number is somewhat more or less. Here a single cubit is said to be lacking for the number fifty. The mystery and secret meaning is this: the number fifty formerly signified a jubilee; but the flames in that Babylonian region of death, although they prey upon both body and soul above all measure, and increase exceedingly beyond all the torments of this life, nevertheless never reach the point of attaining the grace of a jubilee. In hell there is no jubilee, no pardon, no end of torments. A jubilee at present consists, not of a hundred or of fifty years, but of single days, hours, moments. A fraction of an hour can now obtain that pardon which there a whole eternity cannot gain. Now one short day can pay more debts than whole years or centuries in the avenging fires.

Let us add to the above another exposition of the inspired pages. When the people of God were crossing the Jordan, the lower waters flowed down into the sea of desolation (which is now called the Dead Sea) until they completely failed; and Ecclesiasticus says: "There is one that buyeth much for a small price" (Ecclus. XX, 12). Galfridus unites these two statements and discourses thus upon



them: "If you are deserving of perpetual affliction and you can escape it by accepting temporal affliction instead, you have certainly bought great things at a small price. I admit, it is a sea on which you are sailing, but a dead sea; and how great gratitude do you owe to God, because you had deserved a briny, raging, impassable sea, and behold, this He has mercifully changed for you into a dead sea. O that you may be able to pass over this dead sea into the land of the living!" This writer compares all the adversities of this life to a dead sea, but eternal punishments to a briny and impassable sea. No one can escape both; each must traverse either the one or the other. "What are you doing, O man?" exclaims St. Chrysostom. "You are preparing to ascend to heaven, and you ask that you nowhere encounter any difficulty." Whatever we do, this dead sea must be crossed. It depends on us whether we wish to land in the peaceful harbor of beatitude. "The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom, and her ways are everlasting commandments" (Ecclus. I, 5). No other way lies open over this dead sea to the region of the living than the way of the commandments of God. We have the clearest oracle: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. XIX, 17). Through these confines is eternity approached.

But if the question "What is eternity?" be put to a theologian of the present age (Cornelius a Lapide),

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he will say: "It is a circle returning upon itself, whose centre is Always, whose circumference is Nowhere; that is, it never ends."

What is eternity? It is an orb, round on all sides, and like unto itself, in which there is no beginning and no end.

What is eternity? A wheel which is always revolving and will revolve, rolling on into every age.

What is eternity? A year continually recurring; where it dies and perishes, there it is reborn and begins again.

What is eternity? An ever-flowing fountain, in which the waters in their winding courses always flow back to their source, that they may issue forth again.

What is eternity? A perennial spring, sending forth never-failing waters, but either the sweetest waters of benediction, or the bitterest waters of malediction.

What is eternity? A labyrinth twisting itself into innumerable curves, which continually leads through many windings those who have entered it, and finally ruins them.

What is eternity? It is an abyss of spirals and windings; it is a spiral ever curving and circling over a boundless expanse.

What is eternity? A serpent bending back upon itself with its coils, holding its tail in its mouth; which in its own end always begins again and will never cease to begin.

What is eternity? It is duration ever present, it is one perpetual Today, which does not go over into the past or the future.

What is eternity? It is the age of ages, says Dionysius (*De Divinis Nominibus*, Ch. 10), which does not perish, but maintains itself always in the same way.

What is eternity? It is a beginning without beginning, without middle, without end. It is a beginning ever interminable and always beginning, in which the blessed continually enter upon a blessed life and perpetually abound with new delights; in which the damned always die, and after all death and the struggle of death again begin continually to die and to struggle with death. As long as God will be God, so long will the blessed be blessed, so long will they reign and triumph; so long will the damned endure unspeakable burnings and cry out: "We are tormented in this flame," only to be tormented and tortured eternally.

### III

#### WHY THE PLACE OF ETERNITY IS CALLED A MANSION

John, Patriarch of Alexandria, a man of eminent piety, frequently visited the sick, and on one occasion had as a companion Troilus, a bishop, who loved money more than he did the sick. John whispered

in his ear: "Come, brother, let us aid the friends of Christ." Hereupon Troilus, being crafty and cleverly concealing the disease of his soul, ordered all the money which his servant was then carrying with him for the purchase of other things to be given to the needy. Not long after this he was seized with a fever, which avarice had produced in him. The patriarch of Alexandria heard of this, and having shrewdly surmised the cause of the disease, brought with him to the fever-stricken man as much silver as had lately been distributed among the sick, and in the course of conversation said: "I was jesting when a short time ago I asked from you an alms for the sick since my servant had none with him. Now in good faith I return to you the borrowed philippi, and thank you." When Troilus beheld the ready money, immediately that obliging fever ceased, its heat abated, and everything seemed brighter. Accordingly, Troilus having regained his strength, arose for dinner, and together they went to table. Later when dinner was over Troilus fell asleep at home and enjoyed a mid-day nap, during which he saw in a dream a very spacious house and on its front over the door an inscription: "Eternal mansion and rest of Bishop Troilus." He rejoiced in this dream, but afterwards he had another which caused him grief. There came a man who, bearing his works with him, said in a tone of stern command: "Remove that inscription from the house

and fasten up this one in its place: 'Eternal mansion and rest of John, Archbishop of Alexandria, purchased for thirty pounds of silver.'” Troilus shuddered at this dream and resolved that it should not be without good effect. Accordingly, from avaricious and harsh he became much more liberal, especially toward the poor: such a change did that eternal mansion, seen only in sleep, produce in him.

O blessed mansions, and blessed for the reason that they are eternal! How Christ desires that we despise our tents and huts, which are destined shortly to crumble, and love and hasten to those eternal mansions! “In my Father’s house,” says He, “there are many mansions” (John XIV, 12). No one is debarred from these except by himself; the place excludes no one, being as widely extensive as possible; time sends no one away, for there is there an abiding, and an abiding that is eternal.

O eternal, merciful God! O eternal truth! O true charity! O dear ternity! So heal our blindness that from present brief sufferings we may understand future, horrible, eternal torments. Lead us and teach us, that we may so possess perishable goods as not to lose the eternal; that we may so grieve over faults committed as to escape eternal punishment; that we may so conduct ourselves in the inn of this life as not to be debarred from the eternal mansions; that we may so advance along our journey as not to be excluded from our country.

## CONSIDERATION II

### IN WHAT THINGS NATURE REPRESENTS ETERNITY

**E**VEN idolaters, as we have seen, recognized what the nature of eternity was and represented it by certain symbols; for "God hath manifested it unto them, so that they are inexcusable" (Rom. I, 19, 20). How much more ought this thought to commend itself to Christians, to whom eternity is represented in a manner far different and better. Wherefore you are inexcusable, O man, who consign this most salutary remembrance of eternity to heedless forgetfulness, even though thus reminded. Often before your eyes are rings and circles, spheres and globes, chairs and couches; sun and moon repeatedly meet your gaze. And the sight of these things forces upon you the remembrance of eternity. But even Nature herself, a good mother, places in full view objects of such a kind that by the sight and hearing of them you are invited to meditate on eternity.

Solinus relates that a stone of Arcadia, called asbestos, when it has received the seeds of flame, burns with almost continual fires. For this reason

lamps used at shrines and tombs were in former times made of it. This fact is also mentioned by St. Augustine. Furthermore, Pliny, Volateranus, Dioscoris and several others relate wonderful things about a certain kind of linen. This has various names, for it is called asbestian, Carystian, Indian, and also live linen. It is not only not consumed by fire, but is washed and dried by it. Therefore, when the bodies of several kings were about to be placed upon the pyre and burned, they were wrapped in this linen, to avoid mingling their ashes and to distinguish them one from the other. Nero had a mantle made of it, which he esteemed more precious than gems and gold. Behold nature, your guide and teacher, who points out clearly that she does not find her own death in fire. So all the damned will be on fire and will not be destroyed; they will burn perpetually and will never be consumed; they will seek death in these flames and will not find it. Rightly does Amandus exclaim: "O wretched eternity, never to have an end! O end without end; death more grievous than all death; always to die and never to be able to die!" So the inspired Isaias says: "Their fire shall never be quenched" (Isai. LXVI, 24); and that angel of the Apocalypse: "They shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them" (Apoc. IX, 6).

That the salamander can maintain life in the fire, for some time at least, is believed by St. Augustine,

as well as by Aristotle, Pliny, Galen, Aelian, and Dioscoris. This animal, produced from moisture, is very cold; sun and dryness cause its death; hence, in flames, according to the opinion of Pliny, it retains the coldness of ice. From its skin are made lamps for the purpose of providing ever burning lights. The good God, who produces the salamander from earth and mud, formed man also from the same matter it is true, but with a nature far nobler. "He made him a little less than the angels" (Ps. VIII, 6). At any rate he has destined for him the same kingdom as for the angels, after he has passed through the probationary period of this life. But "man when he was in honor did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them" (Ps. XLVIII, 13). By his own malice he has made himself like a salamander, either to live forever or to die forever in eternal flames.

In those fiery prisons of hell all things are eternal, yet six are especially deserving of consideration.

## I

### WHAT THINGS ARE ETERNAL IN HELL?

First, the damned soul itself is eternal, immortal. No one will be able to destroy another or himself. "They shall seek death and shall not find it" (Apoc. IX, 6). Nay, this very desire of death will be for



them a mighty torment, because they will know that it can never be realized.

Secondly, the prison is eternal: it cannot fall, it cannot be broken open, it cannot be melted away; it is barred with mountains and rocks, and these bars and barriers are so firm that they will afford egress to none. If any one of the damned comes to us from there before the day of judgment, this happens by the permission of God; but he carries around with him his own hell and is not free from torture.

There arises here a discussion of two theologians, which is no idle one, about the location and place of bodies in hell. One of them, who was also a skilled geometrician, reasoned in this wise: It is certain from the words of Christ that the majority of men are lost, so that there will be few of the blessed in comparison with the incredible number of the damned. These are the words of truth: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it" (Matt. VII, 13-14). Pray tell me, is this believed in the world? Are these thought to be the words of Christ?

But to return to my subject: the middle and centre of the earth is the abode of hell, and how could this contain so many millions of men, unless

we say that there body is penetrated by body? This is not necessary, says the other, but they shall be as fish in a jar, which are so tightly packed together that salt only can be placed between them; so is fire between the damned. Or they shall be as bricks in a lime-kiln, one closely pressed upon the other, while the force of the flame penetrates all. Sacred Scripture clearly agrees with this, but by a different simile: "They are laid in hell like sheep: death shall feed upon them" (Ps. XLVIII, 15). They shall be like sheep, not in the pastures, but in the market-place, already strangled and thrown into one heap.

Thirdly, not less eternal is that fire which no lapse of time will extinguish. Christ gives this very clear warning in St. Matthew: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire" (Matt. XXV, 41). Do you hear that word "everlasting"? The divine wrath feeds this fire, which will never die out. Isaias testifies: "The breath of the Lord is as a torrent of brimstone kindling it; night and day it shall not be quenched; the smoke thereof shall go up forever" (Isai. XXX, 33; XXIV, 10). "Equally related," says St. Augustine, "are eternal punishment on the one hand, and eternal life on the other. Therefore to say 'Eternal life will be without end, and eternal punishment have an end' is the height of absurdity" (De Civ. Dei XXI, 23). Who then will hesitate to be wholly converted?

Fourthly, equally eternal with the rest is the worm and a conscience most afflicted and despairing on account of its past life. "Their worm shall not die" predicts Isaias (LXVI, 24). The poets in former times transferred this belief from the Sacred Writings to myths. For what else is symbolized by Vergil in the well known story of Tityus, who daily suffered the vulture that flew up to him to gnaw out and lacerate his liver; which, however, always grew again on the following night for a new rending? What else is this vulture but that worm and a conscience torn by perpetual remorse?

Fifthly, to this same eternity of hell belong the final sentence and the last judgment pronounced upon all by Christ, the Judge, a judgment, alas, irrevocable, immutable, eternal. From it there will be no appeal or recourse to another judge, where the case can be repeated two or three times in the presence of skilled lawyers; there will be no revision, no postponements or compromises. What has once been pronounced by the mouth of this Judge cannot be revoked for all eternity. Our mother, the Church, earnestly warns us and frequently repeats (Offic. Mort. Noct. 3): "The fear of death troubles me, sinning daily and not repenting, because in hell there is no redemption," none, none, but only eternal despair. The Blood of Christ, shed ever anew on the Mount of Golgotha and most efficacious in making satisfaction, yet does not reach to the damned.

“If,” says St. Bernard, “you do not believe that the yoke of the Lord, a yoke of penance, is sweet in itself, at least you are not ignorant that it is most sweet in comparison with that of which it is said: ‘Depart into eternal fire.’”

In the sixth place, a thing that is without end in hell is the pain of loss, as it is called, or the eternal privation of the divine vision, a privation which, together with all the other torments and pains of the damned, will have no end; for here there can be no satisfaction. And although these torments should endure several thousand million years, nevertheless not a single day, nay, not one short hour nor moment, will be granted for rest and breathing. There will be, indeed, variety and change of torments, but only causing greater pain and suffering. Christ most clearly forewarns more than once in St. Matthew: “The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. VIII, 12; XXII, 13; XXIV, 51); weeping in fire, gnashing of teeth in cold and ice. How, therefore, can a man so forget both himself and God, and how so degenerate into a beast, nay, rather become hardened into rock and stone, that, in reflecting upon those inexplicable and unspeakable tortures which will last for all eternity, he fears nothing, dreads nothing, does not say to himself: “In very fact I am on the road to eternity, and perhaps this road will shortly end; I am already

seated upon the steps of eternity; by the very lightest movement I shall be precipitated hence into a measureless abyss." And if it seems so distressing and intolerable to be wide awake for only one night, although on a soft bed, and to sigh and groan on account of pains in the head or other member, or on account of toothache or gall-stones; when the morning, long in coming, can scarcely be waited for; when the sun seems to have stopped in its course; when one night seems a week, and nevertheless one lies upon feathers, and there is hope of a pleasanter day, and solace and relief from a physician are expected; ah, what will it be, day and night in the midst of flames for a thousand and a thousand and again a thousand years, to watch, to hunger, to thirst, to burn, to suffer extreme torture in all the members; to hope for no refreshment, not the least rest; to despair of all things, and thus to burn and be tortured through infinite myriads of ages, and to think that not only will there be no end of these things, but that it is not even possible to hope for any. "There," says Thomas a Kempis, in the "Imitation of Christ" (Bk. I, Ch. 24), "one hour of punishment will be more grievous than a hundred years of the most bitter penance here. There will be no rest, no consolation for the damned." "O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy indignation, nor chastise me in Thy wrath" (Ps. VI, 1). "The sins of my youth and my ignorance do not remember" (Ps. XXIV, 7). I perish unless Thou spare me, O God.

## II

## WHY HELL IS ETERNAL

At this point there arises a question bearing on our subject, which is most deserving of everyone's attention; namely, how it is possible that that merciful and good God, whose mercy is above all His works, nevertheless most justly punishes for all eternity even one mortal sin, though committed in a moment and even in thought alone, so that it can never be sufficiently punished, and however many thousand years pass by, it can never be said: "Now this crime has been sufficiently punished, now this criminal has given satisfaction, now he has atoned for that evil thought by which he had offended God." Theologians teach that morose pleasure by itself constitutes mortal sin. They define that as morose pleasure, when anyone revolving in his mind an impure and licentious thought, has not indeed determined actually to commit what he is thinking about, but knowingly and deliberately lingers over that thought of his and takes delight in it. Has God, therefore, decreed eternal flames for a single thought? And what justice is this, to ordain eternal punishment for a momentary sin which injures no one? Why does the blessed David cry out: "Praise the Lord for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever" (Ps. CXXXV, 1)? Why does he repeat

this twenty-seven times, if God is so severe? In reply to this St. Augustine, St. Gregory, St. Thomas Aquinas, and others say: In any mortal sin the guilt is of its nature infinite, because sin is an injury against the infinite majesty of God. They add this also: He who dies conscious of a mortal sin and does not grieve for having committed it, acts the same as if he had sinned eternally, if indeed he had been permitted to live eternally. He has lost, not the will to sin, but life, and would always sin if he were to live always; and so he has ceased, not to sin, but to live. Besides, this point, too, must be considered: A man who is damned, however much of his debts he pays, will yet never make satisfaction. For since he is not in God's grace, being His enemy, his payment is not worthy of acceptance, since the man himself is not acceptable. Such a man pays none of his debts, since he does nothing, but only suffers those pains with which he is afflicted against his will. The matter will be clearer from an example. Someone owes his neighbor a thousand philippi which he has borrowed from him, and puts his house under a perpetual mortgage, intending to make yearly payments. Within twenty years he pays his neighbor the same amount as he received from him. Is he therefore now free from all debt? Does nothing remain to be paid? Yes, the entire capital, which remains to be paid as completely as if nothing had yet been paid. For the law of these contracts

is such that the capital of the specified sum always remains intact, although the yearly interest be regularly paid. Just so, whatever penalties the damned pay, they nevertheless do not free themselves of debt. They are eternal debtors, perpetual taxpayers to God. Isaias prophesies: "And your strength shall be as the ashes of tow, and your work as a spark; and both shall burn together, and there shall be none to quench it" (Isai. I, 31).

Suetonius (Tib. 61) relates that as Tiberius Cæsar was once examining prisoners, one of them asked for a speedy release from punishment. To whom the emperor replied: "Not yet have you been restored to favor." Christ, the most just judge, is not a tyrant, a Tiberius, yet if any of the damned, after a thousand years passed in the flames, should ask for a speedy death, Christ would make him the same reply: "Not yet have you been restored to favor." Should the soul make this same request after another thousand years, it will hear the same words: "Not yet have you been restored to favor." Should it offer this same petition after a hundred thousand years, there will be no other reply. Should it again present its request after several million years, Christ, the Judge, will always bring forward this same objection: "Not yet have you been restored to favor, nor shall you be. Once I wished to be reconciled; I offered you my grace thousands and thousands of times, but you rejected it. I



wished to be your friend, nay, your father, but you did not wish to be a son. I dissembled my wrath, I was silent, I waited forty, fifty, sixty years, if perchance you might change your disposition and your life, but no serious or persevering repentance followed. 'You have despised all my counsel, and have neglected my reprehensions' (Prov. I, 25); you have hated and shrunk from all my correction. 'Eat therefore the fruit of your own way, and be filled with your own devices' (Prov. I, 31). I shall laugh in your destruction eternally, and after infinite ages my justice will make you no other reply than: Not yet have you been restored to favor." O heaven, O God, O sin, O steep fall of the human race into the depth of torments, into the most dismal abyss of eternity! But "Thou art just, O Lord, and Thy judgment is right" (Ps. CXVIII, 137). It is just, it is right, that he who never wished through repentance to use the mercy offered him, should through suffering always be punished by the justice with which he was threatened.

### III

#### OTHER OBJECTS BY WHICH NATURE SUGGESTS ETERNITY

But I return to the teaching of nature with respect to eternity. There are found among certain moun-

tains and cliffs hot springs, whose resounding waters produce a dashing and roaring so great and of such a kind, that those resorting thither who seem at their first approach to hear a sort of harmony as of musical instruments, have their ears so assailed by the incessant din, that what was in the beginning sweetest music becomes, as the idea persists, a source of disgust and torture; while those who first imagine they hear a drum or some more noisy instrument, are finally driven almost insane by the harassing sound that unceasingly disturbs them. Here, too, we are led to meditate on eternity. Under those mountains, the barriers of hell, that outcry, that wailing, that din, that shrieking of the damned, which began at their first entrance, will never end, will continually torment their ears and not merely their imagination; and none of these things can be assuaged by growing familiar with them. So, on the contrary, among the blessed that heavenly trisagion, Holy, Holy, Holy, not only will not create the least weariness, but will be heard with ever new delight.

Christ in His conversation with the Samaritan woman makes mention of eternity and of eternal life more than twenty times, and says: "But he that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever, but it shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting" (John IV, 13-14). Would that we, too, with the Samari-

tan woman would thirst for these fountains, and with earnest prayers entreat: "O Lord, give me this water, that I may not thirst; give me, O Christ, even a drop of this water, or at least some desire of eternal life."

But nature has something else to teach. In the eighty-first year after our Lord's birth of the Virgin, as Suetonius, Dio Cassius and Pliny the Younger relate in detail, on the first of November at the seventh hour \* there occurred on Mount Vesuvius in Campania a terrible eruption of flames, preceded by unusual drought and severe earthquakes. There were heard also subterranean sounds as of rumbling thunder; then the sea roared and grew turbulent, and the entire heaven resounded, as if the mountains were rushing into conflict. Then, also, immense rocks leaped up, the whole atmosphere became filled with mingled smoke and flames, and the sun itself was darkened; whence many were convinced that the earth would be reduced to chaos or consumed by fire. For so great an abundance of ashes poured out that it filled earth, sea, and air, inflicting the greatest damage on men, lands, and animals, killing fish and birds, and completely burying two cities, Herculaneum and Pompeii, while the people were witnessing a performance in the theatre. Now, these and other cavernous precipices and

\* The eruption of Vesuvius here referred to did not occur on the date given by the author, but on 24 August, A.D. 79. — Tr.

mountain heights of this kind, which glow with continual fires and yet are never consumed or burnt up, are given by God to men as living examples of the eternal fire in hell, by which the bodies of the guilty always burn and are never consumed. Tertullian, Minutius, and Pacianus especially declare this. Consider, my friend, how here too nature skilfully goes in advance and leads you by the hand to contemplate eternity.

Finally, the time that is granted us is itself a sign and token of eternity. Nature would desire that we learn from the sign the thing signified, and by this present time measure the eternity to come. St. Augustine says: "There is this difference between things temporal and eternal: the temporal are loved more before they are possessed, but they lose their value as soon as they have come into our possession, for nothing but a real and unchangeable eternity of imperishable joy satisfies the soul. But what is eternal is loved more ardently when attained than when desired, because charity will there obtain more than faith believed or hope desired. Ah, how despicable does not the earth, which we must soon leave, appear to us when we look up to heaven, which we shall possess by an eternal dominion."

### CONSIDERATION III

IN WHAT ESPECIALLY THE ANCIENT ROMANS MADE ETERNITY TO CONSIST

**P**LINY the Younger says: "I consider happy those who perform deeds worth writing about, or who do things worth reading; but most happy those who do both" (Epist. VI, 16, 3). Thus, the Romans thought that in three ways the eternity of one's name and reputation could be transmitted to posterity. First, they wrote many excellent works, but not all were excellent, not all pure and undefiled. They mingled in their writings their weaknesses also, their infamies and passions — not an honorable and royal road to eternity. How many books perished even before their authors, and according to the opinion of Plato were like the gardens of Adonis, which perished as soon as they were made: what pleased quickly did not please long. But, granted that the books of all the Romans should live forever, yet none of their authors can transfer any life from his book to himself.

Secondly, the Romans not only wrote, but also performed deeds worth writing about, deeds worthy of a learned and elegant style, and these in different

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spheres of action. If indeed they sought eternity in most of them, our faith teaches us that they found it in none. They were great, we do not deny, in civil and military affairs at home and abroad; they were admirable in the arts and sciences; they were splendid and prodigal in their shows and gifts, marvellous in their buildings, mausoleums, tombs, and statues. Let the few following facts which are but briefly touched upon serve as examples.

Augustus held games in his own name and at his own expense twenty-four times, and at the expense of the state twenty-three times, and none of these cost less than 50,000,000 or 100,000,000 sesterces. In our money this latter sum is 2,500,000 philippi.\* And this large amount of money was squandered upon a single performance. The lowest and most economical sum expended upon the separate games given by Augustus was 50,000,000 sesterces, that is, 1,250,000 philippi.

Nero covered over the whole theatre with gold, and caused all the stage equipment and costumes for comedy to be made of gold. Under this emperor there also prevailed the custom of making gifts to the populace, which was done as follows. Wooden tokens were distributed among the people, on which were inscribed houses, fields, farms, estates, property, slaves, animals, and often large amounts of

\* That is, about \$5,000,000. — Tr.

silver and gems. Whoever presented one of these tokens received later the object which the inscription indicated.

Nero likewise on a certain occasion ordered that there be counted out as a largess for the common soldiers 10,000,000 sesterces, that is, 250,000 philippi. His mother Agrippina commanded that an amount of money as great as this be laid upon the table, in order even thus silently to chide and correct her son's extravagance. Nero noticed that he was being reproved, and, ordering the amount doubled, said: "I didn't know that I had given so little."

The same emperor, when King Tiridates passed nine months at Rome as his guest, spent each day 20,000 philippi, that is, 5,400,000 philippi were squandered in those nine months. On his departure he gave him as travelling expenses 100,000,000 sesterces, that is, 2,500,000 philippi. It is not necessary to enumerate the buildings of this emperor.

The Emperor Caligula built a bridge of three miles over the sea. At Rome there were four hundred and twenty-four temples, most of them of imposing magnificence. Domitian spent 7,000,000 philippi for merely gilding the Capitol. On the stone steps of the Amphitheatre 87,000 spectators could be seated comfortably. Along the passage way in the upper part there was standing room for 12,000 more, making the entire capacity 99,000.

There were, among many others, twelve public

baths built by the emperors in which bathing was free of charge. In the baths of Antoninus there were sixteen hundred seats of polished stone, and the same number of persons could conveniently bathe at the same time. In the bath of Hetruscus, according to Pliny, everything was of silver — the pipes, the basins, the very floor. But let us pass to other things.

At Rome there were almost as many statues as men. Besides countless ones made of bronze, marble, and ivory, there were also many of silver and gold. Domitian had on the Capitol a golden statue weighing a hundred pounds. Commodus and Claudius had golden statues, each of a thousand pounds. Claudius had also a silver statue on the Rostra. Hence there was appointed a certain prefect with the title of Roman Count, who had under his command many soldiers to guard this great number of statues.

It took a traveller unencumbered by baggage five days to traverse the Via Appia. This road extended from Rome to Capua, and was so broad that two chariots coming from opposite directions could easily pass; so firm that there was no evidence of looseness or lack of solidity, just as if it were a single stone. And there were many such roads. What trustworthy authors write about the aqueducts is incredible. The Emperor Claudius spent seven and a half millions in gold on an equeduct. Six hundred men



were employed for the sole purpose of maintaining the aqueducts. These are certainly great works, some of them deserving of censure on account of their excessive extravagance. Yet the Romans had something which surpassed even these, though used for a more humble purpose. I mean the sewers or subterranean arches, through which flowed water to carry off the refuse of the whole city. So many, so large, and so long were these sewers, that they can justly be rated among the wonders of the world. Enough has been said to serve as an example of those things which are not, I know, at all incredible to one who has even a slight knowledge of the wealth and power of the ancient Romans, and has heard the testimony of Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Pliny, Livy, and others.

The things that I have mentioned are praiseworthy in themselves. In the matter of government the nation was as wise as it was for the most part unconquered in war, pre-eminent in the arts and sciences, and illustrious also in valor. It was in consequence of these qualities that Cineas, ambassador of Pyrrhus, an eloquent and intelligent man, after he had in vain urged the city to accept a treaty quite unworthy of the Romans, returning told his king that the city seemed to him a temple and the senators kings. In such things as these, then, the Romans are to be praised. But in the following respect they erred most seriously and completely,

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that though so prudent they placed all their eternity in things by no means eternal.

If the Romans had chosen Augustine as their guide on the road to eternity, he would have pointed out to them a much more certain way to the very palace of eternity (*De Civ. Dei. V, 24*). "For," says he, "we do not call those emperors happy who have counted many years of rule and of life, or many victorious triumphs, or treasures bestowed by fortune. These gifts are granted even to those who have no right to the eternal kingdom." And who, then, Augustine, in your opinion are to be deemed happy? Hear, ye emperors, kings, and princes. According to the view of Augustine you will obtain eternal happiness by observing the following laws:

First, justice: to rule justly; to hate all the deceit and pretenses of injustice.

Second, modesty in thought: not to be puffed up by the words of so many who show you marks of honor and respect, but to remember that you are human.

Third, fear and love of God: for the purpose of spreading as much as possible the worship of God, to make all human power the handmaid of the divine majesty through fear and love of the Divinity.

Fourth, desire of heaven: to love more ardently that eternal kingdom, in which no sharers of power are feared.

Fifth, readiness to pardon: to be inclined and ready to pardon, slow to revenge, and to seek revenge only when the necessity of defending the state demands it.

Sixth, a merciful generosity: to temper decrees somewhat harsh by the gentleness of mercy and the bestowal of benefits.

Seventh, continence: to keep indulgence more in subjection, in proportion as it has more freedom.

Eighth, control of the emotions: to prefer to rule over one's evil emotions than over any nations whatsoever.

Ninth, application to humility and prayer: to perform all these things through the desire, not of empty glory, but of eternal happiness; never to neglect the most noble sacrifice of humility and prayer.

These laws Augustine himself affixed as it were to the gates of the world, as a shining mirror for all princes. Now, O Romans, how far have you wandered from the gates of these laws, not to mention the fact that you held in veneration almost innumerable gods instead of one? "Rome thought she had adopted a great religion, because she rejected no false teaching; and when she ruled almost all nations, she was subject to the errors of all nations" (St. Leo, Serm. 1).

But to pass over all this, how vain and ridiculous it is to wish to leave all one's eternity after one

in parchments and writings, in marble and stone, in amphitheatres, pyramids, tombs, and mausoleums! And where now is this eternity of stone? Rome has had almost the same fate as Jerusalem. One of the Apostles, pointing out to Christ, his Master, the structure of the temple of Jerusalem, said: "Master, behold what stones and what buildings!" Christ replied: "Do you see all these great edifices? There shall not be left a stone upon a stone, that shall not be destroyed" (Matt. XXIV, 1-2). And so there is nothing eternal in this world. Where now is the ancient city of Rome? it is asked; and the answer can be made: It was here. Where are those who built it? They have all perished, and we know not their ashes. And we ourselves after a few years shall follow in the same road—a shade, dust, nothing. Alas, how paltry the affairs of even the greatest men! Alas, how unstable those of the most powerful! For what now are all those things? Where are they? They have vanished. Where the wealth heaped up beyond belief? It has passed away. Where the works vying in height with the heavens? They are not visible. Thus, all things which to us seem great are a shadow and a dream, if compared with the eternal and with eternity. Too weak and made of clay is the foundation on which is erected the whole fabric of passing glory. Eternity is not thus engraved on stone and marble. Rightly does Lactantius say: "Mortal are the works

of mortals." We believe that Babylon, Troy, Carthage, and Rome existed, yet scarcely part of a corpse remains to give ocular proof of this. So the seven wonders of the world, so the golden palace of Nero, the baths of Diocletian and those of Antoninus, the Septizonium of Severus, the Colosseum of Julius,\* the Amphitheatre of Pompey, have left scarcely a trace of themselves and their names in books; and how long will even this last?

## I

HOW FAR THE ROMANS STRAYED FROM THE TRUE  
ROAD OF ETERNITY

At Nazareth in the secret chamber of the most Holy Virgin the angel made mention of "the kingdom of which there shall be no end" (Luke I, 33). Such was not the kingdom of Solomon, which lasted only four hundred years, until its destruction by Babylon. Such was not the kingdom of the Romans, nor of the Persians, nor of the Greeks. For where now are those kingdoms, once most flourishing? Where those very ancient monarchies? How great was once Nabuchodonosor in Chaldea and Syria, and after him Balthasar? From these the sceptre

\* The Colosseum was not erected by Julius Cæsar, but was the work of the Flavian Emperors, being completed about A. D. 80. — Tr.

passed to Persia and Media, to Cyrus and Darius. Nor did it remain long there: it was transferred to Greece, to Alexander of Macedon, a great king, long warlike, long successful; but when that valorous spirit fell, fortune also failed, and passed from here with her sceptre into Italy, to Julius Cæsar and Octavian Augustus. But where now are all these?

Do you, my Christian friend, seek the kingdom of which there shall be no end. Their own end destroyed Numantia, Athens, Carthage, Sparta. But there will be no end of the kingdom which is above us; its king is eternal, eternal its inhabitants. "The Lord shall reign forever and ever" (Exod. XV, 18). Origen, commenting on these words, says: "Do you think that God will reign forever and ever? He will reign this long and even longer; and whatever you say, the prophet will always tell you in regard to the length of his reign: 'this long and even longer.'" "And now," says Isidore, "this kingdom, everlasting, immeasurable, happy in every respect, is promised to every class of men; and nevertheless, among us, there is a profound silence regarding it." For how few there are who spend even the smallest part of a day in meditating on it; how few who mention it, who instil the thought of it into their wives, their children, their entire household? We talk freely on all other subjects; of heaven there is scarcely any mention, or at least the very rarest. In praising our native soil most of

us are eloquent; but we almost blush to praise that truest country of ours. Many become so unaccustomed to pious conversation, that, unless with boastful lips they utter barren trifles, sometimes even wanton indecencies, they believe that they are considered impolite and disagreeable. This is an egregiously mistaken notion. We must long for eternal things, with heart and voice, in our thoughts and conversations. No true glory but the eternal is to be hoped for.

The chief men of the Jews, in order to pave for themselves a way to an eternity of political life against the power of Christ, ordered the council to assemble in full numbers, and by a most stupid prudence passed a decree which brought upon their own head what they most feared. In regard to these men deliberating in full council Augustine elegantly says: "The priests and Pharisees consulted among themselves, yet they did not say: Let us believe. These wicked men plotted how they might do evil in order to destroy Him, rather than how they might consult for their own good so as not to perish. And nevertheless they were afraid and in a way took counsel, for they said: 'What do we, for this man doth many miracles? If we let him alone so, all will believe in him; and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation' (John XI, 47-48). They feared to lose temporal possessions, and thought not of eternal life; and so they

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lost both." (In Ioan. Tract. 49.) So it happens; such is the vanity of our thoughts and the sport of our affections. And who are we? What are our possessions? Today we flourish, we are commended, we please; tomorrow the flower will droop, and we shall be as displeasing to those whom we hitherto pleased, as to God whom we never strove to please. We neglect heaven, yet do not retain earth; we do not gain the favor of God, and we lose that of the world, wretched on the one side and on the other because of a most deplorable loss. If death should spare those who are fortunate in this world, perhaps they would find here a kind of glory; a kind, I say, for there is no true glory but that which is in heaven and eternal. But death spares no one; in the darkness it always sees and is not seen; it waits to attack the unwary from ambush. Whither will it lead us, if we live badly? To "the realms of dusky Proserpina and to Æacus holding judgment" (Horace, Odes II, 13, 21-22). There nobility will free no one; power will protect no one; the applause of men will rescue no one; but the favor of God alone and that glory which has been attained by fleeing from glory will save. There is no true glory but the eternal.

The Jewish wise man describes wisdom as a queen in whose train attend two handmaids — on the right Eternity, on the left Glory (Prov. III, 16). Glory is of no worth, if the eternity which we Chris-



tians look for is absent. "We have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come, eternal in heaven" (Heb. XIII, 14). The just will be in eternal remembrance. O Christian, you give alms to the poor, you refuse food to a greedy appetite, you resist the enemy of chastity; these are not great works, nor do they require much time; nevertheless the memory of the deed and also its reward will be eternal.

How little Magdalen expended on the feet of Christ; how quickly she performed that service, and yet it became known to the whole world. Others would have admired other things in Magdalen: the ruddy beauty of her countenance, the enticing charm of her form, the lovely flower of her youth, her rare grace, vast wealth, great favors, pleasing affability, the popular praises accorded her. Yet these things procured her no commendation but only disgrace. But a service performed only for the feet, not in itself a great work of mercy, won for her, on the testimony of Christ, eternal glory, an immortal name: "It shall be preached in the whole world" (Matt. XXVI, 13). This work was not carved on marble, it was not moulded in Cyprian bronze, it was not proclaimed to the accompaniment of trumpets and cymbals; nevertheless it has lived up to the present and will live eternally, "and it shall be preached in the whole world." If you look to the action, the avaricious economist Iscariot finds faults with it, and

the proud Pharisee Simon condemns it; if you look to the material, it was a perfume worth at most thirty pieces of gold; if to the place, it was private; if to the witnesses, they were few; if to the person, an infamous woman; and yet "it shall be preached in the whole world."

How many emperors have planted their victorious eagles in the enemy's camp! How many warlike leaders have laudably managed most numerous armies! How many far-seeing statesmen have wisely governed most extensive nations! How many great kings have won honors and statues, established camps and cities! How many learned men have put their entire brain into new inventions, which, like alchemists, they distilled upon paper by means of their pen, that they might be reckoned among men worthy of remembrance! Yet all these lie enveloped in the night of silence and oblivion. But a single work of a just person brings eternal remembrance; cannot grow old; is beyond the reach of envy; is heard and read in reverence and silence by philosophers, generals, kings, and pontiffs: "It shall be preached in the whole world." Accordingly, to live and die well is the only road to eternal immortality.

Go now, ye Romans, and seek eternity in statues and marbles, although there you will never find it. I rather desire and prefer what St. Jerome desired when in relating the works of Paul the Hermit he

said: "Remember Jerome the sinner, who, if God should give him the choice, would prefer the tunic of Paul and choose it with its merits rather than the purple of kings with their kingdoms." We Christians, that we may not incur the loss of our money, make a loan, or rather we send it before us to another world, and heaven receives it. This is a safe transaction, and our wealth is carried thither by most trusty couriers, no other indeed than mendicants and the poor. We give to them a few cheap things, for which we are to receive the greatest possessions in heaven. So Christ promised and ordained: "And I say to you: Make unto you friends of the mammon of iniquity, that when you shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings" (Luke XVI, 9). But let us pass from the Romans to others.

## II

### A WAY TO ETERNITY BETTER THAN THE FORMER

Darius, that king of the Persians who became famous because of the disaster he sustained, had in his army ten thousand Persians whom he called the Immortals, not because (as Cælius Rhodiginus explains) they would never die at all (for where are there such?), but because if any of them should lessen the number by death or sickness, another was

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immediately put in his place; and thus there were never more nor less than ten thousand. In this way Darius achieved a sort of immortality and eternity in numbers; but this was very brief, since Darius and his whole army perished utterly. Formerly the governors used to pray thus to Darius, the Mede: "King Darius, live forever" (Dan. VI, 6). Ah, how empty this prayer, and how short this eternity! We live seventy, or at most eighty years, yet in our dreams we wish to live eternally. Quite right was the thought of Xerxes, who (as Herodotus relates), in order to subjugate Greece, conducted from Asia by land and sea two armies, consisting of 2,317,600 men, not including the servants of the soldiers. As he stood on a mountain and gazed down upon this vast host, he burst into tears at the sight, and said he wept because after fifty or sixty years, from so many hundred thousands of men, so sturdy and picked, scarcely any would survive.

We can devise for ourselves eternities of one kind or another; yet meanwhile "we all die and like waters we fall down into the earth" (2 Kings XIV, 14).

Another and better type of eternity was worked out at Constantinople. In the four hundred and fifty-ninth year after our Lord's birth of the Virgin, the church of Constantinople, in the time of Bishop Gennadius, was enriched by a new and famous monastery, dedicated to St. John the Baptist, and

belonging to the *Accœmetæ*, that is, those who sleep not, who were accustomed day and night to sing to God continual and never-ending praises, in the following manner. All the *Cenobites* were divided into three classes, so that when the first class had finished some part of the divine praises, the second began; and when the second, too, ended, the third began. From this pious custom the city had a sort of heaven of its own. Thus there was there represented the heavenly eternity, through all of which God will be praised without weariness or tedium, amid the greatest delights. How rightly does the inspired psalmist exclaim: "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord; they shall praise Thee forever and ever" (Ps. LXXXIII, 5). Then the words of all the blessed will be those of Peter on the rock of Thabor: "It is good for us to be here."

For as St. Bernard says in his hymn (Serm. 2 De Omn. Sanctis): "Eternity is wealth exceeding great." But he also adds: "Eternity is not found unless sought perseveringly." From you then, O blessed Bernard, we demand the means of seeking it. Hear, therefore, the teaching of this excellent father. By poverty, meekness, and weeping there is renewed in the soul a certain resemblance and image of eternity, embracing all time. By poverty we merit future goods: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Where the poor are scorned and turned away, where the heart is

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enclosed in the chest with one's money, where money is spent according to the dictates of avarice, there no affection and love of poverty exist, and none either for eternity.

By meekness we claim for ourselves present goods: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land." Here it may be asked in regard to a man in whom there is no evidence of meekness or patience, from whom scarcely ever a word at all mild is heard, what gain he derives from that ungovernable impatience of his; what advantage it brings him to become indignant so often, to rage, to murmur, to talk loudly, to create a tumult, to wish to overturn everything, to address no one with even a little courtesy. Certainly such a one suffers the loss of goods or reputation, frequently of both. For whatever wealth he has he does not possess, but guards it like a dog, which can only bark, attack, and bite; he does not by reason of his impatience increase his good name, if he have any. He loses heaven before he gains it.

Finally, by sorrow we regain even the past, which we have prodigally squandered by sinning. But it is necessary that this grief be not of a single hour or day. For what would we think of that son, who attended his mother's funeral with tearful eyes and in mourning garb, yet on that or the following day immediately laughs with dry eyes and changes his mourning garments for one of gay colors? This is

not to grieve seriously, to banish grief so quickly. We do something very similar, alas, too frequently. Today we fortify ourselves by a confession that frees us from sin and by Holy Communion; we grieve for having sinned. But tomorrow we again sin without remorse. We often deeply deplore our former life, and yet we return to it. We forswear the crimes we have committed, and on the same day we again perpetrate them. Thus by the same tongue by which we preach the sinless Christ, we condemn Him to the cross, true brothers of Pontius Pilate, who with one and the same mouth proclaimed Him to be our Messiah and worthy of life, and to be deserving of being hurried to the cross; men altogether unstable, and in nothing more constant than in seeking a wicked course of life. Alas, we carry in our hearts much of the changeableness of the moon. Sometimes piety pleases us so greatly, that almost no amusement can interfere with its holy duties. With look downcast, and resenting any relaxation, we assume an air of sanctity, which is, alas, destined not to continue long. Afterwards we begin to hate this very piety, and, turning the stream in the opposite direction, we seek again the ease and luxury which we had given up. Thus, we as easily sever the friendship made with God as we form it reluctantly. While we are thus engaged, behold piety, restored, is with us again, and by sorrowful repentance again drives out luxury, until we begin to

repent even of this repentance. Thus we rarely maintain by persistent efforts the semblance of virtue which demands labor. At a slight motion we descend to our former uncleanness. Hence this great inconstancy of life produces in our mind all kinds of indulgences and vices. Openly, to be sure, we seem to respect virtue, but within our soul we cultivate vice with sedulous care. This is not the way to eternity, unless to that eternity which knows only anguish and the greatest perpetual torments.

But let us choose from among Catholics someone most given over to bodily pleasures, let us conduct him to a furnace glowing and crackling with flames, and question him as follows: "How much pleasure do you demand for passing one day naked in this furnace?" He will unhesitatingly reply: "I would not take the whole world nor all the pleasures of the world as a reward or gift, to allow myself to be tortured in these flames for a single day." But let us bargain further: "What reward do you ask to remain in this fire for only half a day?" He will say: "Offer whatever delights and whatever price you wish; I will not purchase them with so great torments." But suppose we should at length inquire: "What reward or pleasure do you demand to enter this burning furnace and remain therein only a single hour?" He will surely reply: "Give whatever the most avaricious or the most shameless person could ask; this is not to be compared with the unspeakable burnings and pains of a single hour."



But if the one thus questioned has replied rightly and in harmony with reason, how does it happen, O God, that for the sake of a slight and paltry gain, for the sake of a deceitful and fleeting honor, a shameful pleasure of no long duration, eternal punishment is lightly regarded by so many? We cannot be persuaded to remain a single hour in the fire, though the whole world be offered as a prize; and yet we do not fear the eternal fires of hell, provided only that gain invites, or honor attracts, or pleasure allures. "I hope," you say, "for better things, and the infinite goodness of God bids me not to take such a gloomy forecast of future and eternal things." We are accustomed to speak thus, and these words are not impious, but our deeds contradict them. It is rash and too dangerous to pass one's life in vices, and at the same time to look forward to an eternity among the blessed. Even a single mortal sin is sufficient for damnation. Know you not what Christ threatens? "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. V, 22). Or know you not what Christ forbids? "Whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. V, 28). Or know you not what Christ forewarns? "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. VII, 21). Or

know you not how many Christ bars out? "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me"; and "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth me is not worthy of me" (Matt. X, 37, 38). Or know you not how openly and solemnly he enforces this truth: "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. XX, 16)? Few, few! Or know you not how often He exhorts to amendment of life? "Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. XVIII, 3). "If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire" (Matt. XVIII, 8). "Unless you shall do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke XIII, 3). And He adds: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able" (Luke XIII, 24). Or know you not also how explicitly St. Paul enumerates all those things which preclude a blessed eternity? "The works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions, sects, envies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like. Of which I foretell you, as I have foretold you, that they who do such things shall not obtain the kingdom of God." (Gal. V, 19-21.)

But if anyone is conscious to himself of even one of the things here enumerated, and does not so grieve for it that he seeks every means of avoiding that sin for the future, but meanwhile keeps repeating to himself that vain word, "I hope, I hope"; his hope is nothing but mere presumption. To undergo the risk of blows and scourges is an evil that can be endured; to stake a hundred or a thousand florins on an uncertain throw of dice is not a supreme hazard; to put one's head and life in peril is not the greatest harm. But to expose the eternal salvation of body as well as of soul to so great danger; to live thus in uncertainty; to hope in words but in deeds to act contrary to such hope: this is the supreme evil of all evils; this is the supreme hazard; this is truly the greatest harm; this is the most pernicious act of boldness and rashness, the extreme of folly and madness. "Understand these things, you that forget God; lest He snatch you away, and there be none to deliver you" (Ps. XLIX, 22).

### III

#### THIS WAY MUST BE EARNESTLY SOUGHT

Accordingly, let there be no man of Christian faith who does not frequently ask of himself and of God's representatives: "What shall I do to obtain

a happy eternity? Is this the true road to that eternity which I seek? To be sure, I am performing some work, but how little it is and how slight! I aspire, indeed, to immortal and eternal joys, but are these works of mine, so few, so feeble, so cold, deserving of an eternal reward? I desire, indeed, to reach the haven, but I dread a way which is a little too troublesome, although that is the safest and best way to heaven which is also the roughest and narrowest." The truth of divine lips proclaims this; Christ cries out and warns: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are [alas, they are many] who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are [alas, they are few] that find it" (Matt. VIII, 13-14). He does not cease to cry out or to warn: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter and shall not be able" (Luke XIII, 24). O how dreadful and terrible are those words "Many" and "Few"! Meanwhile, wretched and too inconsiderate regarding the matter of eternity, we deceive ourselves, and I know not whether we hope or dream that we are to be numbered among those few in heaven. O that while there are days of salvation and an acceptable time, we would frequently turn a more attentive gaze towards eternity, and reason thus with ourselves: "What, pray, is all this which I

suffer or behold others suffering, what is it all compared with eternity? Indeed, if with St. Paul I could count as many labors and dangers as he himself endured, and related in those Epistles which he sent to the Corinthians; if I should bear hunger and thirst, bitter enmities and injuries, sickness and poverty; nay, if with St. Paul I should be overwhelmed with stones, beaten with rods; if I should suffer shipwreck; what are all these things compared with eternal punishments? Therefore, in all adversities I must reflect: 'I have seen an end of all perfection' (Ps. CXVIII, 96)."

The Prophet Daniel, after relating many calamities, adds: "And this until a time" (Dan. XI, 24). Where, where are you who are suffering, afflicted, unfortunate? Why do you bury yourselves in your tears? Why do you make your whole life bitter by vain complaints of impatience? You have solace, and indeed a great one from time itself. Do various misfortunes harass you? Be not dismayed; they will last only until a time. Do insults defame you, injuries vex you, many evils disturb you? Dismiss lamentations; all these things will be only until a time. Your groans will not extend into endless ages; your tears will fall but for a short time; you will not heave eternal sighs; you will endure a brief sorrow, and pass to immortal felicity. Ecclesiasticus clearly declares this: "A patient man shall bear for a time, and afterwards joy shall be restored to him"

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(Ecclus. I, 29). But you, too, O would-be happy ones, dear offspring of the world, glory not in your strength! In how small a prison and how narrow an enclosure all your happiness is confined! Until a time you will triumph; until a time your happy dreams will last; but after no long time death will bid you lay aside the mask of fortune, and force you to stand amid the throng, destined then to be so much the more truly miserable, as you were formerly happier in your brief imaginary joy. Therefore, all things will be until a time. Eternity alone is subject to no laws of time. Therefore, if my body or soul suffers; if goods or honors are taken away; if pains or sadness, cares or any other affliction interior or exterior harass me; all these things are unreal and momentary compared to eternal punishments. For when after the day of final judgment fifty million years have passed, there will still remain a thousand times fifty million years to pass. When these, too, according to our method of calculating, have passed, other and other and again other millions will remain to be passed, and this without end. And who thinks of this? Who ponders on it? We try, indeed, sometimes to understand eternal things, but our hearts, full of vanity, still flit among the past and future movements of things. Who will grasp and fix in his mind this truth, so that he may pause for a little while and for a little while draw to himself the splendor of eternity which is ever immovable?

Nobly did Myrogenes act when Eustachius, Archbishop of Jerusalem, had sent gifts to him; modestly refusing to accept them, he said: "This one thing I ask: pray for me that I may be freed from eternal torment." And Cicero strayed not far from the truth when he said: "Nothing in human affairs can seem great to the wise man to whom all eternity and the greatness of the whole universe are known." But far better than Cicero did Francis, the sincere lover of poverty and true contemplator of eternity, speak: "The pleasure here is small, but the punishment afterwards immense; the labor here is slight, but the glory afterwards eternal. Choose, then; many are called; few chosen; all receive their due reward."

Therefore, let anyone who is bound by even one mortal sin hasten his repentance. "It is better and sweeter," says Guericus (Serm. 4 De Purific.), "to be cleansed by water than by fire." Now is the time for penance; let penance forestall punishment. "He that fears the hoary frost, the snow shall fall upon him" (Job VI, 16). He that fears smaller losses will incur the greatest; he that avoids the light labor of penance will endure the most severe pains of hell. Thus St. Gregory says: "Some, while they fear temporal adversities, expose themselves to the penalty of eternal punishment." In agreement with this is the saying of St. Paucianus: "Remember that in hell there is no confession. nor can penance

then be granted, since the time for repentance is past. Hasten while you are in the way; behold, we fear the fires of time and dread the hooks of the executioners. Compare with these the eternal bands of torturers, and the darts of flames which at no time die." These thoughts St. Ambrose beautifully expresses in a letter to a virgin who had fallen: "Penance must be performed not in words but in deed; and the way to perform it is this: Set before your eyes from how great glory you have fallen, and from what book your name has been effaced, and believe now that you have been placed near that exterior darkness where there will be weeping of eyes and gnashing of teeth without end. When you have conceived these truths in your mind with firm faith, as they really are, namely, that the prevaricating soul must be handed over to infernal punishments and the fires of hell, and that no other remedy has been appointed after baptism than the solace of penance; then be content to undergo any labor whatever, any affliction whatever, provided only you be freed from eternal punishments. Bodily diseases induce a sick person to purge the body; let the diseases of the soul induce us to purge the soul; let eagerness for salvation urge us on, let dread of eternal death and eternal torment urge us on, let hope of obtaining eternal life and eternal glory urge us on. Let us grasp at whatever cleanses the soul; let us shun whatever stains it; but defilement of body



especially stains it." (Ad Virg. Lapsam 8.) This is precisely the most faithful admonition of St. Ambrose.

Christ Jesus, grant that we may so possess all these vain and passing things as not to lose the eternal; but let us keep to the path of those of whom St. Augustine has excellently said: "Many through a desire of salvation come voluntarily under the yoke, and though a little while before distinguished and exalted, they now strive to attain humility; they desire to be what they had before despised; and they begin to hate what they had been; like strangers, looking forward to things to come, they sigh after that eternal country; they prefer abstinence to delights, watchings to sleep, poverty to riches; they count as pleasure the difficult labor against their vices; they love their enemies, are crushed by no injuries, on account of the eternal reward. Who would not labor exceedingly through love of you, O eternal reward?"

#### CONSIDERATION IV

### HOW DAVID MEDITATED ON ETERNITY, AND WHAT IS THE MEANS OF IMITATING HIM IN THIS

**T**HAT God will punish eternally the apostate angels and men condemned at the last judgment has seemed to some very hard and incredible. Even Origen, a man of great intellect and remarkable learning, and skilled in the Scriptures, dared to teach in his books entitled *Periarchon* (On Origins), that the damned and the demons will be restored to grace after they have sufficiently expiated in fire the guilt they have contracted. Among others St. Augustine (De Civ. Dei XXI, 23 ff.) convicts him of error; yet this error finds not a few who assent to it. Heretics called Aniti spread it through Spain, with various interpretations. Some thought that all the damned would be released from hell; others believed that this applied to Christians only, others to Catholics only, others to those only who had been more generous in bestowing alms. Even if St. Augustine had not proved them guilty of error, the sacred pages would very openly refute them. "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire"; and "These shall go into everlasting punish-

ment, but the just into life everlasting" (Matt. XXV, 41, 46). Here no explanations, no arguments can be brought forward in opposition.

Hence the inspired psalmist, King David, had at heart two periods of time, looking not so much to the past as to the future: "My eyes," he says, "prevented the watches; I was troubled, and I spoke not" (Ps. LXXVI, 5). What interrupted your sleep, blessed prophet? What were those tasks before daybreak? Whence this silence and trouble of soul? Hear the cause: "I thought upon the days of old, and I had in my mind the eternal years" (Ibid. 6). Lo, this is what broke off his sleep: he compared the past with the future and eternal years; and he did this not only during the day: "And I meditated in the night with my own heart; and I was exercised and I swept my spirit" (Ibid. 7). And what is the motive of this nightly exercise? "Will God then cast off forever, or will He never be more favorable again?" (Ibid. 8). Behold how he dreads and shudders at eternity; how he fears the divine judgments, lest God visit him with everlasting punishments. And what is the end or effect of this meditation? "And I said, Now have I begun" (Ibid. 11). Thus, in a moment almost he became better than he had been; he did not defer, he did not procrastinate, he did not put off his amendment to his declinng years. Now have I begun, now will I live more holily, not after an hour or a day.

“If I could meditate on eternity,” someone may say, “as blessed David did, perhaps I should promptly and cheerfully pronounce the words ‘Now have I begun.’ But I am involved in daily cares, impeded by labors, distracted by duties in a thousand ways. I live among men; I see and hear much evil; and thus there is scarcely room in my life for so salutary a reflection on eternity. In social circles, in law courts, at banquets, our conversations are not of such a nature that we can turn our mind, wandering over many things, to the consideration of eternity. At banquets, indeed, the subject of conversation is trifles and cups; serious topics have long been banished thence. Law courts and social circles scarcely admit such austere discussions. News from other lands is sought; too old and too often repeated is the news which is brought from heaven and from hell; we know this already. What need to repeat such things so often, even to the point of causing weariness? Thus, scarcely anywhere is there found a place suited to meditate on eternity, scarcely ever an opportune time.” May you love the truth, my Christian friend, how truly have you said this! O that you would amend the fault which you acknowledge! Too clear is this, and we believe our eyes, that there is in the world almost no care for eternity, although there are not wanting objects which remind us of it, some frequently, some even daily.

The ritual of the Church in the installation of bishops advises that these words be read to them: "Have in mind the eternal years." When the newly elected bishop, according to solemn rite, is led to the altar, there is one who precedes him, and brandishing a glowing torch repeats three times: "Holy father, thus passes the glory of the world." How salutary and pious a practice it would be to repeat daily to ourselves at the beginning and end of all our actions: "Have in mind the eternal years," especially when there is an occasion of sin, when the suggestions of the demon are importunate, when danger of doing violence to conscience threatens. O, then have in mind the eternal years.

## I

### VARIOUS ADMONITIONS TO THINK ON ETERNITY

Philip, King of Macedon, ordered that every morning the words "Philip, you are a man" be repeated to him three times by a noble youth. He wished never to forget his mortality, that he might live among mortals more wisely. I think that there ought to be no man of Catholic faith who should not be his own daily monitor, and say to himself thoughtfully at least three times: "Eternity, eternity, eternity." Wherefore, "take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live" (Isai. XXXVIII, 1),

says the prophet to King Ezechias. There will be an evening whose next morning you will not see; or there will be a morning whose following evening will not be yours. Therefore, perform your duties so as not to injure conscience; so devote yourself to things that will perish, that through them you may not perish and lose eternal possessions.

There is also this good custom in Germany, that when one enters a room in a dim light he should utter these Christian words: "May God give us eternal light!" In churches before the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist a lamp with an ever burning light keeps watch and proclaims that there dwells the Light of the world and the Creator of light. What are these things but reminders to think on eternity? There is also an eternity in prisons, but it is infamous and horrible. To be condemned to everlasting galleys, to everlasting prisons, is a terrible punishment, and to many this seems more dismal than death itself. Those afflicted with diseases and other sufferings likewise picture to themselves a sort of eternity; whence we often hear expressions such as these: "Will this last forever? Shall I be thus confined to bed eternally? Are these perpetual pains to be endured? Shall I be thus harassed and tormented always?" But these eternities are short and restricted within their own limits.

But I return to prisons, perpetual prisons which many enter voluntarily and of their own accord

and in which they willingly pass their whole life. These are religious men and women, who do not think it difficult for God's sake to bid an eternal farewell to the world and to confine themselves in sacred prisons. There is a monastery in Bavaria, taking its name from St. Alto, which is divided into two classes, one of men and the other women, so that thus divided it almost equals that double monastery in Constantinople which I have mentioned before, in chanting continually day and night the praises of God. Here, when a virgin receives the sacred veil in the church and is made a spouse of Christ, it is customary, after all the public rites have been finished, to lead the new bride of Christ into the convent through the sanctuary. There precede her four of the nuns, who, according to a praiseworthy practice, carry a bier. When all the sacred virgins have entered, the doors are closed and bolted, just as if the new bride of Christ were told: "See to it, O virgin, that what you are now beginning you complete fittingly and perseveringly. Reflect that you are now entering upon this road, not to return until death. The world and whatever belongs to the world you must renounce, and return thither no more even in thought; let Christ be all things to you. Behold, you are passing through this door to the house of obedience, and you will return through it only on this bier which you see, when you make your final journey to the tomb on the shoulders

of your sisters. The path to heaven is always open to you; in it you may walk and hasten, but not to the world, not to your country, not to your father's house; for we are now burying you alive, and you yourself are attending your own obsequies." To many of the onlookers this seems a mournful and sad spectacle. "What," they say, "to be thus confined in an eternal enclosure, to lie hidden always in one place, to be denied all return to one's parents, to live far from pleasures, to be thus buried before death! We shudder at it. Though other men and women lead the way, we will not follow." But tell me, pray, ye children of the world, what think you of the question put to you by the prophet Isaias: "Which of you can dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isai. XXXIII, 14). Does it seem to you intolerable to be cloistered for a few short years in order to lead a holy life, to obtain heaven more securely and more certainly, to merit a happy eternity in heaven, to attain the eternal vision of God? Yet those who live religiously and purely experience a more genuine joy than those who abound and overflow with daily luxuries and pleasures. But tell me also, will a bier be borne before the damned to signify that they are now being banished to the funeral pyre and the punishment of fire, but that after several centuries they will die and be carried out for burial? O how desirable and mild would be this sentence! But "they look for death, and it



cometh not" (Job III, 21). For a thousand and a thousand and another thousand years they will look for it, and not yet will it come; nevertheless they look for it, although they know that they look in vain. You who love heaven, and yourself, now while there is time, keep in mind the eternal years.

Concerning a monastery somewhat similar in regard to entrance, Rufinus of Aquileia (Bk. I, Ch. 17) relates the following. In the Thebaid is the monastery of Isidore, as extensive as it is renowned, enclosed with spacious walls, generously equipped with gardens, wells, and all things necessary for life, so that no one may have any excuse or cause for thinking of departure. For this is an unchangeable law of the monastery, that no one ever withdraws from that place where he has once entered. To heaven, to the tomb only, and not elsewhere, is egress open. And it may seem wonderful, says Rufinus, that having entered under this law, not the necessity of the law, but the happiness of the life itself keeps men there. All their work is to pray, to praise God, to employ their energy in religious occupations; all which offices they perform with such application and holiness of life, that there are among them many who are wonder-workers and who have power to perform miracles. Moreover, they live in such temperance and singular prerogative of life that there is no disease among them except the last, that is, death itself, which tears away the bars and bolts

of all cloisters, and does not allow itself to be excluded by any doors however strongly barred. Does not this monastery also present to us some shadow of eternity? But let us proceed.

## II

ETERNITY EXCEEDS ALL ARITHMETICAL NUMBERS  
AND LAWS

In explaining eternity a common and well known problem in arithmetic is wont to be proposed, which children are taught in school; and it is this: "Suppose," it is said, "there is a mountain composed of minute grains of sand, as large as the whole world, or in mass and size even greater, and that only a single grain be taken from this mountain by an angel each year. How many thousands of years, and again thousands upon thousands; how many hundred thousands, nay, how many thousand millions of years will have passed before the mountain would appear to diminish and decrease?" Suppose now that the teacher of arithmetic sits down and makes a calculation and reckons up how many years will pass before half the mountain thus so slowly removed by the angel disappears, and how many before it entirely disappears. We indeed understand this scarcely otherwise than if there were going to be no end at all. But our imagination is most

seriously mistaken and shamefully deceived in regard to that which it cannot adequately grasp.

But let us suppose that finally the last grain of this immense mountain has actually been counted; yet eternity exceeds it by an incomparable length (and nothing is more certain), because there is no comparison, no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Eternity admits of no confines, no boundaries; therefore the damned will burn during this long, this incomprehensible term of years in perpetual flames, until a mountain of so great size can by a mere word be transferred to another place. But the measure and limit of their torments will be so far from being ended at that time, that it can then be said: "Now eternity is just beginning; nothing has been subtracted from it, it is still entire. After a thousand years, after a hundred thousand years, there is not yet an end nor middle nor beginning of eternity, but its measure is *always*."

A theologian of our age (Cornelius a Lapide, In Exod. XV, 18) explains this arithmetical calculation in the matter of eternity in exactly the same sense, but in slightly different words; all of which I shall measure out for you, dear reader, fully and in good faith, for this matter can never be sufficiently spoken of nor recommended nor inculcated. "Consider," he says, "how long is eternity, how long will God and the saints reign, how long will the damned burn in hell? Forever. And what is 'forever'?"

Think of a hundred thousand years: you have thought of nothing in respect to eternity. Think of ten hundred thousand years, nay centuries: you have yet subtracted nothing from eternity. Think of a thousand million years: eternity remains yet equally entire. Think of a thousand thousand million years multiplied indefinitely. Think, I say, of these countless years passed in flames, and not yet have you begun eternity. Think of as many millions of years as there are drops of water in the ocean: not yet have you reached the beginning of eternity. There remains an equally eternal eternity of joys for the saints and of torments for the damned." O Jesus, spare; O Jesus, Jesus, save; have mercy on me, O good Jesus, that I be not precipitated into this eternity of the damned.

But if God were to say to the damned: "Let the earth be filled with the finest sand, so that the whole world is made full of these minute grains, from the earth even to the empyrean heaven; and every thousandth year let an angel come and take away from this immense heap of sand but a single grain. When after as many millions of years as there are grains he shall have exhausted them, I shall release you from hell"; O, how the damned would exult! They would not deem themselves damned. But now, after all these millions of years, there remain other and still other millions to infinity, forever and ever. This is the heavy weight of eternity which oppresses

the damned. Reflect, O sinner, reflect that this weight threatens you, unless you come to your senses.

William Peraldus, Bishop of Lyons, a very religious and learned man, suggests to us another method of meditating on this innumerable number of years among the damned (Sum. Virt. 7, de 8 Beatitud.). He says: "If the damned should each day shed only one tear, which would be preserved with all the others still to be shed, they would at length pour forth more tears than the sea has waters; for all the drops in the sea can be reduced to number and measure, since it is not difficult to God to say: 'There are so many drops in the sea and no more.' But the tears of the damned transcend all number and measure." Alas, how we think not of these things, and how freely we sin and make ourselves guilty for a whole eternity, generally for the sake of a short and vile pleasure.

But let us make our calculation also in this manner, while measuring the years of the damned. Suppose there is a strip of parchment of the width of a hand but so long that it encircles the circumference of the whole earth; suppose that this for its entire length is written over with numbers, continuous and closely joined to each other. Where is the mathematician who can express this number? Where is the mountain which can contain so many grains? Where the ocean which can possess so

many drops of water? And yet this is not eternity. The latter extends further and does not suffer itself to be thus circumscribed: it is longer and more extensive. But up to what point? To infinity. If your heart, O Christian, has not yet hardened into stone and rock, it is not possible that you think of this without shuddering at that immense abyss of eternity; if there is any feeling in you, it will be manifested here. But, as we have pointed out above, too few think on these things, and hence live as heedless of salvation as if there were no heaven, no God, no hell, no eternity; they let no day pass which they do not burden down with sins, as if they were striving for this alone, that on the last day of their life they might find the greatest possible number of sins. And trifling thus they approach eternity, just as if there were question of imprisonment for only a few weeks. "Such as these," says Gregory, "amid joyous dancing perform deeds which will cause them tears, and smiling bring about their own death." O truly, this is blindness and mad forgetfulness. For a very short life, for the shadow of eternity, we labor beyond our strength; for a true eternity of the happiest life we deign to labor, I do not say beyond our strength, but not even in proportion to it. But not to gain this life is to incur everlasting death, which, besides the fact that it is a torment more severe than all the torments of this life, has also this penalty, that in all eternity there

will not be a single brief hour which will bring rest, much less an end of suffering.

### III

#### EFFECTS OF MEDITATING ON ETERNITY

It is this meditation on eternity that has made so many Christians, so many holy martyrs, ready and eager to endure any torments whatever, any death whatever; so that although they were in the greatest sufferings and dripping with their own blood, yet they were so courageous and cheerful, and maintained an expression so steadfast and a countenance so smiling that they mocked their torturers. They had in mind the eternal years.

This it is that drove so many thousands of men, and among them many who were formerly ungodly, into the deserts and confined them in monasteries and cloisters; withdrew them from a life of luxury and pleasure to one that was severe and rigorous. They had in mind the eternal years. Furthermore, many religious persons now living could be named, who admit that because of this thought of eternity alone the whole world began to be distasteful and displeasing to them. Such was the blessed Teresa, the parent of the revival of religious fervor throughout Spain.

This thought of eternity it is, also, that makes all

things easy and delightful to religious men and women and to all others who embrace a rigorous rule of life. It convinces them that all labor is light and short; it gives a zest to their prayers, studies, and watches, and makes these duties loved; it tempers hunger and thirst, and assuages all the privations of poverty; it makes rough garments, hard beds, disciplines, and all other austerities of life tolerable and pleasing. Whoever has in mind the eternal years and by daily meditation impresses them more and more deeply upon his soul, is overcome by no labor, is discouraged by no hardships. If to such a man you should offer a kingdom, if you should offer the greatest pleasures and delights, he would not take all these things in exchange for his own conditions, though it be the very poorest. Such a man complains about nothing, nor finds fault with any one; he endures all things, submits to all things, for he constantly entertains this thought: "How slight a thing is this, and that; accordingly I shall suffer and endure it, for it will not last forever. It is only for a short hour that my enemies oppress me. Proceed then, detractors; defame me, ye envious; I shall not shrink from you; this is your hour, this is the power of darkness; I wait for the day of the Lord, the eternal day. And why should I consume myself with lamentations? This whole life is a death which lasts but a single hour; the victory is not difficult, the triumph is eternal. Why should



I dread the threats of the raging sea? Already I see the harbor. Now indeed the rains and the fury of the storms thunder upon the heads of the virtuous, but it will not be thus forever, except for the enemies of God. Daniel prophesies: 'Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always' (Dan. XII, 2)."

In the Old Law God instructing Moses says: "Make thee two trumpets of beaten silver. If thou sound but once, the princes and heads of the multitude of Israel shall come to thee; but if the sound of the trumpets be longer and with interruptions, they shall move forward" (Numb. X, 2-5). With these two trumpets are to be compared the two words Now and Always. The law of the world is: "Now let us be joyful, now let us seek delights, now let us enjoy good things while they are present: 'Come, let us crown ourselves with roses, before they be withered; now let us everywhere leave tokens of joy' (Wisd. II, 8-9)." Those who heed this one trumpet alone and listen attentively only to this Now, often live as if that Always were never to follow. Accordingly, they do not move forward; in the midst of enjoyments they forget that they are pilgrims; whithersoever the evil tendencies of the flesh invite they willingly follow, wholly absorbed in heaping up wealth or in enjoying pleasures. The noise of that Now so smites their ears, that, deaf to the best ad-

monitions, they do not hear that Always which is to follow. But those who with ears and mind listen to both these trumpets, as the Church daily causes them to resound many times, and who compare that very brief Now with the very long and eternal Always, do not deliberate long, but move forward, live as pilgrims, restrain the flesh, remember that they are on a journey, and send before them to their country riches and pleasures, which they prefer to enjoy *always* in heaven than *now* on earth. It is certain that whoever with serious and attentive mind listens to the brief sound of the one trumpet and the longer sound of the other, and compares present things to future, those that pass to the eternal, soon prepares for his departure, looks around for his tomb, lays out his shroud, sets up his bier, arranges all things for his journey, everywhere remembers that he is on the road to eternity, and for this reason constantly interrogates himself thus: "Shall I be able to render an account to God of all my words, deeds and thoughts? And when shall I render it? What sentence will He pass upon me? I shall die *now* to myself, that I may live *always* to myself and to God." Well for that man who now in time and daily meditates thus on eternity. Whatever we do, we shall by this way and perhaps in a short time arrive at the gate of eternity, where we shall see all eternity before us. At the last hour of life death will place us at this door and will force us to enter.

This the dying teach us often both by words and action.

There died in the year of our Lord 1606, on March twenty-third, Justus Lipsius, a man famous for his learning and writings. He had often been accustomed, like Augustus, to wish for himself euthanasia, an easy death; also a soul free and fearless in that last extremity. Both his wishes were realized; for during only four days was he engaged in the supreme task of dying. In all this time he said not a single word about either his writings or his studies. On the contrary, when someone whispered to him that he had abundant cause for consolation from the teaching of the Stoics, he replied: "Those things are vain"; and, pointing towards an image of Christ crucified that stood near, said: "This is true patience"; then added with a deep sigh: "Lord Jesus, give me Christian patience." As soon as his sickness became serious, his first care was to cleanse, fortify and invigorate his soul by the sacraments of penance, Holy Eucharist and extreme unction, constantly and ardently requesting the prayers of the devout, and raising his dying eyes and hands on high thus piously prayed: "O Mother of God, assist your servant, struggling with all eternity, and abandon me not at this hour on which depends the eternal salvation of my soul."

We have here, O Christian, a noble example of a Catholic man. Let us likewise daily demand the

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same thing of Christ the Lord and the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, and with burning soul let us say frequently each day: "O Christ Jesus, O Mother of God, assist your servant who is soon to struggle with all eternity, and abandon me not at that hour on which depends the eternal salvation of my soul."

## CONSIDERATION V

### HOW EVEN SOME WICKED PEOPLE MEDITATED ON ETERNITY

**A**N ancient history of the Fathers relates that a religious, as he was meditating on that eighty-ninth Psalm, came at length to these words: "For a thousand years in Thy sight are as yesterday, which is past" (Ps. LXXXIX, 4). He stopped here and could not quite understand how a thousand years and one short day could be compared with each other. They say that hereupon a little bird was sent by God, which so charmed the man by the sweetness of its singing that though he listened a very long time, he thought it had been scarcely an hour. "The spirit breatheth where it will." Not only many of the good have with holy David meditated on eternity, but also the wicked, and almost against their will.

Benedict Renatus (Bk. V, Magni Ordinis Christianor.) relates that a vain and impious man, named Fulco, who had been trained in strict accordance with the laws of the world, and was consequently unaccustomed both to fasts and vigils, suffered no privation to be imposed upon him in regard to sleep

as well as other things. However, there came a night when he was unable as at other times to sleep soundly. The unusual sleeplessness forced him to lie awake; he turned from side to side, and yet could not obtain sleep; he longed for daybreak. Hereupon, the spirit of the Lord began to breathe, although in an unknown land, for good thoughts were very rare with this man; and in the weariness caused by wakefulness he began to think of various things. This thought occurred to him among others: "What reward would you ask for lying here for two or three successive years in darkness, without friends, suffering from a lingering disease, without amusement and revelings, in these bonds even though they be of feather, deprived also of the gaiety of banquets and theatres? Certainly I alone shall not depart from this life as one exceptional and immune; I shall be obliged to lie on a bed of sickness, whether I will it or not, unless I die a sudden and unexpected death, which may God avert!" (Here was the good inspiration, here the salutary thought.) "But what bed shall I have when death snatches me from my present one? My body will decay within the earth; it is this that I see happens to all others after death. But what shall become of my soul in the other world? Not all men, I suppose, assemble in the same place. Where then are these, and those? Are there not beside heaven avenging flames, is there not a hell? Alas, what kind of a bed will the

damned have there? How many years will they lie there? And once begun, in what year will these flames cease? Christ certainly not only threatens that the impious shall be sent into eternal fire, but also sends them; this fact is very clear, very certain! Therefore will they burn in flames eternally? Therefore, will not a thousand, and another and another thousand years suffice to wash away the sins of a short life? Therefore, will they during all eternity behold neither the sun, nor heaven, nor God, but be miserable eternally?" By such thoughts as these he became so sleepless and wakeful and reached such a point, that this eternity which he had thought on pursued him other nights and days. He wished to shake off these troublesome worms of the soul, but could not. He did not give up his amusements, cups, companions and revelings. Thus he listened less to the annoying complaints of conscience when he was among others; but when he returned to himself in solitude, he did not escape them. Eternity became fixed in his mind and beset him. At length he determined to amend his life and devote himself to better pursuits, saying to himself: "What am I doing here, wretch that I am? I am enjoying the world, and yet not enjoying it. I suffer many things against my will; I am deprived of many things which I would wish to have. I am a slave, but who will recompense my service? Up to the present I have easily seen what rewards the

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world bestows on one who has served it a long time. And granted that I enjoy whatever delights I could desire, how long will this last? I am certain of life not even until tomorrow; daily funerals are sufficient proof of this. O eternity, if only you did not exist! O eternity, if you are passed out of heaven, you will be disagreeable and bitter even on the softest bed. With difficulty do we tear ourselves from those things to which we are accustomed; it is hard thus to renounce sumptuous banquets, generous cups, dear companions; but if we hesitate, death comes and carries off all these things. Why then do you put off your resolution? Why do you not impose upon yourself a virtuous necessity? My decision is made; henceforth I shall be different or perish. This life of mine is too short, eternity too long. Now I must walk in another road. I shall not waver, but proceed along this road. Welcome me now, O divine eternity!" He carried out his resolution, and becoming a member of the order of the Cistercians he lived in the practice of virtue and died a holy death.

O eternity, how few there are who reflect thus seriously upon you; fewer still who carefully examine and become absorbed in you! All other things are sought: eternity alone is lightly valued. Riches are amassed, but they are fleeting and must be abandoned. Honors are solicited, but they must be relinquished in a short time. Pleasures are loved,



but only those that have an evil and bitter end. Rest is desired, but such as will not last. Friendship is sought, but such as death breaks off. There is everywhere a craving for conversation, but not such as is in heaven. There is a longing for abundance, but in a place where it will fail. But if we would think oftener on eternity, certainly our desires would be less inflamed for things of such short duration. I bring forward St. Bernard as a witness of this: "Transitory things," he says, "are distasteful to him who yearns for things eternal" (Epist. 3).

But there are some who speak glibly of a sort of eternity and declare that certain things are to be shunned eternally. Thus there are sometimes heard promises of this kind: "Forever shall I be on my guard against this place which I suspect and which is an occasion of sin to me. Forever shall I keep from that man, that woman, that associate in sin. Forever shall I avoid those revelings, those dances. It is enough to have sinned once, to have sinned so often, in this place and that, with this person and that." Your purpose is good, my friend, and because you fear sin you rightly shun also the danger of sin. But would that so easily as you make your promise, you would so scrupulously keep it! Sometimes scarcely a day or a few hours pass, when you do exactly the same thing which you have thus renounced and forsworn. This resolution must be made with consideration and courage. No rash

promise should be made to God, but what has been promised must be kept scrupulously and perseveringly. By very clear examples we are taught how God punishes us if we break a pledge given to Him.

## I

THE LABORS OF MAN AND THOSE OF  
THE SPIDER COMPARED

There is another eternity, but a very bad one, which those men promise themselves who wish to build for themselves a heaven outside of heaven, and to be happy before they are dead. Wherefore Isaias says: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men; for you have said: We have entered into a league with death, and we have made a covenant with hell" (Isaias XXVIII, 14-15). O madmen, how truly this eternity of yours is mere nothingness! There is nothing stable or lasting in this prison.

The royal prophet fitly explains this when he says: "Our years shall be considered as a spider" (Ps. LXXXIX, 9). He could not have expressed it more briefly and better. For what else are all these years of ours but a continual exercise and a laborious exertion? The whole time of life is spent in vain labors, many sorrows, various fears, frequent suspicions, and almost innumerable anxieties. As the spider, when she weaves thread with thread, so is

our labor linked together and continual; we sigh almost uninterruptedly, now that we may enjoy this pleasure, again that we may avert that trouble from us. We perform many works and undertake laborious tasks, not knowing, alas, that we are weaving a spider's web, with great labor, rarely with success and with no result. "Our years shall be considered as a spider." The spider laboriously begins her web, runs busily to and fro for a long time, goes round on this side and that, often returns to the same place, and consumes herself in completing that little wheel of manifold threads. She empties and disembowels herself in order to shape artistically that very airy little tent of hers. That she may suspend it aloft, fasten it and make it firm, she goes back and forth a thousand times, and does not spare her vitals but gladly expends them on this very thin web. But when this transparent and delicate gauze net now hangs in place and the work of weaving is completed, a slight stroke of the broom entirely destroys and wipes out all this labor. The poor little spider is either killed in its own web, or as if dragged to death by a rope will be trodden under foot. Thus the tiny insect has unknowingly either woven for itself a funeral shroud in which it may be wrapped, or fashioned a rope by which it may be killed.

Just so, men, like the spider, exhaust themselves by many labors that they may mount to a high

position, abound with pleasures, heap up wealth and retain and increase it. To these attempts they direct all the energies of their mind and often sacrifice bodily health; they run hither and thither, weary themselves, toil, and wear themselves out like the spider by using up their vital energies; and when they have done all this, they have spiders' webs and a woven fabric to catch flies. Often they die while engaged in this work of theirs, and the days which they had hoped would be filled with enjoyment bring death; they find that to be a tomb which they thought a palace. Thus, our years are truly for the most part considered only as a spider. For we propose to do very many things, yet we accomplish few, and those which we perform better generally have no enduring quality, and we usually fail to attain those for which we strive with so much effort. Therefore, there is no league with death, no covenant with hell. We all waste away and die. The worst thing is that thus blind we approach an eternity from which we will never come forth.

Guerricus once heard read in church the following passage from the book of Genesis: "All the time that Adam lived came to nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years, and he died. And all the days of Matusala

were nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he died," etc. (Gen. V, 5, 8, 11, 27.) He hereupon became so imbued with the thought of death, and his mind was so strongly impressed by the fact that he too would die, that he at length bound himself by the rules of St. Dominic in order to meet death more holily, and thus more safely to enter upon a blessed eternity, since no eternity can be experienced in this life.

## II

### WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION IN THE WORLD?

St. Matthew relates that a young man came to Christ to propose a question. This young man was good, as may be inferred from St. Mark's narrative. Now he came, bending the knee, and questioned the Saviour in these words: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?" (Matt. XIX, 16; Mark X, 17). "Thou knowest the law," replied Christ, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. XIX, 17). At Philippi, a city of Macedonia, the keeper of the prison, falling down at the feet of Paul and Silas, said: "Masters, what must I do that I may be saved?" (Acts XVI, 30.)

An excellent question indeed. These men could

have asked nothing better, nothing more useful. But, O good God, where is this question found in the world? Continual questions flit about everywhere, this one alone almost nowhere. Usually men betray themselves by their questions, and bring into full light either their simplicity or their curiosity or some other hidden ailment of the soul. He who diligently inquires where good wine is sold makes it quite clear what the object of his care is. Another inquires for that at which the listener cannot fail to blush. Here it is quite evident that the heart is filled with that with which the mouth overflows. Questions everywhere abound, but how rarely does one man ask another: "Do you think this road leads to heaven?"

It is a characteristic of all vices, but especially of lust and impurity, that when one is tending toward the abyss and is beginning to sink, he does not readily ask with an earnest and sincere mind: "Shall I by this manner of living obtain a blessed eternity? Is it thus one reaches heaven?" This is indeed the last question that those ask themselves to whom life is delightful and sweet, who experience but little sorrow and affliction, or who, if they do experience it, use every effort to avoid it. With them to suffer is the greatest evil; let them only possess present enjoyment, whatever happens to others, whatever may happen in that eternity of which they think not at all. They daily repeat these words:

“The heaven of heaven is the Lord’s, but the earth He has given to the children of men.” (Ps. CXIII, 16.) Nor do they lack strength of body and mind with which to escape for the moment the attacks of men, but with the result that they fall without escape into the far-reaching hands of the supreme judge, and pay the longest penalties for their crimes.

And if God by His most secret judgments rejects and condemns a man and permits him to live according to the pleasure of his unrestrained desires, He usually allows all things to prosper and turn out well for him, that the wretched man may not be punished twice, both here and hereafter, and that he may at once receive his reward for whatever good he has done. Concerning unfortunate men of this kind the royal psalmist speaks thus: “They are not in the labor of men; neither shall they be scourged like other men” (Ps. LXXII, 5). They shall walk in their own devices. And this, if any, is the most wretched condition of life; because God certainly does not spare one whom He has destined to lead into the way of that blessed eternity, but “frequently chastiseth him” (Ecclus. XXX, 1). From innumerable witnesses I choose only one, but a great one; and I think that for many ages past nothing like it has been seen or heard.

## III

A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE OF HOW GOD PUNISHES  
HERE THAT HE MAY SPARE HEREAFTER

In the year 1185 after our Lord's birth of the Virgin, Andronicus, Emperor of the East, in the third year of his reign was conquered by Isaac Angelus. Two iron chains were put upon his neck, he was burdened with shackles, subjected to the greatest insults, and after being thus treated was at length conducted to Isaac. Here he was charged with cruelty and tyranny, and permission was granted to all to do anything they wished to him. Those who were angry with him took pleasure in wreaking vengeance upon their enemy. Accordingly, they inflicted blows upon him, ignominiously beat his back, plucked his beard, pulled his hair, knocked out his teeth, then dragged him along in public. He was exposed to the mockery of all, and was struck even by the fists of women. His right hand was next cut off, and thus mutilated he was thrust into the prison of thieves and robbers, without food, without drink, without the service of anyone. After the lapse of a few days one of his eyes was dug out, and he himself, thus disgracefully treated and deformed, having only one eye and one hand, was clothed in a small and short tunic,



was dishonored by having his head shaved smooth, and was placed backward upon a mangy camel, his head in mockery wreathed with a crown of garlic and the camel's tail put in his left hand as a sceptre; and he was thus led in slow procession through the forum after the manner of a triumph. Hereupon the malicious and vile mob about the forum made a savage attack upon him, giving no consideration to the fact that only yesterday he had been emperor, crowned with a royal diadem, praised, courted, sought after, revered by all; and that they themselves had by oath pledged their loyalty and goodwill to him. Rage furnished arms to all: some struck his head with clubs, others filled his nostrils with filth, others squeezed upon his face sponges filled with the foulest substances, others beat his sides with javelins. Some attacked him with stones, others with mud; others called him a mad dog, a dolt and stupid fellow. A shameless woman, taking from her kitchen a pot filled with boiling water, poured it upon the head of the emperor as he passed. There was no one who did not maltreat him. He was at length conducted to the theater amid the greatest mockery, and then taken from the camel and hung by the feet between two columns. He who had already suffered a thousand evils now behaved himself as a truly Christian man and hero; he was not heard to utter lamentations and wailings, nor to accuse fortune; and to no pur-

pose would he have done this. He began to settle his accounts with God, and to pray for the pardon of his faults; for he repeatedly uttered only these words: "Lord, have mercy; Lord, have mercy."

O Andronicus, wretched because you are forced to endure such great sufferings; happy because you bear them patiently, and recognize that thus your sins must be expiated. But not even when he was thus suspended did the maddened crowd spare him as long as life remained in him. Tearing off his tunic, they attack and lacerate him with their hands in various ways. One, more savage than the rest, drove a sword through his body into his vitals, as he hung there. Two others, to test whose sword was the sharper, exerting themselves with both hands, pierced his body in the back. Hereupon the wretched emperor with great effort put his mutilated right arm to his mouth in order, as many thought, to suck from it the warm blood which was still dripping from the recent wound. Thus, pitiably he laid down his life. After several days had passed his body was taken from the gibbet and cast under an arch of the theater, like that of a beast, until some more humane persons transferred it to another place; yet Isaac permitted no one to bury it. O Andronicus, O Emperor of the East, how great a grace did God confer upon you in willing that you suffer these things for a few days, that you might not perish for all days! You were wretched for a

short time that you might not be so eternally. Nor do I doubt that you had in mind the eternal years, since you bore these sufferings with so much fortitude.

The above facts have been recorded by Nicetas Choniates, who lived in that age, and who praises Andronicus also for the fact that he was most steadfast in the Catholic faith and at the same time most devout to St. Paul, the Apostle, whose Epistles he was accustomed to have at hand and always open. The apostle did not suffer this service to pass unrewarded. He took care of his client, Andronicus, whose image of the apostle, adorned with gold and placed in a sacred shrine, was seen to weep copiously when ruin threatened its owner. This miracle Andronicus himself immediately received as a message of coming disaster.

O Christians, have in mind the eternal years. Thus, whatever evils must be borne you will bear far more easily; for whatever is compared with eternity will seem short. "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. IV, 17). Hence Augustine thus earnestly exclaims and prays: "Lord, here burn, here cut, provided Thou spare for eternity." And St. Fulgentius, although very holy, when near his death, for seventy days before he died repeatedly cried out: "Lord, grant me only patience, and afterwards par-

don." These were his words and prayers until he expired. Certainly God spares least of all those whom He has decreed to keep with Him during all eternity.

## CONSIDERATION VI

### HOW THE HOLY FATHERS, THE CHURCH, AND THE SCRIPTURES INSIST ON THE NECESSITY OF MEDITATING ON ETERNITY

**I**T is a Catholic ceremony to offer prayers and hold processions on certain days of the year for the purpose of advancing the honor of God and the saints. The demon is jealous of this: he also has his followers who make supplications and go about. The royal prophet saw these: "The wicked walk round about" (Ps. XI, 9). They so dispose their lives that they go from feast to feast, from pleasure to pleasure, from crime to crime. This is their round; and when they think that this round of iniquity is almost complete and their circle of wickedness is in some way rounded out, they begin again; they return to their former and oldtime practices until death, uninvited, comes upon them as they thus go round.

The children of Job made this law among themselves, that they should pass the days of feasting in rotation, and be invited each by the others. Their good parent rightly noticed that this succes-

sion of feastings would scarcely be without sin, "whèrefore he sent to them and sanctified them, and rising up early offered holocausts for every one of them" (Job 1, 5). Therefore, as the wicked rejoice in a round of pleasures and pass their days in good things, so God will make for them a round, but perpetual, in torments, eternal. This same thing blessed David foresaw: "For thy arrows pass; the voice of thy thunder in a wheel" (Ps. LXXVI, 18-19). Famine, war, pestilence, tribulations, diseases, calamities, death itself; in fine, all adversities which afflict us before our first death, are the arrows of God. But they fly past, they are winged, they quickly speed from these persons to those, and then to others. But the voice of thunder, the voice of divine wrath and fury in the prisons of hell, will move round like a wheel, and this for eternal ages. This wheel, as if it were filled with tormenting dust, when once it has been set on fire, will burn for all eternity. "A fire is kindled in my wrath, and I shall burn even to the lowest hell" (Deut. XXXII, 22). There is another round, and this too eternal — from indescribable cold to intense heat, and from this again there will be a return to the former. "Let him pass," says Job, "from the snow waters to excessive heat" (Job XXIV, 19). This is more clearly denoted by the gnashing of teeth and weeping of the eyes (Matt. XXII, 13).

That we may more fully describe this horrible and

incomprehensible wheel of eternity, order demands that we point out in what way the Holy Fathers agree in this matter with the Church, and she in turn with the Sacred Scriptures. Various admonitions are given by them, attending to which we shall not easily forget eternity.

## I

### ANSWERS OF THE HOLY FATHERS AND THE CHURCH ON THIS SUBJECT

Of the entire number of the holy Fathers five especially, who lived at different times, are to be listened to, namely, Augustine, Chrysostom, Gregory, Bernard, and Lawrence Justinian.

Here is the first question, but one which seems vain and foolish: Which is easier or more tolerable — to endure for three days pains in the head, eyes, teeth, to suffer from gall-stones or pains in the vitals, or to undergo any other bodily sufferings whatever, and night and day not to know sleep, to be tortured almost without any respite; or merely to eat a small portion of fish in which gall has been mixed. A ridiculous and most unprofitable question indeed! How much sweeter it is to devour an entire fish of this kind saturated with gall, than to endure such pains even for a single day. The bitterness of the fish will not deprive one of life, nor

will it generate disease; the mouth only, which dislikes what is bitter, will loudly complain. This is a correct answer; nevertheless, how many thousand men choose the first, either in words or in very deed? How often in exhortations, in confessions, in sermons is the following truth proclaimed, how eloquently and openly is it preached: "Behold, the eternal salvation of your soul is at stake; eternal torments await you, if you continue to advance on this road. Christ pointed out another, traversed another; return, then, come to your senses; long enough have you strayed. It depends on your own will whether you are to enjoy heaven or be excluded therefrom. God is never wanting to those who have good will. Abstinence and fasting, confession of sins, chastisement of the body, custody of the senses and victory over one's self have indeed some bitterness; a chaste and pure life is not a very easy task for any one. But whatever our lot, each has something to endure. 'Ought not Christ to have suffered and so to enter into his glory?' (Luke XXIV, 26). Let not short labor terrify. It is necessary to act and to suffer with fortitude for a few short years or perhaps only days; rest and joy will be eternal. He conquers all things who conquers himself, who restrains himself, who violently resists his evil emotions, and does all this for heaven, for Christ, for a most blessed eternity. Christ after His resurrection set before His disciples a fish laid on burning



coals, by which He wished to teach them how great sufferings they must still endure; that a pleasant and delightful life was not to be expected; that they were to be stoned, scourged, crucified, flayed, since this life must be passed with a view to a joyous resurrection hereafter and an eternity among the blessed. All things which we see are trifling and insignificant, and are not to be compared with immortal beatitude, which is not yet seen."

These admonitions are uttered but are not heeded. Here is that fish saturated with gall, which is so often set before men in sermons and in books. For these thoughts and others like them are often insisted upon and inculcated, are read and heard, and yet are not believed, are esteemed of small account, are buried beneath other cares, and forgotten. And how often also conscience itself plays the part of a preacher and brings forward these salutary warnings, insists, exhorts, pricks? Yet it effects nothing; all is in vain. For many are persuaded neither by preacher nor by conscience. On the contrary, they oppose conscience and are guided by their own maxims, saying: "Let us only be well off here; the future is uncertain; only let the present be enjoyable; none of the dead return, for there is no one who is known to have come back from hell; come, therefore, let us enjoy good things." These are their oft-repeated strains. But let Augustine answer the proposed question: "Better," he says, "is a little

bitterness in the mouth than eternal torment in the vitals." Just so, it is truly better to pay in this world rather than in the next the debts one has contracted; far preferable is it to exercise the body here for sixty or seventy years by continual and daily fasts, scourgings, and hair shirts, than to be detained there even one day in torments. But let another of the Holy Fathers come forward.

St. Chrysostom proposes a second question. "If anyone," he says, "within the period of a hundred years had had on a single night only a sweet and pleasant dream, and were punished a hundred years for this, would such a dream be worth desiring? But," he continues, "what this dream is when compared to a hundred years, that the present life is when compared to the future; nay, it is much less. And what a drop of water is when compared to the sea, that a thousand years are when compared to the eternity to come." (Hom. 20, Ad Pop.) Elsewhere, in confirmation of this he says: "What will you compare to infinite time? What are ten thousand years when you think of infinite ages? Are they not as the tiniest drop compared to an abyss? Do not look for an end after this life, where repentance will be of no avail as a remedy, where tears will fall but will profit naught. Although one should there gnash with his teeth, although he should stretch forth his burning tongue, no one will let fall from his finger a drop of water, but the

sufferer will hear the words addressed to the rich man in the Gospel. Granted, therefore, that we have been at leisure for pleasure during all our life, yet what is this compared to infinite ages? For here both good and evil have an end, but there there are everlasting pains; here, if the body is burned, the soul leaves it; but there, when the body rises incorrupt, the soul will burn forever; for sinners will rise incorrupt, not that they may be honored, but that they may everlastingly remain in torments." (Hom. 28, In Epist. ad. Hebr.)

After Chrysostom, St. Gregory answers the question which is usually put thus: Does not intoxication produce its effect more quickly when one drinks in the cellar near the wine-casks than in the dining room? The heavenly spouse proclaims by the mouth of Solomon: "The king brought me into the cellar of wine; he set in order charity in me" (Cant. II, 4). Upon these words St. Gregory discourses thus: "By the cellar of wine what do we understand more suitably than the secret contemplation of eternity? And certainly, whoever lets this thought of eternity sink more deeply into his mind, will be able to declare: 'He set in order charity in me'; for he will observe a better order of love, by loving himself less, God more intensely and fervently, and even his very enemies for God's sake. But this thought has the following effect also: that he who tastes of it a little more generously

becomes intoxicated, but with an intoxication of the best desires, which lead only to amendment of life, to the heavenly country, to eternal delights. The Apostles were reproached with being intoxicated with new wine; they were, to be sure, but from this cellar of charity." Although St. Gregory often mentions eternity, yet his briefest and truest statement about it is this: "Momentary is that which delights; eternal that which tortures." Here rightly might anyone desire with Job: "Who will grant me that they may be marked down in a book with an iron pen?" (Job XIX, 23), I mean these very words: "Momentary is that which delights; eternal that which tortures." The book suitable for this writing is the heart of man; the iron pen, serious meditation; the purple ink, the Blood of Christ. And these words, thus engraved on the heart, must then especially be pondered on and more frequently repeated, when pleasure attracts, when passion incites, when luxury entices, when the flesh is rebellious, when the spirit grows weak, when there is occasion or danger of sin.

In the fourth place comes St. Bernard, who will now make answer to a question which should have been stated before. Human life is such that men have very different feelings, just as they have very different countenances. There are found some who are continually and deeply afflicted, so that they think that they must almost succumb to affliction.

Poverty overwhelms and disturbs one, sickness another, secret debts another, cares another, injuries or calumnies another; so that those who are pusillanimous and impatient sometimes wish for death, hasten to the river or look for a rope; for these wretched beings think that they can thus put an end to tribulations, whereas they hereby make a beginning of sufferings to which no end will be granted. Others, on the contrary, full of virtue and most ready to do the will of God in all things, have no particular desire either to die quickly or to live long. Does God wish them to die? They, too, entertain the same wish. Does He wish them to die quickly? This they also wish. Does He wish them to live long? They do not oppose His will. Thus, to will and not to will with God is to them the same thing. Besides these two classes of men there is the great majority of those who desire a long life; and there is scarcely any man so old that he does not hope and desire to live at least a year. Among these men there is almost no weariness of life; for them death hastens too much, approaches too soon, and is believed to come before its time. Here it may be asked: What men live or are likely to live the longest? St. Bernard, commenting on this divine promise: "I will fill him with length of days" (Ps. XC, 16), exclaims in wonder: "What is so long as that which is eternal? What so long as that which is cut short by no end? A good end is life

eternal; a good end is that which has no end." He adds: "That is a true day which knows no setting; truth is eternal, eternity true, forming a true and eternal alliance" (Serm. 17). Accordingly, we must say that those only will live a truly long life who will never die in heaven; and those will die a death, alas, too prolonged who will always die, who will never live in hell, although they live there always.

St. Lawrence Justinian will explain the last question to us. There are very many things in this world which nature has so assigned to one place or to a certain number of places, that they cannot be found in others. Of flowers belonging to the New World only the seed can be procured; of many animals only the hide. Eternity is a thing belonging so entirely to the other world that we can have here only its seed. What, therefore, is the seed of eternity? "The seeds of eternity," says St. Lawrence Justinian, "are these: contempt of self, the gift of charity, a relish for the works of Christ. Contempt for others is a tree which covers the whole earth, and grows most extensively before the fires of hell. Contempt for self is both the smallest seed and least known to the world. It was this that brought Christ from heaven, who 'emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant and becoming obedient,' not only to the stable and the manger, but even to Calvary, to the cross, to death, to the tomb, to Limbo; 'for which cause God also hath exalted Him' (Philip.

II, 7-9). Behold, this seed has grown into the most luxuriant vine, into the tallest of all trees." (De Obed. 26.)

The same blessed Patriarch mentioning charity says: "According to the measure of charity is the glory of the eternal reward. For 'to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less' (Luke VII, 47). He obtains less grace who has less charity; but where there is less grace, there will be also less glory" (De Disciplin. et Convers. Monas.). Thus, then, the more you love God, the more you heap up for yourself eternal rewards. The whole law is love, but a love that is pure, chaste and divine.

The third seed of eternity is a relish for the works of Christ. In regard to students of rhetoric it is a recognized fact that those who have a taste for Cicero should be considered to be making progress; just so can it be affirmed that they are advancing in virtue to whom the divine teachings of Christ are not distasteful. Whoever finds scarcely any relish in the words, deeds, and life of Christ, who is not affected by them, does not take delight in them, is not moved by those things which pertain to the soul and to piety, to beatitude and divine things; but who finds eating, drinking, walking, laughing, jesting, and playing much to his taste; such a man may safely say to himself: "O my God, how truly there is in me no seed of eternity! For when I descend into myself, I clearly detect there

to what a deadly spirit I am subject, and whither my affection invites me. To lead the dance, to cheer myself with banquets, to watch late over the cups, to set in motion the dice-box and the dice, to listen to vanities and gossip, to read impure pages, to applaud love songs, to be outdone in nothing by my companions — all this I can do, this is pleasing and delightful to me. But to hear or read much about Christ, about the watchings and fastings of the saints, is unpleasant and disagreeable. Scarcely do I remain during an entire sermon; its one short hour seems longer than all others, and so it must be whiled away with sleep or conversation.” It is easy to pronounce sentence on such a man as this: in him there is no relish for the works of Christ. But let us consider the mind of the Church on eternity.

The Church esteems so highly the memory of eternity, that there is no psalm, prayer, or hymn which does not end with the mention of eternity. Hence the perpetual and solemn closing of the Psalms: Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning (that is, before all beginning, from eternity without any beginning), is now and ever shall be, ages without end, innumerable, incomprehensible. I pass over the vestments, rites, and sacred ceremonies, of which not a few emphasize the same memory of eternity. But let us proceed from the rivulets to the very fountain-head.



## II

THE CLEAR TESTIMONY OF THE INSPIRED WRITINGS  
ON ETERNITY

I bring forward only three witnesses: a prophet, an apostle, an evangelist.

How many complaints are daily heard from men who are abandoned and despised by all! Everywhere may be found someone who says: "Alas, for me, how few friends I count, because I am poor; I am regarded by all as of no importance; everywhere I am scorned and almost trodden under foot by all." Wait, my friend, a little while, and suffer; not yet have the suns of all days set; wait for the divine promise. Baruch declares: "God will clothe thee with the double garment of justice, and will set a crown on thy head of everlasting honor" (Baruch V, 2).

There are some who find fault with the laws of nature, and complain that a long life has been granted to crows and too short a one to man. Listen, you who thus complain: there still remains another life, when this brief and vain life is over. Believe Blessed Paul when he testifies: "We know, if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven" (2 Cor. V, 1). What so great loss is it, then, if this little clay hut of our

body fall to ruin, since there is prepared for us a golden palace which will never crumble?

To the testimony of the prophet and the apostle is added that of the evangelist St. Matthew, by whose mouth Christ utters these words: "If thy hand or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. It is better for thee, having one eye to enter into life, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Matt. XVIII, 8-9). O fire! O hell! O eternity! Any temporal loss whatsoever, compared to the loss of eternity, is gain, not loss. In this sense Christ gives as it were his signature to the pledge or contract recorded in the words of St. Matthew: "Everyone that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall possess life everlasting" (Matt. XIX, 29). Is not this promise regarding a happy eternity sufficiently clear, since that hundredfold is given as a pledge? Moreover, when Christ, in the same evangelist, forewarns about the last judgment, he three times makes distinct mention of eternity: eternal punishment, eternal fire, and eternal life.

Pachomius weighed these truths in profound meditation. After undergoing many labors in a desolate

hermitage, he thought out a new way of sleeping, or rather of watching. For fifteen years he never took any sleep reclining in his hut, or lying down, or resting on any support; but he sat in the middle of his cell, unsupported on all sides, so that neither his back nor his side leaned against the wall, and if sleep tried to overpower him, it came upon him in this posture, not lying down, not comfortably reclining, but refusing to be overcome. The holy man suffered much by this persistency in watchings, yet he bore with cheerfulness this most difficult struggle against sleep, enjoying by hope a foretaste of that eternal rest in heaven. Therefore, meditation on the everlasting rest induced Pachomius to reckon as delight sleeping on the ground and having the earth as a bed.

Since, therefore, the Holy Fathers, the Church, and the Scriptures set before us in different ways the necessity of meditating on eternity, it is now the duty of each of us who wishes to be eternal in heaven, to reflect seriously as follows: "O my God, hitherto how rarely and how indifferently have I thought of eternity, although each hour brings me nearer to eternity. Hereafter, in a matter so serious I shall trifle less, and if I notice that many things happen according to my wishes and that prosperity and success attend my undertakings, my next thought will be: And how long will this last? Will the weather be always so fair? Will Phœbus and

fortune always smile thus? And what reward will the eternity so soon to follow bestow upon me for this happiness, which is sweet but brief, pleasing but dangerous? But if adversity comes upon me, if many things happen contrary to my desires, if I am afflicted and tormented, if on this side and that evils and misfortunes conspire against me, rush in upon me, and disturb me, I shall constantly entertain this one thought: Let the tempest only accomplish the commands of the fates, let this great and angry sea grow rough, let the winds of affliction roar, the waves of tribulation lash, the clouds of temptation threaten, the darkness of sorrow overshadow, let the world be shattered and fall to ruins; there will not always be ruins; there will not always be storms; these winds will at some time be calmed; these waves will subside; rain and hail will be dispelled: in fine, whatever I suffer here will not last eternally. My cross shall fall, at least when I fall a victim of death. But more tempestuous than all storms is it to be condemned to eternal flames. This indeed is a long torment; all other things which are outside eternity are brief, fleeting, momentary. They are shadows and a dream, says Chrysostom, whatever be their nature. Let us hope and look for the things beyond. And how does Christ impress upon his disciples this little while? He says that all His torments and His most bitter death on the cross are for a little while. He declares

that all the labors of the Apostles and their violent death by tortures are for a little while. Why then does not whatever I suffer seem to me, too, to be but for a little while, even if I should suffer it for a hundred years? "For yet a little and a very little while, and he that is to come will come, and will not delay" (Hebr. X, 37). Thus, therefore, shall I proceed, and I shall judge this one thing only necessary: to do nothing against conscience, nothing against God. All his affairs are safe to whom a happy eternity is assured.

## III

ALL THINGS EXCEPT ETERNITY LAST BUT FOR A  
LITTLE WHILE

Whatever labor or pain we must endure here lasts truly for a very little while. St. Augustine says: "This little while seems long to us because it is still going on; only when it is completed shall we know how little it was" (Tract. 101, In Ioannem).

The wisest of men, that he might with his own pen describe the entire period of human life, even though it should extend to a hundred years, chose the most minute things to express it; for it is stated thus clearly in Ecclesiasticus: "The number of the days of men at the most are a hundred years: as a drop of water of the sea are they esteemed; and as

a pebble of the sand, so are a few years compared to eternity" (Ecclus. XVIII, 8). Why do you applaud yourselves, you ancients, and you old men of a hundred years? What are all our years? A pebble of the sand and a drop of water of the sea. And what is a pebble compared to very high mountains of sand? And what is a drop compared to the very deep abyss of the sea? Thus your fifty, sixty, or a hundred years, O old men, are a little while, are nothing compared to that day of endless eternity. And yet we thus glory in this pebble and this little drop of water. O vain and wretched creatures! Our life is a pebble, and not a valuable one, not one of gold and precious stone, but of sand. Our life is a drop of water, and not of sweet water, but of the briny sea. "All his days are full of sorrows and miseries; even in the night he doth not rest in mind," says Ecclesiastes (II, 23). St. Augustine says truly: "Consider the years from Adam up to the present day; scan the Scriptures. It was almost yesterday that Adam fell from Paradise. For where are the times that are past? If you had lived from the time when Adam was expelled from Paradise even up to the present day, you would surely see that your life had not been of long duration, since it passed away thus. But how long is the life of each individual man? Add as many years as you please; draw out the longest old age; what is it? Is it not the breath of the morn-

ing?" (In Ps. XXXVI). All this is most true. For tell me, pray, where now is Adam? Where now is Cain? Where the aged Mathusala? Where Noe? Where Sem? Where Heber? Where the most obedient Abraham? Where Jacob? Where Joseph? Their lives are ended: the Trojans have perished. Thus passes life; thus passes the glory of the world. O dew! O vanity! Why do you strive, why do you hope for things of long duration? Whatever you see here is brief; it is for a little while; it is worthless; it is a mere point. Truly did Gregory the Great say: "The entire length of the present life is understood to be a point, since it comes to an end." In the twinkling of an eye all things are contained. "I have seen an end of all perfection: thy commandment is exceeding broad" (Ps. CXVIII, 96). Why then do we say that time is long? For the past is gone; the future does not yet exist; and what is the present? A single hour is divided into parts that quickly flee; whatever portion of it has flitted away, is past; whatever of it remains, is future. Where then is the time which we call long? Quite rightly did St. Bernard impress upon his disciples (and upon you too, my dear reader) this very true admonition of St. Jerome: "No labor ought to seem hard, no time long, by which the glory of eternity is gained."

But however short and brief may be the time of this life compared to eternity, yet no one of the

damned will be able to accuse God, because He did not give him a longer life; they will all condemn themselves because they did not lead a better life. "For among the dead there is no accusing of life" (Ecclus. XLI, 7). Those deserving damnation would live long enough if they lived virtuously enough.

At this point, my Christian friend, I should like to converse with you a little more candidly and confidentially, and place before your eyes a matter which should be seen most clearly. You say that you often think of heaven, and by strong desires aspire to eternity. You say this, to be sure; but I deny, and deny most emphatically, that such are your sentiments; and I would bid you not to believe me, if I affirmed the same thing about myself. For how is it possible, my good Christian, that you and I should think frequently and seriously of heaven and aspire to eternity with such great desires as we boast that we do, yet meanwhile live so torpid and cold, so sluggish, so feeble for good, so active and ardent for evil, so ready and willing for all wickedness; men complaining and indolent, never more remiss than when we should show anger, never more pusillanimous than when we should suffer. At the slightest affliction, the least expression of disapproval, we are disturbed and downcast; at a single word all our patience melts and flows away. Never are we more despondent than when many



things happen against our will. I shall pass over in silence the other sores hidden in the soul, namely, lust and envy. And we, being such fine men as I have described, so timid when we should be brave, so bold when we should be timid, nevertheless boast that we often have in our mind and in our desires the joys of eternity. Indeed, this is most difficult to believe: that we frequently reflect on heaven and eternity, and meanwhile do not live with better morals. Not only is it difficult to believe this, but to speak correctly, it is impossible. And I shall now prove this.

The Patriarch Jacob served his uncle Laban seven years for his daughter Rachel, "and they seemed but a few days because of the greatness of his love" (Gen. XXIX, 20). Do you hear this, you who complain? You serve, not an impostor as Laban was, but God, your creator, who is most faithful to His promises. You serve, not for a wife, but for the whole kingdom of heaven; not for a wife's beauty, but for the eternal vision of God; not for a wife's caresses, but for celestial and eternal delights. And yet an annoyance lasting for even a single day so weakens you that at once all your love for heaven and for God begins to grow cold. As soon as adversities assail you, you break out into the most voluble complaints, call upon heaven and earth, breathe revenge; and perhaps your complaint does not always spare divine justice itself. Again, the

enticements of pleasure sometimes so enfeeble you, that forgetting the divine service and entering the labyrinth of sin, which is attractive on the outside, you relax in a deadly sleep. Is this your vigilance? Is this the heroic greatness of your love? Where are those seven hard years endured in the divine service? O Simon, Simon, can you not thus watch one hour with your Master? But hear more about the Patriarch Jacob. Deceived by Laban by a marriage with Lia who was blear-eyed, he served the same impostor seven years more for Rachel who had been promised to him; and there is no doubt that these seven years also seemed but a few days because of the same greatness of his love. And we may believe that often when, weary from labor, he cast his eyes upon Rachel's beauty, he said silently to himself: "This beauty is certainly worth a service of seven years, however irksome it may be. If necessary, I shall not refuse to endure for her sake this hard service for seven years more." Thus the force of his love softened all the hardship of labor.

Do you disdain this example, soldier of Christ, and do you still murmur? You are bidden to serve God for the sake of God Himself, to labor for the sake of eternal rest; you are called to endurance and patience for the sake of immortal happiness, and do you still complain, like a lazy sleeper? Count, please, the years which you have devoted wholly to the service of God. See whether you have for

twenty years served God as faithfully and industriously as Jacob served Laban. You will find that your service comprises scarcely that number of months or days. Count the nights spent in prayer, review the days passed in holy labors. Will you be able to say to God what Jacob said to his father-in-law: "Day and night I was parched with heat and with frost, and sleep departed from my eyes. And in this manner have I served thee in thy house twenty years: fourteen for thy daughters and six for thy flocks" (Gen. XXXI, 40-41). Have you, O Christian, served God thus for twenty years? Do you know what is to be the reward of your labor? Not the daughters of Laban, not flocks of sheep; but the reward of your service will be God Himself; you shall have complete happiness of soul and body; you shall abound in joys innumerable and immense, which never fail, which cause no weariness, which have no end; you shall be as it were immersed in everflowing delights. And yet behold your hands, which are most feeble for labor; look at your feet, which are most slow to go to church; look into your heart, which is mad with envy, seething with wrath and revenge, groveling in filthy thoughts, lazy through sloth and impatience. Is it thus you serve God for the sake of heaven, of immortal life, of eternal beatitude? Why do you not do as Jacob did, and look upon the Rachel promised to you, when there creeps upon you disgust for the labor

you have undertaken? As often, therefore, as you are troubled, and either adversity oppresses or prosperity allures you, or labors are burdensome, raise your eyes to heaven and comfort yourself thus: "Behold, that Rachel of yours is exceedingly beautiful and comely. She is all fair and there is no spot in her. Behold heaven, behold the home of rest and eternal delight. Endure now for a little while pains that are not the most intense, labors that are not the greatest, and you will shortly be there, and will be so much the more joyful and happy, as now you have been sadder and more afflicted. Then that rest will be the more delightful to you, the more laborious your life now has been. Therefore, work courageously, suffer steadfastly; a blessed eternity is worth all this."

If, O Christian, you would oftener encourage yourself thus, if with such a gaze you would more frequently look up to heaven, and with this affection daily think on eternity; I assure you, the days of service would seem few to you, because of the greatness of your love for this eternity. You would say that all labor was easy to you; you would reckon all troubles as a favor; you would count all adversities as gain. Everyone orders his present life more holily, the more attentively he reflects on the eternity to come.

## CONSIDERATION VII

### HOW CHRISTIANS REPRESENT ETERNITY

**O**NE must walk along a dark house slowly, feeling along the walls. Likewise, if the human intellect wishes to make its way into eternity, it will find the road enveloped in darkness and mist and never to be penetrated in this life. The way to eternity is short, but the end interminable. And although no man has formed such a conception of eternity that he can state clearly what it is, yet he may represent its immensity by means of similitudes and pictures, as it were in certain shadowy outlines. For certainly whatever is written or depicted about eternity is a shadow and a shadow of shadows. For not all ages heaped together will exhaust its breadth; not hours, not days, not weeks, not months, not years, not Olympiads, not lustrums, not indictions, not jubilees, not centuries, not the Platonic years and the very slow movements of the eighth sphere. Although these periods of time should be multiplied by thousands and millions or compared to any number whatsoever, as for example to the stars of heaven, or to the sands of the ocean, or to the blades of grass

on the earth, or to the drops of water in the rivers, yet the measure of eternity will not be discovered. Sailors test the depth of the sea by letting down a plummet. Let us also by humble and reverent reflection sound the impenetrable depth of eternity; and a picture which has been produced by Christians will assist us to ponder on it better. It is as follows:

Christ as a little child almost entirely unclothed, as if from the manger and cradle, stands amid the clouds and carries a little cross fitted to His shoulder. On the clouds is seen inscribed the single word: Eternity. On the earth beneath the feet of Christ is seated a skeleton, stripped of hair and skin, recognizable by its beard alone; in its left hand it holds a scroll on which is written: Momentary is that which delights. In its right hand it raises an apple. Nearby is a raven holding in its beak a snail; its motto is: Tomorrow, tomorrow. From the yawning earth flames rise on high, on which these words are written: Eternal is that which tortures. Two persons, one of either sex, representing the whole human race, adore on bended knees Christ as He comes forth from the clouds. Behind them is a flowing clepsydra and an open book with two pages. On one page is written: "They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment they go down to hell" (Job XXI, 13); and on the other: "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom.

VII, 24). Nearby stand heavenly spirits who by a gesture direct the eyes of those who look at it and bid them gaze upon the Divine Child. Such is the picture; its interpretation is as follows:

## I

## CHRIST INVITING

Christ, the Eternal Son of the Eternal God, came into this world with the same vesture as ourselves, that is, He came naked. We have lost the vesture of immortality and innocence by disobedience. Thus clothed, alas how poorly, we all enter this world! Christ atones with us, nay rather for us, because He did no wrong. But why a cross on the shoulder of this Divine little Child? It is the couch on which He fell asleep in death, Golgotha as His sleeping room, thorns for a pillow, a cross for a bed. Many of the saints, led by this example, voluntarily for many years chose to lie uncomfortably and to sleep poorly and most sparingly, provided only they arose joyful for the eternal day. St. Bononius, Abbot, had, instead of a feather mattress, the earth; instead of a blanket, hair-cloth; instead of a pillow, a stone. St. Lupus, Bishop, for twenty years, and St. Edmund, Archbishop, for thirty years, slept without any bed. I pass over in silence the

Nicholases, the Basils, the Udalrici and very many others, who did not think it worth while to induce sleep by such comforts for a few short years. They had in mind another and a longer rest, and they accordingly decided not to enjoy rest outside of heaven to the point either of satiety or of delight. How many women even were of the same mind! St. Clare placed under her head a log of wood instead of a pillow. St. Hedwig regarded only a straw mattress as a luxury. St. Bridget after the death of her husband wore hair-cloth constantly for thirty years and slept only on the ground. I pass over the austerities of other holy women. But why am I telling of the ancients? How many religious men even today gladly and cheerfully sleep on straw; they do not look for feathers, since they hope for a blessed eternity, upon which they daily meditate.

But let us return to Christ. He submitted to death, and death the most bitter and ignominious, but in order that he might preserve us from eternal death. To be sure, we all die, but this death is very short. In the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, the soul is separated from the body, and all that we call death has happened. Not thus is it in hell. Those torments far surpass all the anguish and pains of death, not only because they are much more severe, but because they are of incomparably longer duration, since they are eternal. Accordingly, to



suffer them there is to die continually. It was from this everlasting death that we have been freed by that Child who is pictured as advancing on the clouds. Under the feet of this Divine Child sits a skeleton, which as can be known from several signs, is that of the first parent of all men. Listen now, posterity and late descendants of Adam, to your parent who addresses you thus:

## II

## ADAM LAMENTING

“O sons, destined to be happy if your parent had known how to make use of his happiness, but now wretched for the very reason that I slew you before I begot you; on my account you were condemned before you were born. I wished to be God, I remained scarcely man. You all perished in me before you could perish; and so I know not whether you should call me father or murderer and tyrant. Why do I wonder or complain that you are sin-stained? From me you learned to be such. I grieve that you are disobedient, but yet I taught you to be so by being myself disobedient to God. The heavenly beings turn away from you because you are intemperate and gluttonous; ah! this is your father’s vice. Your pride makes you hateful to God: I was the

first of you who fell, conquered by this monster; pride has become more arrogant by her victory over me. Such is the inheritance you have received from me — a mass of miseries. Heaven, by the will of the great God, had been made over and bequeathed to you on a most certain pledge. I undid all this, and at one throw squandered the inheritance of you all. I esteemed my wife and an apple more highly than you, than heaven, than God. Alas, wicked and accursed meal after which I was obliged to eat in hell for several thousand years!

“I dwelt in a garden lovely beyond power to conceive and imagine, and there I was permitted to enjoy everything which my soul desired, if I refrained from one tree only. I was king of all living things, wise and beautiful, strong and sturdy. I abounded with innumerable delights. The sky in unchanging calm looked with favor upon me and my consort, and, radiant in its deep blue vesture, was ever fair: there we saw only the brightest suns. All that met our eyes was lovely and blooming; our ears listened to the music of the birds; the earth exhaled the fragrance of crocus and cinnamon. On all sides an incredible delight surrounded me; I lived far from all care, weariness, fear, labor, disease and death. I was a sort of god on earth; the heavenly beings themselves congratulated me on this felicity. I alone begrudged myself this happiness; and because I did not obey the divine law and ate

the forbidden fruit, all evils rushed in upon me. Expelled from Paradise, banished by God, full of shame, I sought a hiding-place. Labor, pain, sorrow, fear, tears, calamities, a thousand miseries, began to harass me. All you who belong to my race know that death, which is believed to be the end of sufferings, is often the beginning of those that are eternal.

“O my sons, be wise by my loss and yours, and learn this one thing from me — to hate sin. Behold the flame bursting forth near me. This flame, which began to burn at the same time that sin was first committed, will not be extinguished for all eternity. All other punishments are to be considered light and end in a short time; this one will always torture the guilty. But now we can escape it, provided only we ourselves wish it. For more than five thousand years the gate of heaven was closed to me and to all my children; now it has been opened by Him who, because I of my free will wickedly plucked of a tree, was Himself fastened to a tree and thereon most freely paid all the debt, and by dying made atonement for us all. Heaven is now open to all, but only the road of penance leads thither; only the gate of the cross admits there. He who comes to joys by this road and through this gate comes securely, and, certain of an eternal habitation, will no longer be excluded therefrom. There no one can injure or be injured. O posterity, think on eternity, you who are destined in a short time to be

immortal and among the blessed." Such are the admonitions given to his posterity by Adam, who

To all the race of mankind hath bequeathed  
The penalty by him alone incurred.

When Thomas More, Chancellor of England, a man eminent in many respects, was confined in prison, and all means of inducing him to give his approval to the king's unlawful passion had failed, his wife was sent to him in prison, in the hope that she might soften his manly resolve by her supplications and tears. She accordingly began to address to him the most persuasive entreaties and to beg him by everything sacred not thus to bring ruin upon himself, his children, his country and his life, which he might still enjoy for many years. When she strove to heighten the effect of her words by tears and added more remarks about a longer life, "And how long, my dear Louise," asked More, "shall I be able to enjoy this life?" To which she replied: "My dear husband, easily for twenty years." "Do you wish then," said he, "that I exchange eternity for twenty years? Truly you are an inexperienced trader; if you had said twenty thousand years, you might expect to have been heeded, yet even then you could reasonably be considered insane; for what are these twenty thousand years compared to eternity? A little while, some short period, a point, a moment, nothing. Therefore, I prefer to endure for my whole life imprisonment and whatever evils

conspire against me, rather than incur the very slightest loss of a blessed eternity." By thus placing before him eternity he sustained this assault without wavering. But let us now consider the raven.

## III

## THE RAVEN CROAKING

Next to this corpse of the first man is painted a raven, which to no small extent serves to represent eternity again. Well-known is the saying of St. Augustine: "Tomorrow, tomorrow is the word of the raven; lament as the dove and strike your breast." Very many lose a blessed eternity, usually for the reason that they decide that eternity must be sought, but that they will seek it tomorrow. For there is nothing which we more readily postpone to a very uncertain tomorrow than repentance. But, that we may put it away from us under an appearance of virtue, we repeatedly promise:

Tomorrow, yea, tomorrow 'twill be done.  
But morrow finds the deed not yet begun.  
What, deem you then one day a gift so dear?  
Yet when the sun on morrow doth appear,  
Our yesterday's tomorrow now is past,  
And always a new morrow hastens fast  
To steal away our years; yet none denies  
Beyond our grasp tomorrow always lies.

PERSIUS, *Sat.* V, 66-69.

Thus, that tomorrow delays with a distant promise, while the time of life slips by, and suddenly wretched

men are thrown into eternity, but a dreadful eternity below the earth. St. Augustine says: "It is this eternity which ruins many, while they say 'Tomorrow, tomorrow,' and suddenly the door is closed." Solomon repeatedly exclaims: "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day; for His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee" (Ecclus. V, 8-9). Truly has the Roman philosopher Seneca said: "A large part of life is spent in doing wrong; the greatest part in doing nothing; the whole in acting indifferently." And as Archimedes, during the capture of Syracuse, remained in his own home regardless of danger, and revolved a pair of compasses in the dust; so most men, while their eternal salvation is at stake, handle mere dust; that is, their attention is absorbed in vain lawsuits, money transactions and profitless labors. Of eternity they think not at all or very rarely, and then only in a perfunctory way, as dogs drink from the Nile. O Martha, Martha, how vainly thou art troubled and distracted about many things! But one thing is necessary — happiness; not however the present brief happiness of earth, but the eternal happiness of heaven.

Before undertaking a task we usually apply a well-known rule and ask ourselves: Will this labor earn bread for me? With much greater reason should a Christian at the beginning of any work

whatever seriously put this question to himself: Will this earn heaven for me? Does this conduce towards meriting a blessed eternity? But we put off such interests as these to another and still another time, intending no doubt to ask ourselves this question about our labor when we shall no longer be able to labor. "This is a characteristic of all sinners," says St. Augustine, "every sinner says, 'some-time, but not now.' But why not now, if some-time?"

Dionysius, tyrant of Sicily, when stealing a golden cloak from Apollo, said: "This garment is suitable neither for summer nor for winter: in summer it is too heavy; in winter it has no warmth." "In this manner," says St. Ambrose, "many trifle with their soul and with God. In their youth they say that they must live according to the laws of the world; must give themselves up to revelings and dances, to horses and athletics; must enjoy the sunny fields and their companions, and leave the cloister and the churches to stern old men. When chilling and depressing old age creeps upon them, they say: "These things must not be expected of old men; their strength does not permit it; they must indulge in rest; provided they take care of their health they do enough." Thus, both the summer and the winter of our life pass, and we labor not at all for the future eternal spring. Therefore, while we have time, let us perform good works, and because of that

word of the raven: "Tomorrow, tomorrow," let us not allow today and tomorrow and eternity to slip from our grasp. Tomorrow is not ours, but today is. "Behold now," says the Apostle St. James, "you that say: Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and there we will spend a year, and will traffic and make our gain; whereas you know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is a vapor which appeareth for a little while, and afterwards shall vanish away" (James IV, 13-15).

Rightly did Messodamus, as Guido of Bourges relates, reply to one who invited him to dinner for the following day: "My friend, why do you invite for tomorrow? For some years now I have never dared to promise myself the following day, because I look for death from hour to hour." No one is certainly ever sufficiently on his guard against death but the man who is always on his guard. Too rash is that man and clearly does he despise eternity, who goes to bed in mortal sin and throwing himself upon his soft bed sleeps soundly. Ah, how great is the blindness and temerity of the human mind! We know how frequent and common is a sudden death; we even know men who the day before went to bed well and strong, and in the morning were found dead, taken perhaps (God only knows) from a bed of feathers to eternal flames. We ourselves have seen men, when attacked by a sudden stroke, fall sick and



die at once; within the fraction of an hour they were well, sick, living, dead. And yet we still procrastinate, and put off amendment of life from day to day; but this is saying too little — we put it off rather from year to year. Meanwhile death, though unexpected, approaches and hands us over to a whole eternity.

St. Augustine, valiantly attacking in himself this hesitating remissness, says: "I felt myself bound by these evil habits, and I uttered the pitiable words: How long, how long? Will it be tomorrow and again tomorrow? Why do I not at this hour put an end to my wickedness? Saying this I wept in the bitterest contrition of my heart."

The great St. Anthony, according to the testimony of St. Jerome, when exhorting his followers to virtue, said that by constant practice this admonition must be observed: "Let not the sun go down upon your anger" (Ephes. IV, 26). And he said that not only upon anger should the sun never set, but upon all other sins, in order that sun and moon might never depart as witnesses of our crimes.

John, Patriarch of Alexandria, had had a dispute with Nicetas Patricius, the chief magistrate of the city. The matter was on the point of being brought to court, the patriarch undertaking to protect the interest of the poor, Nicetas that of his money. It was finally agreed that they should meet at a certain place to come to terms, if this were in any way

possible. For a long time there was a vehement discussion, not without traces of irritation and anger. Neither thought it right to give up his claim, and thus this contest of words lasted to a late hour, with no other result than that their feelings were somewhat more hostile than before. Since, therefore, neither was disposed to yield to the terms of the other, they withdrew, leaving the dispute doubtful and undecided. Patricius thought it wrong to give up his title to the money: the patriarch believed that he was upholding the cause of God. Nevertheless, when they had parted, Patricius, being a most upright official, condemned his obstinacy, saying to himself: "Do not think that even in the best cause this inflexible stubbornness in anger is pleasing to God. Even now night is fast approaching: shall we thus allow the sun to go down upon our anger? This is the conduct of wicked men, and contrary to the precept of the apostle." Nor could this good bishop rest, and as soon as possible sent several of his prominent priests to Nicetas Patricius, and ordered this message only to be given to him: "Sir, the sun is near its setting." These few words, producing an unexpected effect, so changed the disposition of Patricius and so overcame all his obstinacy, that he with difficulty restrained the tears that were ready to fall from his moist eyes; nor did he delay, but at once following the priests as they departed, hastened to his bishop John, eager and

grateful, and at once exclaimed: "Holy Father, hereafter I shall be subject to your power." At these words they embraced each other and were reconciled. Thus peace, which a long discussion in words could not bring, was restored by this one word: "The sun is near its setting."

Just so, if anyone is conscious to himself of mortal sin, let him frequently reflect this within himself at evening: "Sir, the sun is hastening to its setting; yes, and perhaps your life as well. And if you should die this night, a happening neither strange nor rare, in what kind of an eternity do you think you will be? That of the saints or that of the damned?" Your conscience will make you this reply: "Attend to what you are doing. The sun is hastening towards its setting; let it not set upon your lust and luxury, upon your envy and blasphemy, upon your detraction and theft, upon even one mortal sin." If our clothing or face or hat be even slightly soiled, we brush it off or wash it. We cannot endure a spot on our clothing or hat or face, and shall we endure so long the foulest blemishes on our soul? Let that be the day, that the hour of expiation, in which the sin is committed. "We must do penance," says St. Ambrose, "not only earnestly but also quickly, lest perchance that husbandman of the Gospel, who planted a fig tree in his vineyard, come, and seeking fruit on it, if he does not find it, say to the cultivator of the vineyard: 'Cut it

down.'” (De Pœnit. Bk. II, Ch. 1.) This last wound inflicted on the tree is absolutely irremediable. Wherefore let us who have it in our power apply a remedy while there is yet time. The very animals teach us this. The deer when pierced with an arrow hastens to procure dittany, an herb known to it. The swallow, if its young have been blinded, knows how to restore their sight by its own herb, swallow-wort. We wretched men, alas, are wounded almost daily, and often mortally, and yet we take no care to procure a remedy. We hasten to table, to social intercourse, to bed in the customary way; but who hastens to penance, to confession?

If we listen to the admonitions of our guardian angel (for the angels, too, stand represented in this symbol of eternity), never would we go to bed without being reconciled to God. This guardian of ours often reminds us of the clepsydra running to its end, of the judgment close at hand; but we proceed along the road we have begun: let the clepsydra flow, let judgment approach, let hell threaten, let our angel warn, let death be close at hand, yet we go our way and close our eyes in sweet sleep. O wretched man, whoever thou art.

Canst thou in evil plight calm slumber thus enjoy? (Vergil, Aen. IV, 560.) Can you carry to bed a conscience guilty of mortal sin? Can you, when in so great danger of eternal death, admit sleep, the brother of death? “I can,” you say,

"I can, and no evil has ever befallen me." Be not over confident: what has not happened in a thousand hours can happen in a single hour. You have not yet escaped; and reflect, I pray, by what distance your soul is separated from death, from hell, from eternity; certainly only by a single breath. You also will say most truly: "By a single step death and I are divided." There is need of no great preparation in order that death may prostrate you. A whole quiver of arrows need not be exhausted in order to pierce your heart; the point of one little arrow will deprive you entirely of life. Infected and foul air blows upon you, or some humor passes from your brain to your chest, or some passage somewhere in your body is stopped up, or the heat of your heart is suddenly stifled, or the pulse of an artery ceases to beat: your whole living organism collapses, and you will be surprised that you have been hurried into eternity before you even feared that this would happen. There are a thousand ways not only of a slow, but of a sudden death. His is the most improvident death whose preceding life was not provident. A death that has not been reflected upon is the worst death. Therefore, it is salutary advice for all, whatever be their age, to believe each day their last; nay, to consider each hour their last. How many men have died suddenly, by falling, by hanging, by poison, by the sword, in flames, in the waves, by the claws of a lion, by

the teeth of boars, by the kicks of horses — there are a thousand causes of death. As many as the body has, I will not say senses, but pores, so many windows are there through which death may creep and kill. “You have been born,” says St. Augustine, “and it is certain that you shall die; but as this fact of death is certain, so the day of death is uncertain.” No one of us knows how near his end is. “I know not,” says Job, “how long I shall continue, and whether after a while my Maker may take me away” (Job XXXII, 22). In the midst of life we are in death, which we always carry about in our bosom; and who is assured that he will live till evening? This robber of men, I mean death, has a thousand arts for injuring: innumerable lightnings, thunders, Trojan and Grecian fires, arrows, swords, burning javelins, scythes, slings. There is no need to seek examples from the ancients; we have sufficient among the moderns. Have not many persons, not unknown to us, during their sleep fallen asleep in death itself, not to be awakened before the last day? Death does not always send messengers or ambassadors to make known its approach; most frequently it comes when not expected, and without any formalities attacks and prostrates its inactive victim. Watch, then, because you know neither the day nor the hour. There is indeed repentance in hell, but a repentance that is not sincere, a repentance that is too late. Now is the cry timely:

“Bring forth fruit worthy of penance” (Matt. III, 8). “The night cometh, when no man can work” (John IX, 4). Work, therefore, while it is day. “Day,” says Origen, “is the period of this life; this day indeed to us seems long, but if it is compared with eternity, it is very short. Yet this short period of a day is followed by the infinite extent of eternity.” (Hom. 10, In Matt.)

O my friend, you especially who are conscious of grievous sin, contemplate the gate of eternity, and think on death. It is most uncertain in what place it awaits you; therefore, do you await it in every place. As the Lord shall find you when He calls, such will He also judge you.

## CONSIDERATION VIII

### HOW ETERNITY IS NOT SO MUCH TO BE REPRESENTED AS MEDITATED UPON BY CHRISTIANS

**O**RDER demands that, turning from the Royal Psalmist and others who meditated on eternity, we descend into ourselves, dwell with ourselves, and, at least at times, be alone and by ourselves. Too far does he depart from himself and his own salvation who sees the things that pass, but forgets those that are eternal.

Lawyers know that a claim which concerns only three obols is not to be brought to court. But if there is question of a perpetual and unending interest, it is agreed that there is great value in only three quadrantes, if this amount is to be paid to the owner yearly: of such value is the perpetuity of even a trifling sum. But if, my friend, you follow up a claim of three obols, then how does it happen that in gaining possession of the inheritance of an eternal kingdom you are so slothful and indolent? Do you for the sake of three obols stir up war against your neighbor and begin a lengthy lawsuit, and yet allow heaven to be borne away by others? Perhaps



heaven is a paltry thing: in your opinion it certainly is, since you labor so little for it. All other things you seek with much ambition, effort, and toil. But you scarcely have leisure to think of eternal things, since they seem so far away; and when you have leisure, you have not the inclination. It seems a troublesome thing to weary the mind's eye over what cannot be clearly seen. Things that are near and present delight more.

Here, if we are wise, we will wonder at our own blindness, or more truly our insanity, because, while we wish to be certain in all other matters, especially in the case of money, yet when there is question of eternal treasures, no certitude, or as it is called, security, is demanded, although it is possible to have some. Who grants a loan of money without demanding in turn a note or a pledge? The following words are on the lips of all: "I wish to be certain; I desire to have security; I will adopt the safer method; I am determined to run no risk." Things present and certain everywhere have more weight than those that are uncertain and far distant. Better is one sparrow in the hand than ten or twenty on the roof. Of more value to us is a blackbird in a cage than an eagle in the clouds. Doubtless we agree with Plautus: our hands believe when they have eyes.

Is it thus, O mortals, that you seek certitude for things which are most uncertain and which deceive

most when they are held in the hand, and yet do not care to be so certain about eternal life? Christians know what security or certitude Christ, the King of Heaven, establishes on this point: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt. XIX, 17). He who keeps them enters: the fact is most certain, the way most secure. But he who sins against even one of these precepts, and then puts off repentance and is not reconciled to the God he has offended in the same hour in which he has sinned, such a man exposes to open danger himself and all that belongs to him, the eternal salvation of body and soul. He is a few steps (and not even this much) removed from death, since he contains within himself a thousand causes of death; and yet he rashly persists in that state of damnation, by dying in which he would perish for all eternity. Is not this to act rashly, and to expose eternal riches to a most perilous loss, which could easily be avoided?

But if man were obliged to spend in the torments of hell a period of years equal in number to the sins he had committed, or even to the hours comprised in his life, how tolerable this would be! But, in fact, more would live enemies and foes of God, if that fire were to last for a certain number of years only. For even as it is, very many are not terrified, although they know that those punishments will last eternally and through infinite years, and that they are so great and terrible that a frac-

tion of an hour spent in them seems a year. For if all the sufferings that a man can endure in this life in a hundred years should be, as it were, fused into one mass, do you think it would equal one year spent in hell? Assassins, robbers, parricides, and those guilty of any other crimes whatsoever, in three or four years undergo all the punishment due to them. They are tortured most dreadfully, to be sure, but within a few days all this torture stops, and in the course of one week is entirely at an end. But the torments of the damned will not be terminated in one year, nor in one or two centuries. God punishes them always, and never punishes them enough, although He punishes for all eternity.

## I

ETERNITY CUTS OFF NOT ONLY THE ACTUAL POSSESSION OF EARTHLY GOODS, BUT ALSO ALL HOPE OF POSSESSING THEM

Hope in this life is such that often it alone solaces a man in his miseries; for nothing is more efficacious to soothe the weariness of men. Now divine mercy generally causes some hope of salvation to be left in adversity. For a sick man while there's life there's hope. But after this life this last solace in adversity is completely taken away from the damned; and when hope is banished, there remains

only eternal despair. The Prophet Daniel saw and heard an angel crying out: "Cut down the tree, and chop off the branches thereof; shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruits. Nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth" (Dan. IV, 11-12). "He shakes off its flowers and leaves," says St. Ambrose, "but saves its root. Here on earth delights are taken away and punishments are inflicted, yet hope is not removed; behold, the root is saved, hope remains. In hell it has been torn up root and branch. 'It shall not leave them root nor branch,' cries Malachias (IV, 1). Job also lamenting says: 'He hath taken away my hope, as from a tree that is plucked up' (XIX, 10). 'The hope of the wicked shall perish' (Prov. X, 28). Therefore, while we can, and, at the same time, as we ought, let us hope." Ovid once gave this warning:

Men's fortunes hang on slender thread suspended:  
The strongest things a sudden chance o'erthrows.

(Ex Ponto IV, 3, 35-36)

Therefore, no trust, no hope, must be placed in these things. St. Bernard points out a better way in these words: "Faith says: Great and inconceivable blessings have been prepared by God for His faithful. Hope says: They are reserved for me. And now the third, Charity, says: I hasten to them." (Serm. X, In Ps. 91). True hope, as St. Gregory affirms, raises the soul to eternity, and therefore she feels no evils which she endures from without. True

hope is not ignorant that all things last but for a little while and a moment. But O moment, on which all eternity depends! The hour of death and the day of one's last agony are properly that moment, and that pearl of great price for which the prudent merchant sells all that he may buy it. But few know the value of this pearl. St. Jerome affirms: "Regarding eternal salvation almost every man is negligent; but whence this neglect in a matter of the highest moment?" We poor men have weak and bad eyes: we see well enough nearby, but perceive scarcely anything at a distance. I am speaking now not of adults and the aged: boys and girls just from the cradle, who have not yet all their teeth, grasp the elements of vice and learn the smallest meanesses of avarice. Later they are taught the insatiable desire of acquiring wealth, and so they know what conduces to gain, what fills their purse and lays up a store of provisions. They can talk about merchandise, pass judgment on wines, and know how to recommend foreign styles of dress. As Juvenal says:

Of money aged nurses daily talk  
To boys before they yet have learned to walk.  
This maxim, wealth by any means to get,  
All girls learn sooner than their alphabet.  
And hence the causes of our crimes.

(Sat. XIV, 208-209, 173).

Hence also so much ignorance or forgetfulness of eternal things: young men and old understand well

the value of a coin; they are ignorant of the value of heaven and eternity. But let us proceed further.

## II

ETERNITY IS A SEA, A THREE-HEADED HYDRA, BUT  
ALSO THE FOUNTAIN OF ALL JOY

To you especially, O Christian, who are often present at sermons but perhaps rarely attentive, is addressed the following question. Suppose that you should stand by the ocean and attempt to empty its waters by means of a small shell into a rivulet near the shore, which nevertheless itself flows into the ocean, so that all the water which you had taken from the ocean would thus be again swallowed up in it. Tell me, how long will you labor in exhausting the ocean? But if you were permitted to empty it by means of a large jar, and to pour the water into a river which flowed in another direction, even in this way how many years would you be obliged to spend in transferring the ocean to another bed? To live in the midst of flames during this long period of time would be an unspeakable torment; yet for the damned it would be a most welcome compact: they would say that the delay was not long, provided only it would at length be so terminated that they might escape for eternity.

The ancients imagined a sort of three-headed

hydra of such a nature that if one of its heads was cut off, another and still another would grow. This hydra is truly in hell, if it exists anywhere; for there is there a triple eternity, which displays three heads, namely, the pain of loss, the pain of sense, and the worm of conscience, which will never die. Alas, wretched that we are and improvident regarding the most important affairs, we are traveling along a road as short as it is dangerous, yet on it we are cheerful and wantonly joyous, just as if we were walking through paradise and a most delightful valley, secure from enemies, and on the point of being safely established in our native land. Yet not without fault can we be ignorant that we shall come at length to the two gates of a double eternity, one of which belongs to the blessed, the other to the damned. Through one of these gates we must enter, according to the manner in which we have conducted ourselves during the journey.

St. Lawrence Justinian, wondering at this insane rejoicing of the travelers, says: "O lamentable condition of mortals, who, although they are exiles from their country, exult on their journey." Let us postpone vain joys until we reach our country, and let us strive for this one thing, to be admitted through that gate which is the beginning of eternal beatitude. God created us for delights rather than for labors; but here there is neither place nor time for delights, but only for labors. God has appointed

eternity for delights, but has granted the period of this life for meriting those delights. "And by what service," you say, "shall I merit them?" Do you not know the divine words: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away?" (Matt. XI, 12.) Reflect thus within yourself: Do I possess that violence? Perhaps I have it in revelings, in dances, and in pleasures. Ah! we must combat generously, we must run energetically while we have life and strength, so that in the last moment of life, on the very brink of eternity, when we shall be separated forever from this life and transferred to another which will last for all eternity, we may be able to rejoice over our past life and to entertain the highest hope for that to come. Let us labor, therefore, let us labor, and let us do violence to ourselves: thus shall we attain everlasting rest, which is hidden in time, and eternal glory, which is concealed in the period of a few days.

True and solid joy is not to be sought in these present vain and paltry pleasures, but in eternal delights. "An ivy came up over the head of Jonas, to be a shadow over his head. And Jonas was exceeding glad of the ivy" (Jonas IV, 6). And what in fine is all the pleasure or vanity of this world? Is it not verdant ivy, which creeps up the wall with its twining foliage and spreads a luxuriant shade above the head? The rich rejoice exceedingly un-



der the shade of their ivy, that is, their wealth; gluttons and inebriates rejoice under the shade of their tables; voluptuaries under the shade of their pleasures. But grief overtakes the end of their joy. "God prepared a worm, and it struck the ivy and it withered" (Jonas IV, 7). Where now, Jonas, is your ivy, where your joy? The one and the other are withered. Just so our ivies wither, and together with them perishes all that shadowy joy. "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment" (Job XX, 5); the joy of eternal blessings is eternal.

### III

#### THE GREAT VALUE OF A RELISH FOR ETERNITY IS MADE CLEAR BY AN ILLUSTRIOUS EXAMPLE

This truth was seen, and seen in time, by Theodore, the son of Christian parents, a youth in years, but in judgment assuredly an old man. On a certain holiday observed throughout all Egypt, when in his parents' spacious house there resounded laughter, mirth and dancing, when festive tables invited to banquets, he, grieving because of a wound that was secret but salutary, began to expostulate thus with himself: "Unhappy Theodore, what gain is it to you, if you should gain the whole world? You possess many things, but how long will you possess them? You are rich, you feast, you dance; but

how long will all these things last? This manner of life would be pleasing and afford a relish, provided it could please and afford a relish for a long time. But shall I retain these delights and lose those that are eternal? Tell me, Theodore, is it part of the Christian law, to make for one's self a heaven on earth, and to try to pass by way of delights to delights? Either I greatly deceive myself, or Christ said we must go by way of thorns. Put an end therefore to this way of living, and to short-lived joys prefer the eternal."

Thus he spoke, and with moist eyes withdrawing to a private part of the house and there prostrating himself, began to pray as follows: "Eternal God, my heart is open to you; my prayer and my groaning are turned to you. What I shall ask of you, or how, I myself scarcely know. This one thing alone, my God, do I entreat, that you permit me not to die an eternal death. Lord, you know that I love you, and desire to be with you and to praise you forever. Lord, have mercy!"

As he was praying thus, his mother entered, and being a careful observer at once noticed his eyes red and moist with weeping, and said: "Whence this grief, my son? And why do you thus seek solitude on this festal day? Now the table invites you and you alone are missing." To whom Theodore replied: "I beg you, mother, excuse my absence from table, for it is due to a very good

reason: not even you yourself would advise forcing food or drink upon a sick stomach." Thus, by a mild deception he dismissed his mother, and entering alone with God more deeply into the sanctuary of eternity, he began by attentive reflection to examine the state of his life, saying to himself: "What have I been hitherto? Or rather, what do I wish to be hereafter, if I desire not to be excluded from the kingdom of eternity? There are different ways to heaven: one person goes by this way, another by that; but what matters it by what way each goes, provided he attains his end? Yet, since all the ways are not the same, and we, too, are different, each must choose that way which he knows is suited to him. One is shorter, another longer and more perilous. If I should feel fear on a long and perilous way, there remains one that is short and safe, in my choice of which without doubt the angels will rejoice with me.

"But will my friends feel sad? Yes, in the beginning, but afterwards, perhaps, they too will rejoice. Come now, Theodore, do not put off this matter for long, and do not yield too much. I hope indeed that I shall be brave, when I encounter brave adversaries. But what if I shall find them gentle, coaxing, tearful? Here I fear more for myself. But fortify your soul, and though it is now by nature yielding, pray to Christ to make it resolute. But what if your mother should make an urgent appeal

to you? You know what St. Jerome says: 'Fly to the standard of the cross; it is a virtue to be cruel in this matter.' You have another and greater mother, who likewise appeals to you, and she is that patron of yours, the Most Blessed Virgin, who hereafter will be to you as a thousand mothers, if you will be her son.

"But it is a difficult thing, this change of life, especially in the very bloom of youth. It is difficult, I admit. But experience says: Many serve God poorly for the very reason that they serve Him late. More wisely than all others do they act who have learned to carry the yoke of the Lord from youth. But hitherto I have been delicately reared; now I shall enter upon an austere manner of life; shall I be able to endure it? I hope so; but how long will it last? for one or two years? This will not be enough; I must strive further, even to the end of my life. Weigh this choice well then, and either do not begin, or persevere to the end. I think that I shall not be alone in overcoming these difficulties, but I shall have God as my companion. This is true, to be sure; but it is very difficult to go counter to one's former customs. Hitherto I have lived the free life of a noble; now I shall lead a lowly life of service. And how long shall I lead it? Here I am not to think of a short comedy, as it were, in which I shall play this rôle for one or two days. No; the last act will be ended only when

life is ended. The discomfort of this theater will last long, and you will be permitted to return to your silk and purple only when you are clothed in immortality and the vesture of glory.

“O Theodore, what will you do in this play which is to be of such long duration? I shall turn my attention to the other actors, among whom I see Christ, the Son of God, ignoble, lowly and simple, who suffers and performs the humblest services. What must I do, who am surely not better than He? But it is indeed hard to reduce one’s self to these straits, and to enter, as it were, a sort of prison. Consider that for the future your will is to depend on that of another, and you do what another wills. Here also I have Christ to follow, who came not to do His own will but that of His Father who is in heaven. It will not be difficult for me to follow the guidance of another, if I see Him leading the way. Who is it that commands? A man utters the word, but the order comes from God, to whom I would owe obedience even if I did not promise it. But certainly this is too high a philosophy, to pass from a life of wealth to one of poverty; what will you do? You who were able to give to beggars must yourself beg; do not seek for delights which you will not have.

“Why do I debate so long with myself? Why do I fluctuate in this channel between hope and fear? Do I not see before me the example of the Lord?

Have I not before my eyes Christ nailed to the cross, mocked and suffering unspeakable torments? Leaving heavenly treasures He came down to this poor earth. And when here, what did He have? His birth and death show: in the one He had not a place to lodge; in the other He had not wherewith to clothe Himself — He died naked. What was His condition throughout His life? He submitted to flight, travel, thirst, heat; how unwearied He was in acting, how patient in suffering! What He taught, that also He practiced. Who was ever so devoted to poverty, so ready for labors, so mild under insults? Shall I be ashamed of such a leader? Shall I blush to be ranked among His followers? Otherwise I shall not be such a Theodore as my Lord Jesus wishes me to be. I am ready for love of Him to suffer cold, hunger and thirst. I am ready to be despised, imprisoned, burned, cut. These things are brief and cannot be of long duration; the joys or torments of eternity alone are truly of long duration. Depart, all ye things that perish; I esteem you not worth a straw; eternity alone is the object of my desire.”

He became so heated by this fervor of his thoughts, that he burned with desire for heavenly eternity alone. He therefore decided to bid a long and eternal farewell to money, parents and pleasures. For the purpose of strengthening this resolve, he acted not so hastily as steadfastly. He did not at

once become what he desired to be, that is, a disciple of Pachomius, but became so finally. More than one tragedy followed this prologue, but contrary to the custom of tragedies, after a sad beginning it had a joyful ending. Thus, Theodore had absorbed the thought of eternity into his inmost being, so that he did not refuse to become the talk of the world, provided only he did not believe with the world that eternity is a myth.

Do you wish, O Christians, to listen to a true and solemn warning from Theodore, nay from the great St. Paul, nay from Christ Himself? Very many live as if all eternity were a myth. "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat" (Matt. VII, 13). They certainly would not go in thereat, if they believed that they would abide eternally there where they had entered. Thus for you eternity is but a pious myth. But, you will say, we believe in eternity, we hope for it, we desire it. Pray tell me, how small is this hope or faith, how cold this desire? A present pleasure, money in one's hand, the allurements of the flesh so cleverly deceive many, as gradually to extinguish in them by a sweet forgetfulness all love of eternity. A thousand times these words are uttered: "Thus saith the Lord; thus doth God command." This is heard a thousand times, but is also a thousand times disregarded. Let the Lord speak, let God command,

but this way is pleasing to us, "for we will go after our own thoughts, and we will act everyone according to the perverseness of his evil heart. Therefore, thus saith the Lord: "Ask among the nations: Who hath heard such horrible things?" (Jerem. XVIII, 12-13). If those nations who are without God had known these mysteries of eternity, would they have scorned them thus? It is well, O mortals; I cried out and you did not listen; "I called and you refused; I stretched out my hand and you did not regard. I also will laugh in your destruction, when sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction as a tempest shall be at hand" (Prov. I, 24-27); when all eternity shall oppress you. If death should smite you in this state, the sentence is already passed, the gate already closed. Depart, eternally wretched, eternally damned.

Watch then, O Christians, watch! The judge stands at the gate; in a moment will happen that over which all eternity will mourn. The great St. Antony in a certain sermon to his disciples said: "Here, my brothers, in buying and selling wares, the prices of things are equal to their value. You give me ten aurei, and I give you spices of equal value. I count out for you fifty florins; you pay me back an equivalent amount of grain. Far different is the calculation in purchasing those things that are eternal. Eternal life costs a very paltry sum.



A single obol can more justly be compared with a million golden coins than all our labor with heavenly beatitude. In the Psalms I read that the days of our life are seventy years, or at most eighty, 'and what is more of them is labor and sorrow' (Ps. LXXXIX, 10). Wherefore, if we serve God faithfully and fervently for eighty or a hundred years at most, we shall obtain a kingdom of endless ages, and shall reign not merely for a hundred years: we shall inherit heaven, not earth. Therefore, my sons, let not fatigue weary you, nor ambition for empty glory delight you; 'for the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us' (Rom. VIII, 18). Let no one think that in abandoning the world he has left great things; for all the expanses of earth compared to the infinity of the heavens are small and narrow; and although we should retain our wealth, yet by the law of death we will be torn from it against our will. Why then do we not make a virtue of necessity, that is, give up voluntarily what must soon be given up; for these things are trifling, and we are to receive the greatest things." This is told in detail by Athanasius (St. Antonii Vita, Ch. 15).

It was the constant practice of St. Pachomius, whenever an unlawful thought assailed his mind, to drive it away by recalling eternity. If it returned, he opposed to it the consideration of eternal punishments: pains burning without end, the inextinguish-

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able fire and the worm that never dies. Wherefore, let St. Pachomius himself close this consideration in his own words: "Before all things," he says, "let us have before our eyes the last day, and at every moment let us fear the punishment of eternal pains."

## CONSIDERATION IX

### SOME CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM WHAT HAS BEEN SAID ON ETERNITY

#### FIRST CONCLUSION

**N**OT only is no man able to speak adequately of the infinite length of eternity, but he cannot even reach it in thought. There is the greatest difference between a living man and the statue of a man, between real fire and painted fire; and yet even these in their own way are said to be very similar. But between our fire and the fire of hell, between our pains and those of hell, there is no comparison, absolutely none; for the measure of the one is time, of the other eternity. Christ expresses this beautifully in the simile of the branch, when He says: "If anyone abide not in me, he shall be cast forth as a branch and shall wither, and they shall gather him up and cast him into the fire and he burneth" (John XV, 6). Here eternity is excellently described in a brief statement, or rather in a single word. For all the other words of Christ are used in the future tense: he shall wither, they shall gather, they shall cast; but not: he shall burn, but he burneth. This shall be the condition of a

man who is lost. A thousand years shall go by, and he burneth; another thousand shall pass, and he burneth as in the beginning; another and another thousand years shall glide by, and he burneth just as when he began. But if after several millions years it should be asked: What is that man doing who was condemned so many thousand years ago? What is happening to him? No other answer can be given than this: He burneth with continual, unspeakable, eternal burnings; and it will be so from age to age. St. Augustine, commenting on this passage, explains it beautifully when he says: "One of two things is suited to the branch, either the vine or the fire: if it is not on the vine, it will be in the fire; therefore, that it may not be in the fire, let it be on the vine" (Tract. 81 In Ioannem).

#### SECOND CONCLUSION

If those who are in mortal sin knew how near they are to eternity and eternal torments, since they could at the nod of God (for so we speak) be handed over to death and by death to the devil, they would be unwilling to receive as a gift the whole kingdom of Spain, all the treasures of Asia, nay, the whole world, on condition that they defer confession and penance for even one hour, much less that they would go to bed with such a sin on their souls. "For what doth it profit a man if he gain the whole

world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. XVI, 26). If you should lose everything, O man, remember to save your soul. Arialodus, a deacon of Milan, lost almost all his members. He was of very noble family, for he was the brother of a marquis, and was also most holy in his life; but because he resisted heretics and other wicked men with the greatest firmness, he was at length led to death. His ears were cut off, his lips mutilated, his nose cut off, his tongue torn from his throat, his eyes dug out, his right hand amputated. I pass over other indignities. This saint saved his soul in a body most cruelly destroyed, and that he might gain life lost his life, in the year one thousand sixty-six after our Lord's birth of the Virgin.

Such a noble athlete as this, "mindful of his eternity," as says Seneca, "goes forth to everything which has been and will be in all ages" (Consol. ad Helviam 20). Well has St. Augustine said: "What therefore shall we fathers do, unless change our life while there is time, and correct our deeds if there are any needing correction? So that the punishment that without doubt will come upon sinners may not find us among those upon whom it is to come: not because we shall cease to exist, but that it may not find us such as those to whom its coming has been predicted. All that we have heard through the Scriptures is the voice of God saying: Observe; and all that we suffer, the tribu-

lations of this life, is the scourge of God who wishes to correct that He may not condemn in the end. These things are in a way hard and troublesome, and cause a shudder when they are told about; but the most grievous things that each man suffers in this life are in comparison with eternal fire not small, but nothing." (Serm. 109 De Temp.)

### THIRD CONCLUSION

A great number of Christians, even of Catholics, do not believe that there is an eternity in hell and in heaven; that is to say, they would certainly live otherwise if they truly did believe it. To them applies this saying: "The Son of man, when He cometh, shall He find, think you, faith on earth?" (Luke XVIII, 8). There are some who wish to appear to believe this: in words they assent to it, but in their deeds they deny it. They either never or very rarely think of eternity, and they merely think of it, but do not reflect, do not dwell upon it, do not examine it, do not arouse their intellect and will, nor impress it on their imagination. They scarcely begin, and soon wander elsewhere; and if perchance any good spark is produced from this thought, they at once drown it in cares, business, or pleasures, as in water. Thus many with eyes closed and ears stopped up enter upon the way of eternity which leads to death; as the Holy Fathers

observe in regard to the rich glutton mentioned in the Gospel, that he lifted up his eyes only when he was in torments. All his life he had kept them closed, especially to the poor and to all piety; he opened them first in hell, but when it was too late. And there is no reason why we should wonder that many hasten so blindly with might and main to the home of eternal grief: the road is very spacious; it is delightful, broad, and smooth. On this road no one goes astray but at the end; it would be pleasing to more, if its end did not displease and cause terror. Therefore, many prudently prefer a road that is rough for a little while, yet which leads to an abode that is forever happy, rather than one that attracts by a brief charm, but which leads to a prison designed for everlasting tears and torments. With truth does Job say: "As a cloud is consumed and passeth away, so he that shall go down to hell shall not come up; nor shall he return any more into his house, neither shall his place know him any more" (Job VII, 9-10).

#### FOURTH CONCLUSION

It will be found that whoever frequently and seriously turns to the thought of eternity not only does not live in a dissolute and licentious manner, but does not even frequently indulge in immoderate mirth and laughter. Those of the dead who have

beheld the condition of the future life and being raised from the dead have returned to us, were not seen to laugh readily. This was remarked particularly in Lazarus, that friend of Christ's from Bethany. All these could agree with Ecclesiastes when he declares of himself: "Laughter I counted error; and to mirth I said: Why art thou vainly deceived?" (Eccles. II, 2). Cyril of Alexandria rightly confesses himself timid in this matter, saying: "I fear hell, since it is interminable; I dread the destructive worm, since it is everlasting." "O that they would be wise and would understand, and would provide for their last end" (Deut. XXXII, 29). If this thought of eternity does not cause a man to turn to better things (I will speak briefly but truly), either he has not faith, or if he has faith he has not a heart and feeling.

A learned man once declared, not without some truth, that a wedding is a brief and joyous song, but it has a long mournful refrain. So shall we say with all truth that all the pleasure of sin is a short and lively song, but it has a very long and most dismal refrain: eternal torment. O eternity, eternity, eternity!

#### FIFTH CONCLUSION

When eternity is spoken of, no one can say too much or exaggerate the reality. Whatever may be



said, there is here no exaggeration, no numbers are too extensive; but too little is always said, because it is on a subject that is infinite and eternal. For eternity has this quality, that it remains entire however much is taken from it. Let as many years be subtracted as there are stars in the heavens, drops of water in the sea, grains of sand on the shore, leaves on the trees, blades of grass on the earth: it is still entire. Let as many years be added: it will not be greater. As long as God shall exist, so long will He punish the damned. By several shadowy similitudes we have shown this above; let us add now another from St. Bonaventure (De Infer. 49). If any one of the damned should so weep that he would shed only a single tear every hundred years; and if these tears should be preserved for so many centuries that at length they would be equal in volume to an ocean; alas, how many million years must pass by before even a little brook would be formed, not to speak of an ocean! And yet at that time it can truly be said: "Eternity is just beginning." But suppose that this is done a second time, and another river or sea is collected from these drops shed at such long intervals; again, when all that time has passed, we must say: "Eternity is now beginning"; and so on to infinity. There is here no possibility of doubt, for there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. The reason that this truth seems to us so wonderful and incredible

is because our imagination is unable to grasp it, to comprehend things so remote, to penetrate to what is infinite and impenetrable. And this also is partly the reason that our intellect is with such difficulty brought to think on eternity, because in a certain sense it is ashamed or scorns to weary itself over that which it cannot penetrate. But we must not yield to this false shame; the intellect must be impelled and forced to undertake daily this most salutary meditation and to exercise itself at least with such similitudes as the above. Never will it make a mistake, never will it think of too many years, never of so many million years that there are not infinitely more and more. This fact is certain and beyond dispute.

The Prophet Daniel, that he might better explain the incomprehensible extent of eternity, speaks thus: "But they that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternities" (Dan. XII, 3). He uttered this as if he meant to say: Words are lacking to explain eternity; I cannot say more, although more should be said. Yet the prophet adds to the words a double increase by using the expression "all eternities"; and indeed, if one eternity is interminable, what will be two, ten, a hundred, a thousand, nay all eternities? But if we compare to eternity a year or great years multiplied a thousand times, what part of it shall we explain?

They say that the eighth heavenly body moves with excessive slowness, and although it daily revolves by the impulse of initial motion, yet by its own motion it makes a complete revolution in its orbit only every thirty-six thousand years; and this long period of time is called the great year, the turning year, or the Platonic year. Let us compare this whole period with eternity, and in comparison it will be only a moment, an instant, a tick of the clock. Truly has Boethius said: "An instant or second of time and ten thousand years are more similar than are ten thousand years and eternity." St. John says: "Little children, it is the last hour" (John, 1 Epist. II, 18); and yet he said this one thousand six hundred years ago. Therefore, most truly did St. Augustine say: "Everything which has an end is short." (In Ps. 145.) Eternity as a word consists of four syllables: in its essence it is without end. Love eternity. Without end you will reign with Christ, if you have Christ as your end.

#### SIXTH CONCLUSION

It is incredible that a man, especially one blessed with a knowledge of the ancient religion, is to be found possessed of a spirit so unrestrained and so undisciplined, that he does not give to this meditation on eternity at least a portion of an hour once a day; provided, that is, that he does not live as a

beast and deliberately ruin himself; for "the wicked man when he is come into the depth of sins contemneth" (Prov. XVIII, 3). Nay, if he should think seriously on eternity even once each week, it is incredible that he would not change his present mode of life for one far better and become another man — humble and modest from being proud, mild and gentle from being passionate, chaste and continent from being impure, temperate and sober from being inebriate. Such a man as this will become truly religious, in spirit at least, if not in garb.

But not hastily, not casually, not in a perfunctory manner must this subject be considered; it must be carefully weighed and balanced; we must impress the thought upon our minds and repeatedly reflect on eternity, eternity, eternity, which will never have an end; no, never, never; which will continue through innumerable, incomprehensible, infinite ages, and will never cease to continue. This, I say, must be attentively considered, and digested like food. Although food be the best obtainable and healthful, if it is not crushed with the teeth and digested, it is poison and not nourishment; it generates diseases of all kinds; it remains in the body for some time, but produces no good substance. Just so is it with salutary and holy thoughts on death, on judgment, on heaven, on hell; yet far more salutary is the thought of eternity, which can justly be called the quintessence. But this best of food, so to speak,

must be not only taken into the mind, but digested. Let a man ponder on such truths as these when he is in solitude, free from cares and attentive in mind. Unless this is done, the reading and hearing of facts will usually be without fruit and thrown to the winds. Many hear many sermons; they also read certain works themselves; but they derive scarcely any profit therefrom, because they do not reflect on what they have read and heard; all these truths are lightly passed over, and before they can be reduced to practice are completely forgotten. What has been heard and read should be dwelt upon for some time, and the will should be trained. This we learn from the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God: "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (Luke II, 19).

## SEVENTH CONCLUSION

No one believes, or at least no one understands and reflects upon these very clear words of Christ: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it" (Matt. VII, 13-14). And He repeats this by the mouth of St. Luke: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall

not be able" (Luke XIII, 24). "Whoever," says St. Augustine, "ridicules this belief, so as to think that he is not obliged to believe because he does not see, when that which he did not believe comes to pass, such a one is ashamed, and being put to confusion is set apart, and being set apart is condemned" (Serm. 64 De Verbis Domini).

Jerome Platus relates (De Bono Stat. Relig. Bk. I, Ch. 5) that not long after the establishment of a new community by St. Francis, an illustrious man of this community, named Berthold, preached from the pulpit with such vigor and candor of speech against a certain vice, that a woman who was guilty of this crime fell dead. Whereupon all the congregation having recourse to prayer, she was restored to life; and when asked why she had been bidden to return to life and what she had seen in the other world, she told the following story: "When I stood at the tribunal of God, there stood with me sixty thousand souls, which were summoned before their judge from all parts of the world by a different kind of death. From this entire number only three were assigned to the expiatory flames; upon all the others the sentence of eternal punishment was passed."

Alas! I would not believe the narrative of this woman, unless I had first believed Christ, who so solemnly declares: "Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. Strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there

are that find it" (Matt. VII, 13-14). But who would believe that eternal punishment has been decreed by God not only upon sixty thousand but upon so many other thousands upon thousands of men, unless he were convinced of this by the supreme and infinite majesty of God and by the inexplicable malice of sin against this majesty and by the very clear testimonies of Sacred Scripture? Job says in alarm: "Where no order but everlasting horror dwelleth" (Job X, 22). St. Matthew declares: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (XXV, 41). The Church exclaims in the Office of the Dead (Noct. 3): "The fear of death troubles me, sinning daily and not repenting, because in hell there is no redemption." None, none, neither is there any consolation, nor is anyone permitted to carry thither even a drop of water on the tip of his finger to refresh the damned.

But if those even who live in the grace of God, men of good intention and will, sufficiently understood from how great torments they will be freed on the day of judgment by the sentence of the judge, and how great joys of unending duration will be bestowed upon them, they would not defer even for an hour, leaving vanities to the vain, the dead to the dead, the world to its lovers, and then would themselves embrace that sanctity of life in which they could please God most and love and praise Him most throughout their life, in order to merit that

twofold eternal blessing which is to be conferred upon them — the freeing them from hell and granting them paradise. St. Gregory says: "The soul feels the evils of the present life so much the more severely in proportion as it neglects to reflect on the good which follows; and because it does not wish to meditate on the rewards which await it, it judges those things which it endures to be burdensome. But if each man would once for all raise himself to things eternal and fix the eye of his heart upon those which remain unchangeable, he would perceive that whatever hastens to an end is almost nothing." (Moral. Bk. X, Ch. 10.) And again: "Joy in tribulation is a song in the night, because, even if we are afflicted by temporal misfortunes, yet we rejoice in the hope of eternity." (Moral. Bk. XXVI, Ch. 102.)

St. Augustine reasons eloquently in almost the same strain: "When you consider the reward that you are going to receive," he says, "everything which you suffer will seem trifling to you, and you will not esteem these sufferings worthy of that future reward. For, my brothers, surely for eternal rest eternal labor should be endured; if you are going to receive eternal happiness, you ought to undergo eternal sufferings. But if you were to undergo eternal labor, when would you come to eternal happiness? Hence tribulations must necessarily be confined to time, so that when they have ceased you may come



to infinite happiness." And again: "Weigh a thousand years against eternity. Yet why do you weigh anything finite, however great, with infinity? Ten thousand years, ten times a hundred thousand years, if we can so speak, and thousands upon thousands which have an end, cannot be compared with eternity. Add to this God has willed that your labor be not only temporal, but also brief, since the whole life of man consists merely of a few short days. Therefore, though a man should be worn out by various labors, sufferings, and pains during the entire period of his life; though he should endure imprisonment and blows, hunger and thirst continually up to his last day, it should be said that he has endured trouble for a short time. The whole life of man is a few days; and that labor is light and short, upon the completion of which will succeed an eternal kingdom and endless happiness. There will come equality with the angels; there will come inheritance with Christ and Christ Himself as co-heir. How much labor do we undergo to receive so great a reward?" (In Ps. 36.)

The same St. Augustine says elsewhere: "Exceedingly deep are the thoughts of God. Where is the thought of God? For the present He holds the reins loose, but later He will tighten them. Do not rejoice like the fish which delights in its bait; the fisherman has not yet drawn out the hook, the fish still has it in its throat. So, what seems to

you long is short; all things quickly pass. What is a long life of man compared to the eternity of God? Do you wish to possess patience? Look at the eternity of God. Do you look to your few days, and wish all things to be completed in this brief space? That all the wicked be damned, that all the good be crowned — do you wish all this to be completed in your short days? God completes all in His own time; He is eternal, He acts slowly, He is patient. But you say: I am not patient because I exist in time. But you have it in your power to be so; unite your heart to the eternity of God and you will be eternal with Him. If you are a Christian and well instructed you will say: God reserves everything for His own judgment. The good labor because they are scourged like sons; the wicked rejoice because they are condemned like strangers. A man has two sons; one he chastises, the other he lets go free; one acts wrongly and is not reprov'd by his father; the other, whenever he moves, is buffeted with blows and scourged. Why is the one allowed to go free, and the other beaten, unless because an inheritance is reserved for the one who is beaten, but the one who is left free is disinherited. The father sees that the latter affords no hope, and consequently allows him to act as he pleases. But the child who is scourged, if he should not have sense and should be short-sighted and foolish, envies his brother who is not beaten and compassionates

himself, saying in his heart: My brother commits so many evil deeds; he does whatever he pleases against my father's commands, and no one utters a harsh word to him; but as soon as I move I am beaten. He is foolish and short-sighted; he looks to what he suffers, and does not look to what is reserved for him." (In Ps. 91).

To the above words we may rightly add the following from the same holy and learned bishop, as an epitome of what has been said heretofore: "How great is the mercy of God! He does not say: Labor ten times a hundred thousand years. He does not say: Labor even a thousand years. He does not say: Labor five hundred years; but merely: Labor while you live; in a few years you shall have rest, and rest that shall have no end. And you labor a few years, and in these very labors consolation is not lacking, daily joys are not lacking. But do not rejoice in the world; rejoice in Christ, rejoice in His word, rejoice in His law. The saying of the Apostle is true: "For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. IV, 17). Behold how small a price we give, a single straw as it were, to receive everlasting treasures; the straw of labor for incredible rest. Do you rejoice for a time? Place not your trust there. Are you sad for a time? Do not despair; let not happiness mislead you nor adversity

cast you down. God promises eternal life: despise temporal happiness. He threatens eternal fire: despise temporal pains." (In Ps. 95.)

Let us conclude these remarks in the words of the same holy writer. "Therefore, let us love eternal life, and learn how much we ought to labor for eternal life, when we see that men who love the present life which is momentary and soon ended, so labor for it that, when fear of death comes upon them, they use every effort, not that they may remove this fear, but that they may put off death. How much a man labors, when death threatens, in avoiding and seeking to escape it, in giving whatever he has in order to free himself from it, in laboring and enduring sufferings and annoyances, employing physicians and doing whatever else lies in his power. See how he can act, expending thus his bodily and mental powers in order to live for a short period; and yet he cannot do as much in order to live forever. If then men strive with such labor, such effort, such expense, such perseverance, such watchfulness, such care, that they may live a little longer, how should they strive that they may live always? And if they are called prudent who do all in their power to put off death and live a few days that they may not lose a few days, how foolish are they who so live that they lose the eternal day." (Serm. 64 De Verb. Dom.)

Reflect on these truths, O mortals, and before you

are eternal either in joys or in torments, look forward to eternity. All things pass away; eternity alone remains, and will not pass away.

## I

## THE PUNISHMENT OF ETERNAL DEATH

The Messinians had a subterranean prison, deprived of light and air and full of infernal horror; but that they might conceal this deadly place under a fair name, it was called the Treasure-house. This prison had no doors, but the condemned man was lowered by a rope, and the opening was then closed by a huge rock. In this "Treasure-house" was confined Philopœmen, that famous general of Greece, and there he ended his life by poison. God, too, has a "Treasure-house" under the earth; but, alas, what kind of one? One containing criminals, the damned and men deprived of all hope.

Actiolinus, once tyrant of the Paduans (as Jovius relates), had many prisons, so infamous because of every kind of misery and torture that in them death was considered a delight, but did not readily come until frequently invited. As many as were thrust into these prisons were laden with heavy iron and suffered a lingering and piteous death by stench, hunger and filth: they truly felt that they were dying. Here everyone was considered most wretched

except the one who had the good fortune to die; it was a punishment more terrible than death to be thus forced to dwell alive among the dead. Putrefying corpses were heaped up in piles, causing such torture to the sense of smell that it could truly be said: "Here the dead kill the living."

But the most foul of these prisons, compared with the dungeons of hell, is a paradise and delightful palace. Whatever sufferings one endures in the prisons of Actiolinus are all tolerable because they are brief, because they give promise of an end, because they cease with life; because they all vanish in death. But that Treasure-house of the damned, which is the prison of God, has no comfort from the shortness of its torments; it excludes death, it permits no egress, it knows no end, alas, none at all. Most truly does Cassiodorus say: "As no mortal understands what an eternal reward is; so none comprehends what that torment is which is to last without end."

Among the Persians there was a prison such that entrance into it was easy, but departure very difficult, or rather no departure at all was granted; and on this account it was called Lethe. The descent into hell is easy, but for those who have once entered no way out is found; no one ever retraces his steps. This prison of God is by a true title called Lethe or Forgetfulness; for God so forgets the damned that He will not remember them with

favor for all eternity. Hell is truly a land of forgetfulness, and this for two reasons, as a pious and learned author observes (F. Titelmann, In Ps. 87). "Because," he says, "those who are there no longer remember God for their good, and their only remembrance of former things is one which causes them suffering; for there is either a forgetfulness of all pomps, pleasures and delights, or the remembrance of them is not without torture. Also, this fiery region of the damned has been consigned to oblivion by God and the angels, because those who abide there are destined never to be released." "Between us and you," exclaims Abraham, "there is fixed a great chaos; so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, nor from thence come hither" (Luke XVI, 26). O frightful chaos! O dread eternity of torments! "And their sepulchres shall be their houses forever" (Ps. XLVIII, 12). Such palaces do the impious erect for themselves. "And the rich man also died, and he was buried in hell" (Luke XVI, 22). O deep sepulchre! In such a tomb is this torturer of Lazarus buried, who has flames instead of a bed, thirst instead of delicious drink, sulphur instead of banquets, despair instead of dancing. Those confined in prison are said to hope for salvation. Here there is no salvation, and not even any hope of salvation, but only eternal despair.

God delivered to Ezechiel a discourse not so long

as terrifying in these words: "And say to the south forest: Hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord God: Behold I will kindle a fire in thee and will burn in thee every green tree and every dry tree; the flame of the fire shall not be quenched" (Ezech. XX, 47). How many cedars, that is, how many wicked men are green because of the success of fortune and dry through lack of virtues. Hear, therefore, you who are green trees and you who are dry: the fire will be kindled and the flame of the fire shall not be quenched. In hell, whither you are hastening, there are no holidays on which the furnace that has been enkindled may be extinguished: there pain is eternal, death eternal, grief eternal, and these are to be intermixed with no consolations. Day and night the flame, sleepless, ever watchful, inextinguishable, will inflict punishment on you; you will live for a continual, perpetual death. Take the word of St. Augustine for this, who gives the following eloquent and solemn warning: "The wicked will have a life in the midst of torments; but those who live in torments desire, if possible, to end such a life; yet no one grants them annihilation, so that no one takes away their torture. Consider how the Scriptures speak and judge in this matter: they do not deign to call such a life by the name life; they are unwilling to call an existence in the midst of sufferings, torments and everlasting fires life; so that the very word life is a term of praise, not of



sorrow; and whenever you hear of life you do not think of torments, for to be always in torments is eternal death, not life at all. The Scriptures call it a second death after this first to which every member of the human race is subject. The second death is also called death, and yet no one dies there; I should say better and more truly, no one lives there; for to live in sufferings is not to live. Therefore, that life in torments is not life; that only is life which is happy, and it cannot be happy unless it be eternal." (Serm. 112, De Martyr. Massa Candida). This fact he confirms elsewhere as follows: "If the soul lives in the eternal punishments by which unclean spirits shall be tortured, that should be called eternal death rather than life, since there is no greater and worse death than when death does not die."

St. Gregory adduces testimony very similar to the foregoing, when he says: "In hell the wretched shall have death without death, an end without end, because there death lives and the end always begins" (Mor. Bk. IX, Ch. 49). Innocent gives the same warning in these words: "Then death will be immortal. O death, how much sweeter you would be, if you took away life, than when you force one to live thus!" The truth is this: the number of years in hell is without number, can be counted by no one. God Himself in counting it will not find its last year. After thousands of millions of years have been

counted, the same number will remain to be counted; and when these, too, have been counted, not only will the last not be found, but each will be as if it were the first. After the five thousand years which Cain has lived there, dying constantly, the number of his years of suffering remains still as entire as if only today he were thrust down into that fiery prison; and after several millions of years of this number have been passed, the number itself will be no more lessened than if he began to burn at that very hour. And although the torments of that rich glutton in the Gospel have been going on for nigh two thousand years, yet he still burns and will burn forever, and he will never obtain for his fevered tongue that little drop of water asked for long ago.

Do we hear these things, think of them, and still laugh? Perhaps it is a trifling matter to die in eternal flames. Here quite rightly may it be asked: Where are your tears, O silly mortals? And such we certainly are: for a few pennies, for a trifling loss we shed big drops of tears; an immense, irreparable loss we make light of with a burst of merry laughter. When summoned before a mortal judge we tremble; we are going with rapid steps daily even against our will to the tribunal of God, and we jest freely on the way. When about to undertake a sea voyage we fear the dangers; to an entire eternity we hasten laughing.

Most just is the wish of St. Bernard: "Would that men were wise, would that they were!" And to what end do you desire this wisdom, O Bernard? "That the image of eternity may be re-formed in us; that is, that we may direct present things by wisdom, may judge past things by understanding, may attend with caution to the last things."

We have on this point not a wish but a precept of St. Paul; for, writing to the Ephesians, he does not express a desire but lays a command upon them when he says: "See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly, not as unwise, but as wise; redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephes. V, 15-16). Circumspectly, carefully, exactly must the business of salvation be looked after. Most unwise are they who do not spend profitably this short time that is granted them for gaining a happy eternity, but who squander it upon the most vain and paltry pleasures, expecting to purchase heaven by jest, by play, by idleness. The time is not to be redeemed by gossip, by leisure or by revelings, but by frequent prayers, serious labor and constant application. St. Augustine taught that some time must be stolen also from worldly business, saying: "When someone brings a lawsuit against you, incur some loss, that you may have leisure for God and not for lawsuits; for that which you lose is the price of time. For as you give money and buy bread; so lose money, that you may buy for yourself rest and

time in order to have leisure for God; for this is to redeem the time."

Therefore, an opportunity for doing good must be bought at the expense of anything at all, since the days are evil. The days of this life are full of sorrows, dangers, temptations and sufferings, which either take away or lessen the occasion for doing good, as says St. Anselm. But if we allow this occasion to slip by and our life to pass away in mere resolutions of a better life, there will not be a moment more in which we may repair our negligences. "Our life," says the saint of Nazianzus, "is like a market, and when its day is past, there will be no more time for buying what you wish. Therefore, we must buy now, while it is the market day; we must live holily now, while strength remains." Ecclesiastes repeatedly inculcates this truth, saying: "Whatsoever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly" (Eccles. IX, 10). The Apostle frequently incites us by this very motive of time and occasion, in these words: "Whilst we have time, let us work good to all men" (Gal. VI, 10), because "it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep" (Rom. XIII, 11). "You sleep," says St. Ambrose, "but your time does not sleep, but walks." Well for that man, well for all those who not only think of these things, but also undertake labor, and live as they will wish to have lived when they come to die, and do those things which they will rejoice to have done when estab-

lished in eternal life. A slight negligence now becomes eternal loss. What has been once thought and done is once and for all eternal.

## II

## THE REWARD OF ETERNAL LIFE

Life in heaven is truly called life, and is perfect life inasmuch as it is animal, human, angelic, divine. There memory lives by the recollection of all the past; the intellect lives by the knowledge and vision of God; the will lives and enjoys the good of all things, and this without any fear of loss. Similarly, the appetite lives there, both the so-called concupiscible and the irascible; all the senses live and enjoy their own proper delights. There is no groaning, not even the least sign of lamentation or grief; there is the purest honey of joys, all the gall of sadness being dispelled. Here, O eyes, be silent; you have seen nothing like this life; here, O ears, be silent; you have heard nothing like it; be silent, O heart, you have thought of nothing like it. This life includes all delights, wealth, and honors, and the enjoyments of all lives, senses and powers. St. Augustine, inflamed with intense desire for this life, exclaims: "How great will be the felicity there where no evil will exist, no good will be hidden from view; where there will be leisure for the praises of God,

who will be all things in all. 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord: they shall praise Thee forever and ever' (Ps. LXXXIII, 5). All the members and organs of the incorruptible body will be employed in the praises of God. True glory will be there, where no one will be praised through the error or flattery of him who praises. True honor will be there, for it will be denied to no one deserving it, nor conferred on any one unworthy; but neither will any one who is undeserving seek it, where none but the worthy will be permitted to enter. God, who is the author of virtue, will there be its reward, for He has promised Himself, a gift than which there can be none better or greater. For what other meaning have these words that He uttered by His prophet: 'I shall be their God, and they shall be my people' (Levit. XXVI, 12), than, I shall be whatsoever things are rightly desired by all: life and health, food and abundance, glory and honor and peace and all good things? Thus, too, the words of the Apostle: 'that God may be all in all' (I Cor. XV, 28), are rightly interpreted as meaning that He will be the end of all our desires. And that blessed city will possess in itself this great good also, that no one who is lesser will envy one who is greater. As in the body the eye does not wish to be what the finger is, though the well-ordered structure of the whole body contains both." And he adds: "There at rest on the eternal Sabbath we shall see that God

is sweet, for we shall be filled with Him, since He will be all in all" (De Civ. Dei XXII. 30). O dear truth, true eternity, eternal felicity, my God!

The author of the book on The Spirit and Soul (St. Augustine, Opera, Tom. III. ch. LX) addresses this same life thus: "There is in you no corruption, nor defect, nor old age, nor wrath; but uninterrupted peace, everlasting glory, eternal joy, continual festivity. Truly there is only joy and exultation, and the flower and beauty of youth and of salvation accomplished. There is in you no yesterday nor anything of yesterday, but it is always the same today. God is for you salvation, life, infinite peace, all things. 'Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God, since the dwelling in thee is as it were of all rejoicing' (Ps. LXXXVI, 3, 7). There is in you no fear, no sadness; every desire passes over to enjoyment, since whatever is wished for is at hand, and whatever is desired abounds. They shall be inebriated from the fulness of Thy house, O God, and Thou wilt give them to drink from the torrent of Thy pleasure. Since with Thee is the fountain of life, in Thy light we shall see light, when we shall see Thee in Thyself and ourselves in Thee and Thee in ourselves by a continual vision and everlasting felicity."

Yet this everlasting felicity can be gained in a very short time and with no great labor by any man whatever. Christ, grieving over the people, says:

“I have compassion on the multitude, for behold they have now been with me three days” (Mark VIII, 2). Most sweet Jesus, you are counting the three days in which we are now with you; and why, O good Christ, do you not count the eternity of days in which you will in heaven perpetually bestow on us immortal joy? Behold how easy it is to merit eternal glory by brief labor! God counts and sets a value upon the least services; He counts the hairs growing on our heads, and will He not count the drops of blood shed for Him?

Therefore, we may exclaim with St. Jerome: “O how great happiness it is to receive great things for small, things eternal for temporal, and to have the Lord as our debtor!” But it is hard, you say, to suffer so many things daily; it is hard to die, although all other things may be easy. Why, O Christian, do you complain in a vain and childish manner? Are you ignorant of the following truth? I know that I ascend only to descend: that I live only to lose vigor; that I grow up only to reach old age; that I live only to die, and that I die only in order to be happy eternally. Therefore, “hope in the Lord forevermore, in the Lord God mighty forever” (Isai. XXVI, 4). I still have in mind St. Augustine, who in his sermon on the Words of God says: “When the Lord had uttered these words He concluded thus: ‘These shall go into everlasting fire; but the just into life everlasting’ (Matt. XXV, 46).



This is life everlasting which is promised to us. Because men love to live in this world, life is promised to them; and because they have great fear of dying, eternal life is promised to them. What do you love? Life. You shall have it. What do you fear? Death. You shall not suffer it. But those who shall be tormented in punishments have the wish to die, and cannot; therefore it is not a great thing to live long or to live always; but it is a great thing to live happily" (Serm. 64).

Therefore, in heaven you shall live and never die; there you shall live happily, for you shall neither suffer evils nor be able to suffer them. There you shall possess what you desire and you shall long to possess it; you cannot be deprived of your possession, and this will satisfy you. Therefore David, putting off all his hunger and thirst, says: "I shall be satisfied when Thy glory shall appear" (Ps. XVI, 5). A strange and wonderful saying for a king: he has a table well filled with food, and like a servant he hopes for satiety, but not from his own table. David continually hungered for another's food, he thirsted ardently for heavenly nectar. What in fact is all the luxury of all kings? The merest poverty and the baskets of mendicants, if the heavenly food be thought of. "Eat," the King of Heaven will say, "and drink and be inebriated, my dearly beloved" (Cant. V, 1). This banquet will have no end, no sadness will succeed it; what is today will be eternal.

Nor does Augustine here refrain from again exclaiming: "O life that is truly life, life eternal and eternally happy, where there is joy without sorrow, rest without labor, riches without loss, health without weakness (and truly there is no such thing in this life), abundance without want, life without death, continuity without corruption, beatitude without misfortune; where all good things are perfected in charity; where there is full knowledge in all things and through all things; where the majesty of God is seen face to face, and the minds of those who gaze are satisfied with this food of life; they always see and desire to see; they desire without anxiety and are satisfied without weariness" (*De Gaudiis Paradisi* 7).

And that you may know, my Christian friend, that this glory so exalted, this wealth so sublime, this kingdom, can be purchased, hear again the same Augustine: "God says to you: What I have is for sale; buy it. What have you for sale? I have rest for sale, he replies; buy it. You say to Him: How much does it cost? Its price is labor. How much labor is that rest worth which has no end? If you wish to make a true comparison and to form a true judgment, you will be forced to say that eternal rest is rightly purchased by eternal labor. This is true; but do not fear; God is merciful. For if you had eternal labor, you would never attain eternal rest. Therefore, that you may at some time obtain that

which you are purchasing, you are not obliged to labor eternally, not because it is not worth so much, but in order that what is purchased may be possessed. Indeed, that rest is worth being purchased by everlasting labor; but it is necessary that it be bought by temporal labor" (In Ps. 93). Therefore let us, my Christian friends, encourage ourselves to labor with this same Augustine.

"When eternal life is promised, let the life which we place before our eyes be such that we remove from it whatever trouble we suffer here; for we shall more easily discover what is not there than what is. And yet this life is for sale; buy it if you wish, and you will not be much disturbed in this important matter on account of the greatness of the price. It is worth only as much as you have; therefore, do not inquire what you have, but what you are. The thing is of equal value with yourself; it is worth as much as you are. Give yourself and you will have it. Why are you disturbed and troubled? Will you not seek yourself? Behold, give yourself just as you are and what you are, and you will have it. But I am wicked, you say, and perhaps He will not receive me. By giving yourself to Him you will become good. That you give yourself to this pledge and promise means that you are good. But when you become good, you will be the price of this thing; and you will have not only what I have mentioned — salvation, security, life, and life without end —

not only this will you have, but I remove other things. For there it will not be possible to become weary, to sleep, to feel hunger and thirst, to reach maturity and old age; nor will it be possible there to be born, where the number always remains unchanged. The number which exists is absolute, and there is no need that it be increased, because there it does not become diminished. Behold, how much I have brought forward, and not yet have I said what will be there, for this 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man' (I Cor. II, 9). For whence would it enter into my heart to say what has not entered into the heart of man?" (Serm. 64 De Verb. Dom.)

And because we have here been conducted to the celestial paradise through the books of Augustine as through gardens, let us add to the former quotations the following words of that same eloquent and holy doctor: "If we were obliged daily to endure all torments, to suffer for a long time hell itself, so that we might be able to see Christ in His glory and to be associated with His saints, would it not be worth suffering every severity, in order that we might be ranked as sharers in so great a good, so great a glory? Therefore, let the demons lay snares, let them prepare their temptations, let fastings weaken the body, let rough garments harass the flesh, let labors oppress and watchings exhaust it; let one man cry out against me, another disquiet me,

let cold cause me to shiver, let conscience murmur, let heat burn, let my head ache, my chest be inflamed, my stomach be swollen, my countenance grow pale; let my whole body be weakened, my life waste away in pain and my years in groanings; let corruption enter my bones and well up within me; provided only I rest in the day of tribulation and ascend to our people who have girded themselves. For what will be the glory of the just? How great the joy of the saints, when each face shall shine as the sun, when the Lord in His Father's kingdom will begin to review His people in their separate ranks, and will bestow upon the merits and works of each the promised rewards: things heavenly for earthly, eternal for temporal" (De Gaudiis Paradisi 15).

Think therefore of the ancient days, and have in mind the eternal years. Think on eternity, my friend, think, think on eternal punishments and eternal joys, and never (safely do I promise it) will you complain of any adversity. The following words will never fall from your lips: This is too severe; this is intolerable; this is too hard. You will say that all things are tolerable and easy, and never will you be more satisfied with yourself than when you are most afflicted.

John Moschus (Chap. 14) relates that Olympius, an old man of remarkable patience, in the hermitage of Gerasimus near the Jordan, endured with the

greatest patience all kinds of troubles by considering things eternal. A certain religious, who was a stranger, once met him on the road and not without surprise asked him: "How, pray, my dear Olympius, can you exist in this cave in so great heat, among stinging insects and swarms of flies?" Olympius replied: "My son, these things are light; I bear them that I may escape those other unbearable eternal torments. I suffer the stings of these insects, that I may escape the worm that never dies; it is easy for him to undergo these heats who fears eternal fire. These sufferings of mine, although they are troublesome, are yet brief and will have an end; those others will have none." Both truth and wisdom favor you, Olympius; you have said this with as much wisdom as truth. Would that there were many to think as you did; many, also, to suffer as you did.

### III

#### EPILOGUE TO ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID

It is said that Zeuxes, who was very famous among the painters of antiquity, lingered over his work more scrupulously and longer than befitted so excellent an artist; and when he was asked why he painted everything so exactly in every detail and with so careful and slow a brush, he replied: "I paint slowly, because I paint for eternity." We,

too, are all painting for eternity; for whatever works we perform have a bearing on eternity, so that we can each truly say: "It is for eternity that I write, read, sing, pray, labor; whatever I do and say, whatever I even think, is for eternity." But if this is the reason for all our labors, let us paint with a hand not swift nor negligent but careful, in order that we may send to eternity works perfectly elaborated. Certainly they must all be sent there either for punishment or for reward. I repeat what should be repeated and instilled a thousand times: What has been once thought, said and done is eternal.

St. Gregory says: "With vigilant care must our intention be weighed in all our works, so that in all that it does it may seek nothing temporal, but fix itself wholly in the firm foundation of eternity" (Bk. II In Iob). Therefore in all your works be perfect: pray, study, suffer, struggle, labor for eternity; live for God, live for heaven, live for eternity.

Truly does St. Bernard say: "Our works do not pass as they seem to do; but all temporal things are sown as seeds of eternity. The fool will marvel when he shall behold arising from this small seed a plentiful harvest, either good or bad according to the quality of the sowings. He who believes this truth thinks that no sin is small, for the reason that he values the future harvest more than the sowing." (Serm. 15).

O dangerous and pitiable madness of the sons of

Adam! We have been created for the possession of infinite and eternal blessings: why then do we basely mold ourselves with our whole affection upon models that are fleeting and vain? God has enrolled us as heirs of heaven and possessors of eternity: why do we so eagerly crave the earth, only to perish wretchedly in the coils of our vanities? Let us be wise while we may; let us live for eternity, and let us advance toward it by long strides daily. The road is short and narrow; the end is very broad.

But wretched that we are, or rather foolish, we wish to obtain eternal life, and we do not wish to set out on the road to that life; we desire to be there, yet we refuse to go thither. There is no one who does not long to be happy. As St. Augustine says: "There is no one, in whatever rank of life he be, who does not desire a happy life. A happy life, then, is the common possession of all. But how each reaches this life, by what means he strives for it, what road he tries in order to attain it, is the disputed point. If we should seek a happy life on earth, I am inclined to think that we cannot find it, not because what we seek is bad, but because we do not seek it in its proper place. One man says: Happy they who lead a soldier's life. Another denies this and says: Happy they who practice agriculture. Still another denies this and says: Happy they who gain popular fame in law and plead cases. Again, another denies this and says: Happy they who are



judges and have power to hear and decide lawsuits. Yet another denies this and says: Happy they who traverse many regions, learn many things and amass great wealth. You see, my friends, in all that multitude of careers not one pleases all, and yet a happy life pleases all" (Serm, 112, De Martyr. Massa Candida).

Happiness, therefore, is not to be looked for here, but is to be sought elsewhere, and can be found only by a good death. Even the wicked desire a good death, although they avoid a good life. To die well brings felicity; to live well entails labor. The one is not obtained without the other. Eternity depends on death, and death on a good or bad life. Choose now: to have perished once is to have perished eternally.

Not many years ago a man of noble blood and of keen mind, but belonging to the new religion, was asked what he thought of the austere life of religious men and the freer life of others. He replied: "I would prefer to live with the latter, to die with the former." Cleverly said indeed; but he could have made the following reply as befitted a Christian: "I wish to live with those with whom I should like to die." Thus, too, the wish of Balaam was not bad: "Let my soul die the death of the just" (Numb. XXIII, 10). But Balaam's prayer would have been wiser and more advantageous to himself had he said: "Let my soul live the life of the just that it

may die the death of the just." For, whoever lives the life of the good will also die the death of the good; likewise, whoever lives the life of the wicked will also perish by their death, and this once and forever and eternally.

A centurion named Lamachus once chided a soldier for a mistake he had committed. The latter, to atone for his fault, promised that he would not again be found guilty of such an act. Whereupon the centurion said: "In war, my good man, one may not sin twice." In death, alas, one may sin not even once; for such a sin as this is irrevocable. Once dead you are always dead; having once died a bad death you are forever damned. You will never be able throughout all eternity to correct this death, to escape this damnation.

"The words 'I did not think' are shameful in the mouth of an emperor," says Iphicrates. More shameful and far more injurious are the following words when uttered by a Christian: "I did not think that there was so much difference between a chaste and a dissolute life; I did not think that a whole eternity depended upon it. I certainly did not think that I should die so soon." Alas, how drowsily we attend to the business of eternity! And yet this life of ours is mortal and has not even a moment of which it can be certain. But while it is absolutely certain that we must pass hence, yet the hour is most uncertain. When that hour shall arrive, it

will seem that you have not so much lived as that you have in a moment flown to death. You are a tenant, not a possessor; a house has been rented, not given to you. Although you do not wish it, you shall depart; for we have not here a lasting city.

Baruch, the divine prophet, asks: "Where are the princes of the nations, and they that rule over the beasts that are upon the earth, that hoard up silver and gold, and there is no end of their getting?" (Baruch III, 16-18). Do they not still retain their kingdoms and their glory? And the prophet answers himself: "They are cut off and are gone down to hell, and others are risen up in their place" (Baruch III, 19). They have departed, he says, for they are tenants, not possessors. Their houses are rented to others, while they are cast out and banished to hell. But if it should be asked: "Where are the princes of heaven, who inhabit that lofty empyrean space?" it cannot be said in reply: "They are cut off, and others are risen up in their place"; but they remain in the celestial kingdom, and never will they be cast out by any successors.

"Let us crown ourselves with roses," say men of dissolute and profligate life. Indeed it is with roses, whose beauty and fragrance vanish in a single day, that they crown themselves, and they too are destined to perish likewise. But the blessed are crowned with gems and precious stones, whose beauty does not perish. On the head of that mar-

vellous woman of the Apocalypse is a crown, not of roses from the garden, not of gems from the sea, but of stars from heaven. Therefore, as the heavenly orbs are incorruptible, so those who inhabit them are fixed and immortal. "But the just shall live for evermore" (Wisd. V, 16). All earthly things are fleeting, those of heaven are everlasting. Here labor that is not long wearies us, there eternal rest receives us. And why do we seek rest before the end of labor? We are still in the arena, in the dust, in the race-course. We must sweat, rush forward, struggle.

Excellent is this saying of St. Gregory: "If we consider the nature and greatness of those things which are promised to us in heaven, all the possessions of earth become vile in our estimation. For what tongue is capable of expressing, what intellect of comprehending, how great are the joys of that supernal city? And they are these: To be present amid the choirs of angels, to appear before the glory of the Creator with the blessed spirits, to gaze upon the countenance of God face to face, to behold boundless light, to be disturbed by no fear of death, to rejoice in the gift of everlasting incorruption. But the soul is on fire after those things of which she has heard, and desires to take her stand at once in that place where she hopes to rejoice without end. But it is possible to attain to great rewards only through great labors. Whence also Paul, that

remarkable preacher, says: 'No one will be crowned unless he strive lawfully' (2 Tim. II. 5). Therefore, let the greatness of the rewards delight the mind, but let not the contest of labors terrify it. We must advance and continue to advance. Not the roughness of the road, but the blessed eternity of our native land must be considered." (Hom. 37. In Evang.)

The same holy doctor expresses this idea remarkably well in the following words: "This is wont to be the special mark of the elect, that they understand how to make the journey of this present life in such a way, that through the certitude of their hope they know that they have now come to high places, since they see that all things which flow past lie beneath them; and through love for eternity they trample upon everything which in this world is elevated. For this is the meaning of what the Lord through the prophet says to the soul that follows Him: 'I shall raise thee above the heights of earth.' There are, as it were, certain lower parts of the earth, namely, losses, insults, poverty, abjection, which even the lovers of the world do not cease to trample upon, in their endeavor to avoid them as they walk along the level surface of the broad road. But the heights of the earth are the acquisition of property, the flatteries of inferiors, abundance of riches, honor and distinction of offices; and he who is still advancing along the road of low desires regards

these things as high, for the reason that he considers them great. But if once the heart is fixed on heavenly things, it soon discovers how low are those objects which seemed high. For as he who climbs a mountain looks down for a little while upon certain objects lying below, and then directs his steps further on to higher places; so when a man strives to fix his attention on the highest things, and has by this very exertion discovered that the glory of the present life is nothing, he is elevated above the heights of earth; and what he formerly, when fixed in the lowest desires, believed to be above him, afterwards as he makes progress in the ascent, he finds are below him." (Moral, Bk. XIII, ch. 14.)

Not out of keeping with this reasoning of blessed Gregory will be the following golden lesson of St. Augustine: "That which must sometimes be sacrificed of necessity should be voluntarily given up for an eternal reward." Moses lived a long time and in good health, and at length ceased to live. Mathusala lived longer, but he, too, at length departed from among the living and died. This is the epitaph of us all: And he died. We all die and flow away like water. The soul is immortal and eternal; it will live forever, either for reward or for punishment. Here on earth we cast the die, the irrevocable die of eternity. O happy eternity, O eternal happiness! How happens it that we think of you so rarely, so slightly, so cursorily? How happens it that for

your sake we do not labor more, are not more solicitous? O my God and my all, open our eyes, that we may learn what eternity is, how immense it is, how happy or miserable it is. Thou hast created us for Thyself, Thou hast created us for eternity. Because Thou art eternity Thou didst wish, didst order, didst decree to make us sharers of Thy eternity. Grant that we may spend this moment of time virtuously and holily, that in it we may labor for eternity, may suffer and struggle for eternity, and that we may utter the same cry to all, and thereby save as many souls as possible that are likely to perish for eternity. Listen, Christians; listen, pagans; listen, kings; listen, princes; listen, my country; let the whole world listen: No security is great enough where eternity is at stake.

O long, O deep, O abysmal, O eternal eternity! Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house, O Lord, in the eternal mountains; they will praise Thee through infinite myriads of ages.

When Moses at the approach of death was commending Israel to God and invoking blessings, he bade farewell last of all to the race of Aser in these words: "Let Aser be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. His shoe shall be iron and brass. As the days of thy youth, so also shall thy old age be. There is no other God like the God of the rightest. He that is mounted upon the heaven is thy helper.

By His magnificence the clouds run hither and thither. His dwelling is above, and underneath are the everlasting arms." (Deut. XXXIII, 24-27.) Thus, God stretches forth the arms of His power over an immense tract of heaven, and beneath these arms of His all this world, all time, and all the things of this world are contained, hasten this way and that, and are guided. Thus, God from the beginning, nay, from the eternity of His predestination, was the dwelling of all the good, whom He encompasses and protects, as if by some eternal and continual arms. Ascend, therefore, and enter this dwelling of thine, O soul that dost struggle here with earth and mud; stretch thyself forth and ascend to Him that is mounted upon the heaven, to thy God who dwells in the highest mountains of eternity. Established there in safety, look down upon the earth and see how trifling are those things which here either entice thee by the desire they arouse or terrify thee by the fear they inspire. Behold, how paltry are all things which are contained in this point of earth. Behold, in comparison with God, in comparison with eternity, how vain, how unstable, how fleeting are all created things; nay, how all things are a great nothing. Therefore, seek the one supreme and immense good; esteem all else as of little value. Strive after God, expand in God. Trample under foot whatever charm under the sun, under the moon allures thee, whatever terror



threatens thee. Think on things eternal, and constantly turn over in your mind the following saying of St. Jerome: "No labor ought to seem hard, no time long by which the glory of eternity is gained."

An evil spirit which had once taken possession of a camel, upon being brought into the presence of the famous St. Hilarion, began to rage in a terrible manner, as if it would devour the holy man on the spot. To whom Hilarion said: "You do not terrify me, O demon, though in so large a body; whether in a fox or in a camel, you are one and the same to me." Soon this raging camel fell down before him, and all its former ferocity subsided into a ridiculous tameness. Such are all the flatteries, all the temptations of the world, all its bugbears. What do you hope for? What do you fear? What do you love? "He that is mounted upon the heaven is thy helper." He encompasses you with His eternal arms; and with these same arms He so tightly confines your enemies who either entice or terrify you, that He could crush them all with one movement, like flies. Does the pleasure of lust or gluttony allure you? It is trifling, despise it; think on eternal pleasure. Do threats terrify you, sufferings overwhelm you, does contempt afflict you, disease attack you, secret poverty weary you? All these things are trifling, and the more bitterly they assail you, so much the briefer is their attack. Look down upon these things and look up to heaven, think on eternity. "Whatsoever

shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad" (Prov. XII, 21). Even though the heavens should fall, the ruins will smite him undaunted. Therefore, is the just man never sad? Therefore, does no affliction befall him? By no means: "Many are the afflictions of the just" (Ps. XXXIII, 20). But the just consider all evils of this kind as trifles, they regard that as the only real evil which is eternal and which separates from God, as sin and the penalty of sin, eternal death, separate. "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen," says the doctor of the gentiles (2 Cor. IV, 18). These only are truly great, whether they are good or evil.

But we who so rarely look at the things which we see not, what grown up or rather aged children we are! We grieve over a piece of ice which we could not hold and which has fallen from our hands. We stand dazed over shadows and in our dreams we have deep wisdom; we pine away over those things which will not only pass in a little while, but which are passing even now. Not only will the figure of this world pass, but it is already passing, it is in its very passage. And as all those good things which we here enjoy are unstable; so all the evil things by which we are oppressed are not lasting. Those things only which are not seen possess an unchanging state, know no end, admit of no termination, are ignorant of change, are fixed, im-

movable, eternal. I repeat a thousand times the warning of St. Jerome, and thousands of times should it be repeated: "No labor ought to seem hard, no time long by which the glory of eternity is gained."

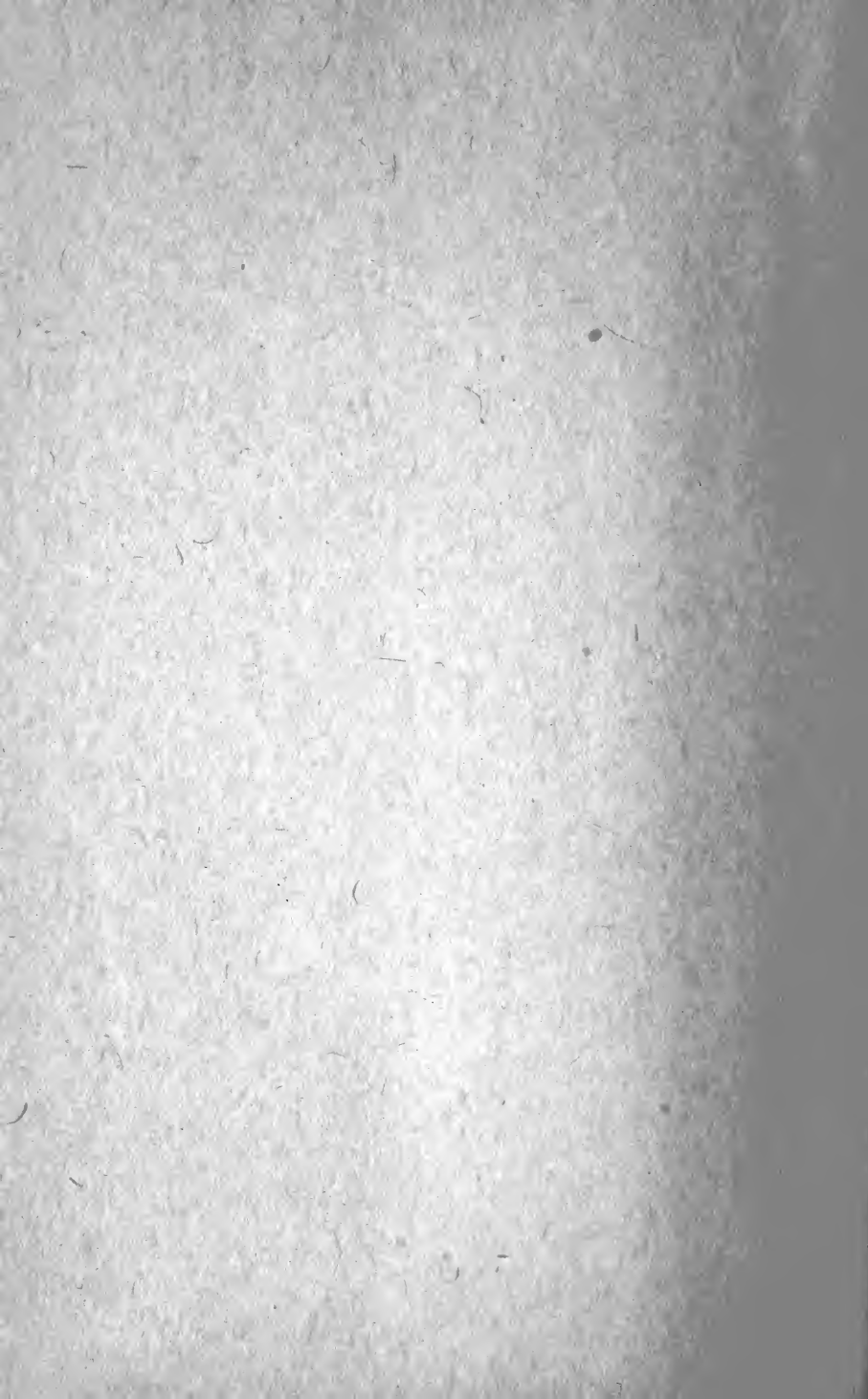
Symphorian, a Christian youth, after undergoing no ordinary scourging with rods, was being led to his final punishment at Autun. He was met on the way by his mother, who, not with dishevelled hair, nor beating her breast, nor crying out in womanish fashion, but comporting herself as befitted a Christian heroine, exclaimed: "My son, my son, remember eternal life; look up to heaven and behold Him who reigns there. Life is not being taken from you, but is being exchanged for a better." The youth, encouraged by these words of his mother, fearlessly offered his neck to the sword.

We, too, my Christian friends, are now being led: we are all going to death, the final punishment, but with a slower step. All the inhabitants of heaven cry out to us: "Remember eternal life, look up to heaven and behold Him who reigns there." Christian, whoever you are, show yourself here a Symphorian; do not shrink from labor and struggle, but courageously endure even the sword, if need be, for Christ. Here be brave, here show fortitude, and when you are tempted, when you grieve, are sad, are afflicted, when you are despised, ridiculed, defamed, when you are robbed and tormented in vari-

ous ways even more than Job, imitate Symphorian and a thousand other Christians, and with steadfast heart give utterance again and again to this cry: "Whatever is here is but for a little while, is brief; farewell, all things; thee only do I greet, O Eternity."

ETERNITY IS WITHOUT END





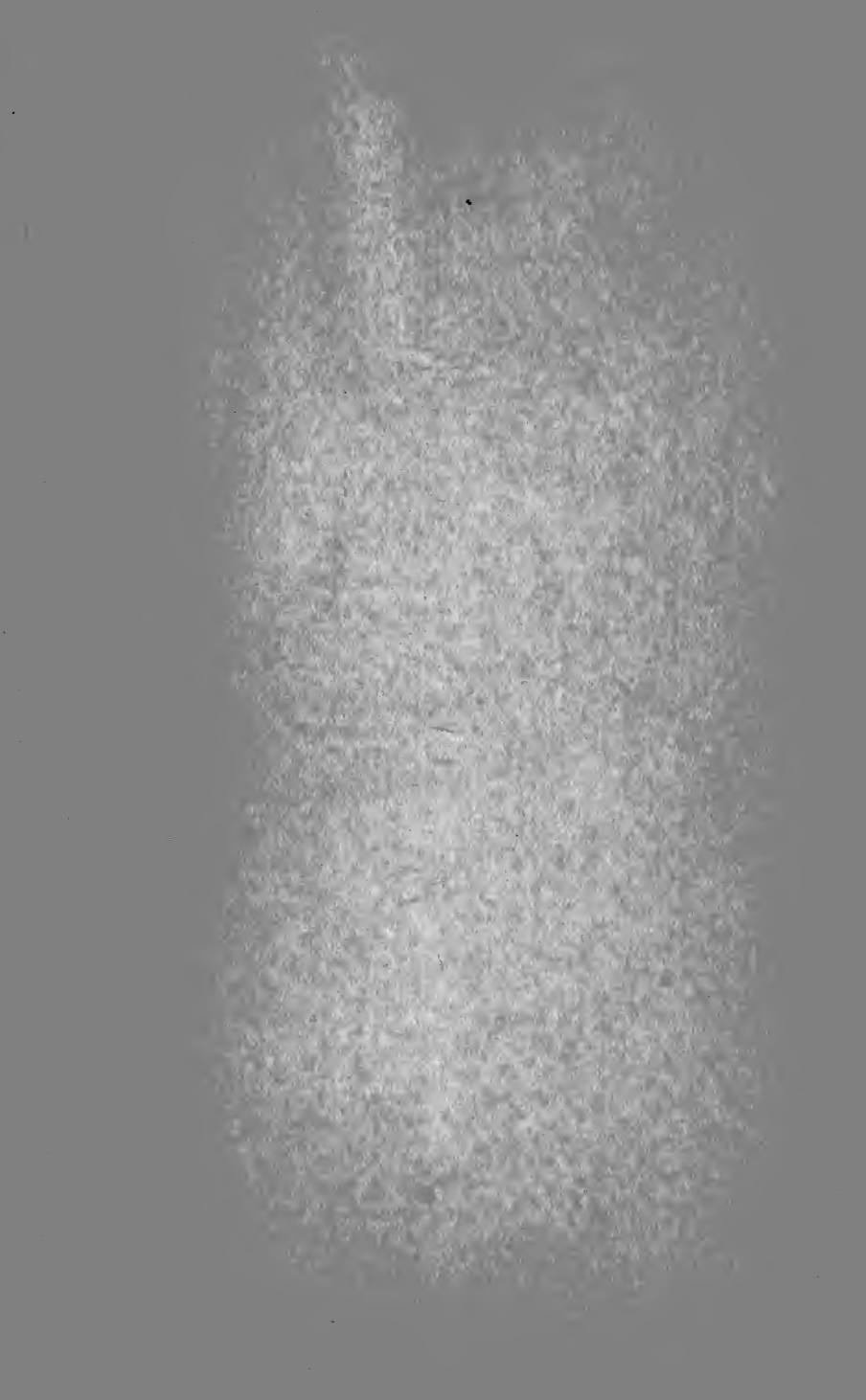


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