



**Three Friends of God: Records from the
Lives of John Tauler, Nicholas of Basle,
Henry Suso**

by

Frances Bevan

About *Three Friends of God: Records from the Lives of John Tauler, Nicholas of Basle, Henry Suso* by Frances Bevan

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RECORDS FROM THE LIVES

OF

JOHN TAULER, NICHOLAS OF BASLE, HENRY SUSO

BY

FRANCES BEVAN,

AUTHOR OF

“TREES PLANTED BY THE RIVER,” “HYMNS OF TER STEEGEN,”

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PREFACE

THE short account given in the following pages of three of the “Friends of God” of the fourteenth century is but a small fragment of a history which would form in itself a voluminous library, the History of the “Brethren” of the Middle Ages, known to us under many names, but in England chiefly as the Lollards or Boni Homines. Any account of these widely scattered and persecuted Christians must necessarily be a very imperfect one, as their history is told us chiefly by enemies, who were both ignorant of their true principles, and eager to malign them. And when, as in the histories that follow, they were themselves the narrators, we find that their writings were altered and enlarged by copyists who had an interest in doing so, or who imagined they rendered them more edifying by additions of their own. It is therefore necessary to remark that, though historical accuracy has been faithfully aimed at in the following stories, and though no addition whatever has been made by the writer to the original accounts, and though, further, the actual words of the “Friends of God” have been employed in making extracts from their writings, the history may yet be open to correction from further researches which are now being made by painstaking historians. The authors who have been followed in the account now given are, besides the three “Friends of God” themselves, Dr. Carl Schmidt, whose histories of Tauler, and of Nicholas of Basle, are the result of great labour and research; and Dr. Ludwig Keller, whose book, most interesting for German readers, “The Reformation, and the Older Reforming Bodies, described in their connection with one another,” will well repay a careful study.” A few words from his preface may not be out of place on the present occasion.

“The bodies thus connected were, as the following pages will show, those communities of ‘Brethren’ which under various names are well known as existing during many centuries, but whose true history lies hidden under the veil which the orthodox Churches, for good reason, spread over the fate of these persecuted Christians, who were called by them ‘heretics, or ‘sectaries,’ and against whom they waged war by fire and sword.

“The history of these ‘communities of Brethren,’ who called themselves simply ‘Christians,’ reminds us, in a remarkable manner, in the mode by which they are described, and in the course of their destiny, of the incidents of the earliest Christian centuries. For it was just those ‘Christians,’ who were represented by the chief authors of antiquity as the ‘offscouring of all things,’ who were hated and persecuted as sectaries by the Jewish and heathen priesthood — we may recall that Paul himself was brought to trial as ‘a leader of the sect of the Nazarenes’ — it was just those despised men who were the beginning of a new era for the heathen and the Jewish world.

“In accordance with the prediction of Christ, ‘If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you,’ the ‘true Christians’ have in all ages been persecuted as being a sect, or sectaries; have been calumniated and hated. But according to the further prediction of the Redeemer, they have arisen as it were from the ashes, and the hatred of the world has been of no avail.”

Thus, though an exterminating war was carried on against these earlier Reformers, we find that two centuries after the events related in the stories that follow, the hidden stream of life burst forth afresh into the daylight, and Martin Luther rejoiced to reprint and circulate the writings of the “Friends of God.”

It is right to observe that there are some historians who are not fully satisfied that the great preacher converted by means of the “Friend of God from the Oberland” was really Dr. Tauler.

Others, again, deny the identity of the “Friend of God from the Oberland” with Nicholas of Basle.

But having examined these various theories, that of Dr. Carl Schmidt, who has devoted many years to careful investigation of these questions, appears to be conclusive. He admits, however, an uncertainty as to the date of the conversion of Dr. Tauler, as it is given variously in manuscripts and in the first printed accounts.

The history of Henry Suso is not that of a man recognised as belonging to the communities of “Brethren.” But it was to them that he belonged in heart, far more than in external observances, and was recognised as a “Friend of God,” by those who used the term (as it was mostly used) to express a true relation with God as to spiritual life, whether within or without the outward pale of the Roman Church.

Thus do “Friends of God,” who stood in immediate connection with Waldensian “Brethren,” speak of him, and he was probably far more free from Roman superstitions than the writer of his life, who seems to have coloured him according to her own thoughts of Catholic orthodoxy. His own words are the best and surest indication of his right to be classed with the sect of all sects, “that which is everywhere spoken against.” If any, who read the history of the labours and persecutions of the three “Friends,” still groping more or less in the ignorance and darkness of Popish superstition, should thereby be stirred up to truer devotedness to Him who has in His grace granted us fuller light and knowledge, the prayers of the writer will be answered.

And may we learn, in reading of the patience, the tenderness, and the love, with which the Lord welcomed and taught His ignorant children, with which He bore their ways of willfulness and superstition, and led them on to fuller knowledge of Himself, to bear with the ignorance and the folly of His people now. Indifference to error, and patience with ignorance, are two different things. We cannot force light into the soul, but we are not therefore to be satisfied to see the people of God wandering from His way by evil teaching. And let us look to ourselves lest we too should be yet in ignorance less excusable than that of the “Friends of God.”

In conclusion, it will be well if these histories lead us to realise, as never before, the Presence on the earth, of Him who was sent down to “teach all things” to believing souls. The living personal intercourse of the Holy Ghost with these sheep of God, who were otherwise without a Shepherd, is almost startling to us in these days when we are apt to look to human teachers, and human books. It should not surprise us that the Lord condescended to teach them from time to time by dreams, or by vivid pictures presented to the mind, which they regarded as visions. Such modes of teaching are not uncommon in our days amongst the ignorant and illiterate, and the Lord has used them apparently more or less in all ages. But it would be well if all of us knew more of that simple and direct communication with God, which Nicholas of Basle and Henry Suso attempted to explain in words, but which none who have known it can really or adequately express.

Whilst men are ready to believe in spiritualism or in any delusions of the evil one, or of the mind of man, they are utterly blind to the fact that the real, true, and supernatural intercourse with God is the privilege and experience of all those who have believed in Jesus. We who believe may well humble ourselves that we know so little of it, but that it is the standing fulfillment of the great promises of John xiv, xv, and xvi we know well, unless indeed we are so wanting in the faith which appropriates those glorious promises, that we have yet to learn what it is to hear the voice of God. In order to give a true and vivid account of the simple, childlike communication with God, granted to these saints of old, care has been taken to keep as closely as possible to their actual words and

expressions, even when such expressions betray the ignorance which marks mediaeval Christianity. We may some day know better than we now know, how much ignorance marks the Christianity of the nineteenth century. Yet we cannot deny that God in His grace has given us light through the free circulation of His Word, which the believers of the Middle ages never had. The difficulty of rendering mediaeval German in modern English makes it impossible to give the full force of many passages, and in such cases the sense, rather than the actual words, has been aimed at in the translation. The extracts, therefore, either from Dr. Tauler's sermons, or from his history of his conversion, or from the autobiographies of Nicholas of Basle, and of Suso, are given as literally as possible, with the desire to convey the actual words, or if that should be impossible on account of the want of English equivalents, the actual sense of every passage. A short, but interesting, life of Suso may be found in Ullman's "Reformers before the Reformation," taken from Diepenbrock's "Life of Suso," which is a reproduction of the old German biography by Elizabeth Staglin.

It should further be borne in mind that the following pages aim rather at recording the light and teaching vouchsafed by the Lord to His servants, than furnishing a complete biography of either of them, which would necessarily comprise much which to modern readers would be of little profit, though doubtless of historical interest to some. Much more might be recorded, as matter of history, but the present account is rather that of their intercourse with God, than of their place in mediaeval history, which would include a great variety of details, entirely apart from the purpose of the present record.

CHAPTER I

THE SERMON OF DR. TAULER

IT came to pass in the year 1340, or thereabouts, that the streets of the city of Strasburg were crowded with men, women, and children, who were all going in the direction of the great church.

There were knights and nobles and ladies from the castles around, and citizens and their wives, and monks and priests. And there were the Beguine “sisters” and the Beghard “brothers,” who nursed the sick, and took care of homeless and infirm people, and orphans, and neglected children.

And there were, most of all, working men and peasants, and poor people from the dark narrow streets of the city.

And there were foreigners from other countries, for many people came from distant lands, to hear the great preacher of Strasburg.

He was a learned and eloquent man, and he had a loving and tender heart, and he spoke from his heart, not from his head only. He had been preaching at Strasburg for ten or twelve years back, or longer still, for he was now, in 1340, fifty years old, and his name was well known far and near.

The people of Strasburg valued their great preacher all the more, because sixteen years before nearly all their priests and preachers had left the city, and the great cathedral and the churches were shut up, except when a few priests who remained in the city, or who came there from other places, had an occasional service. And even this was forbidden.

By whom? It was by the man who called himself the Vicar of Christ on earth, and whose commands were therefore to be obeyed as if the voice of God Himself had spoken.

It came to pass thus. In the year 1314, two German princes, Frederick of Austria and Lewis of Bavaria, were elected at the same time as Emperors of Rome. Each one had a strong party on his side, and the Pope had taken part with Frederick. The Pope had good reasons for so doing. Twelve years earlier it had been declared in the famous Bull of Boniface VIII, called *Unam Sanctam*, that it was a necessary condition of the salvation of every human being, that he should own himself a subject of the Pope of Rome. Boniface had already, two years before, appeared at the great Jubilee, dressed on alternate days as Pope and Emperor. From this time it became a distinctly avowed article of faith, “that there is no power ordained of God but that of the Pope, all other power only exists as subservient to his power, and in so far as he deposes his authority to such power.” The Emperor Lewis had no thought of acknowledging such an article of faith. There were not wanting thousands in Germany who rose in opposition to this marvelous addition to the Word of God. At the head of this opposition stood the brave and God-fearing Emperor, of whom we have the testimony of eleven German cities, that “he was a man doing justice, and striving after righteousness: of all the princes of the world, it is he who lives most conformably to the teachings of Christ; and in faith, as well as in modesty and in moderation, he shines as an example to others.” In the year 1324 a Bull of Pope John XXII declared Lewis a protector and furtherer of heretics, especially of “heretics of Lombardy.” In 1327 a Bull of the same Pope declared him to be himself a heretic, and summoned him to appear at Avignon to receive his sentence. The Emperor took no notice of this summons. The following year the Rector of the University of Paris, Marsilius of Padua, was excommunicated as the author of manifold heresies. He betook himself to the court of the Emperor Lewis, and

presented to him the book he had written, which had brought down upon him the ban of the Pope. "What in the world," said the Emperor, "has induced you to leave the peaceable land of France, and come here, where we are all at war with one another?" Marsilius replied, that love to the Church of Christ had brought him to Germany. "For the Church of the Pope," he said, "is full of vain pretensions. I am prepared to defend the truth, as I have learnt it, against all who oppose it, and if needful, to lay down my life for it." What were the heresies of Marsilius? We find that those contained in his book are precisely the same as those of which the Waldenses in his day, and Wyclif in later days, were accused by Rome. "The Church," he said, "is a word commonly used to mean bishops, priests, and deacons." (Just as even now, in Protestant England, we may be told that a young man has gone into the Church, by which is meant that he has become a clergyman.) "This use of the word," said Marsilius, "is entirely in opposition to the meaning attached to it by the apostles. For they have taught us that the Church is the Assembly, that is to say, the entire body of those who believe in Christ. In this sense does Paul use the word, when he writes 'to the Church' — that is, the Assembly — 'at Corinth.'" He explained also, that it is God alone, not the priest, who can forgive sins. "He alone can forgive sins who died for our sins. The only sense in which the priest can give absolution, is the sense in which the gaoler unlocks the prison door; he has no authority to let out the prisoner; but when the judge declares him free, the gaoler may let him out. And God alone looks at the heart, not the priest. An impenitent man may receive absolution, but that does not give him remission of sins, and the penitent man who confesses his sin to God is absolved, whether the priest consents to it or not. For it is written that there is One only who is able to save and to destroy." More might be related, did space permit, of the teaching of Marsilius. For the present history it is only needful to say further, that the Emperor Lewis gave him a warm welcome, appointed him his physician, and esteemed him greatly. Six years later he was required by the Cardinals of John XXII to dismiss Marsilius, as a condition of peace with Rome. But Lewis refused. Later on Benedict XII required it also. But Lewis never yielded. Marsilius died in his service in the year 1342. It is therefore not to be wondered at, that of the two rival princes, the Pope should have preferred Frederick, and should have been the bitter enemy of Lewis.

For long years the war lasted which was to decide the fate of the Empire. When at last it became evident that Lewis was gaining the day, and that

most of the German towns owned him as Emperor, the Pope, John XXII, laid the Empire under an interdict. He also excommunicated the Emperor Lewis. "May the Almighty God cast Lewis down, and give him into the hands of his enemies and pursuers! May he fall into an unforeseen snare! Cursed be his going out and his coming in! May the Lord smite him with folly and blindness! May the lightning of Heaven blast him! May the wrath of God, and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, burn against him like fire, in this world, and in the world to come! May the whole earth arm itself against him! May the deep open and swallow him up alive! May his name be clean forgotten, and his memory perish from among men! May all the elements oppose him! May his house be left desolate, may his children be driven from their dwellings, and slain by his enemies before the eyes of their father!"

Thus sounded from Rome the voice of the shepherd of the flock! The Emperor Lewis allowed the Pope to curse, and took no notice of it, except by commanding the clergy in the German Empire to continue their services, and to turn a deaf ear to the Pope. The interdict forbade all services and all preaching.

It can easily be imagined what awe and terror took possession of the many thousands who looked upon the sacraments as the doors of Heaven, and who depended upon the priests for the forgiveness of their sins. When the people of Strasburg saw their priests leave the town, and saw the church doors shut, there were many amongst them who felt as though they were forsaken of God, and delivered over to the devil and his angels.

But the great preacher, Dr. John Tauler, did not share their fears. He stayed behind, and he taught and preached, and cheered and comforted the poor people, who would otherwise have felt themselves like sheep without a shepherd. So the people not only admired his sermons, but they loved him greatly, and whenever he preached, they went in crowds to listen, and they felt proud of their city, because their preacher was talked of in France, and Switzerland and Italy, as well as in the German towns far and near.

The preacher was a meek and modest man, but it was hard for him not to feel that he was wiser and, it may be, holier, than other men. For he who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his feet, and Dr. John Tauler had heard many flattering speeches, and had perhaps come to believe that some of them were true.

On this day which I have mentioned, in the year 1340, Dr. Tauler watched the crowds who came into the great church, and his heart yearned over them, and he preached, as was his wont, earnestly and solemnly. And the people listened to him as though he were an angel from Heaven.

Amongst them there sat a stranger who came from a city thirty leagues distant, but whose home was still farther away, amongst the great Alps with snowy peaks, and wild glaciers, in the Bernese Oberland.

The stranger was a grave and yet a simple-looking man, and he kept his eyes fixed upon Dr. Tauler as though he loved to look at him. And he thought as he looked at him, "The Master is a very loving, gentle, good-hearted man by nature. He has also a good understanding of the Holy Scripture. But he is dark as to the light of grace, for he has never known it."

Then the man's heart yearned over Dr. Tauler, for he had been warned of God three times in a dream, when he was in Switzerland, that he should go and hear him. And he knew that it was God who had shown him how dark was the Master's heart.

So when he had heard him preach five times, he went to him and said, "Dear and honoured sir, I have travelled a good thirty leagues on your account, to hear your teaching. Now I have heard you preach five times, and I pray you to let me make my confession to you."

The Master answered, "With all my heart." Then the man confessed to the Master, and continued to come to him and confess to him for twelve weeks. And all this time he went to hear the Master's sermons. But he did not say the thing that was upon his heart, for the time was not yet come.

At last he went to him and said, "Dear sir, I beg you for God's sake to preach us a sermon, showing us how a man may attain to the highest point it is given us to reach whilst we live in this world."

But the Master answered, "Ah, dear son, what dost thou ask for? How shall I tell thee of such high things? for well I know thou wouldst understand but little thereof."

Then the men said, "Ah, dear Master, even though I should understand little or nothing thereof, yet I cannot but thirst after it. And see what multitudes flock to hear you. If there were only one among them all who could understand you, your labour were well bestowed."

Then said the Master, "Dear son, if I am to do as thou sayest, I must needs give some study and labour to the matter, before I can put such a sermon together."

But the man would not cease from his prayers and entreaties till the Master promised him that he should have his desire.

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER SERMON OF DR. TAULER

AT last the Master had prepared his sermon, which cost him much time and much toil. Then he announced to the people that in three days they should come to the church to hear him preach. For, he said, he had been requested to teach how a man could attain to the highest point, to the greatest nearness to God, and to the best condition, during this life on earth.

When the day was come, much people came to the church, and the man from Switzerland, whose name was Nicholas, sat down in a place where he could hear well. And the Master went up into his pulpit, and began his discourse.

The Master spoke first about people who attain to a clear knowledge and reasonable judgment about things, but who do so by the help of images and forms, or by studying the opinions of other men. But by these means, he said, they will never attain to the highest good. Some men also, he said, trust to their own reason or imagination. They, too, not only do not attain to the knowledge of God, but they hinder God from working in their souls. But if a man would only die to himself, and humbly toil and press forward, God would find a resting-place in his soul, and would work in him, and draw him to Himself.

“But such people,” said the Master, “are rare, for they must have a boundless humility, an unclouded understanding, and a clear reason. And such people may be known by twenty-four marks.

1. They have love.
2. They are emptied of themselves.
3. They are utterly resigned to God.
4. They do not seek themselves.
5. By not seeking their own ends, they attain to true contentment.
6. They wait on God to know what He would have them do, and they try their uttermost to fulfil His will.
7. They daily give up their will to the will of God.
8. All their powers are brought into subjection to God.
9. They always have the sense of the presence of God, in all things, both sweet or bitter.
10. They receive all pleasure and all pain, not from the creatures of God, but from God Himself.
11. They are not led captive by lusting after created things.
12. They are never moved from the truth by contradiction or mishap.
13. They are not deceived by false appearances, but own things to be what they really are, and this in a spirit of kindness and love.
14. They are armed with all virtue, ready to fight against all sin and vice, and obtain the victory and prize in all conflicts.

15. They mark what God requires of them, order their life accordingly, and act up to their profession.
16. They are people of few words, but much inward life.
17. They are blameless and righteous, but not puffed up by the same.
18. They are upright and sincere, and preach more with their actions than with their lips.
19. They have no other aim than the glory of God.
20. They are willing to take reproof, and to give up their rights.
21. They do not desire their own advantage, and think the least thing too good for them.
22. They consider themselves less wise and less worthy than other men, and are thoroughly humble.
23. They copy the example of the Lord Jesus in all things, and put away from them everything unbecoming those who follow Him.
24. And lastly, if they are despised by many, this will be more welcome to them than all the favour of the world.

The Master's sermon was ended. Some of his hearers perhaps remarked, on their way home, that they had heard a good, practical sermon. For we like by nature to be told to do this, or not to do that, in order to make ourselves pleasing to God. It does not follow that we betake ourselves diligently to doing the thing we have been directed to do, nor do we refrain from all that is evil, because we are warned against it. It is a singular thing that the people who most commonly need to be told that they cannot be saved by their good works, are the people who trouble themselves the least about doing them. A man who is in earnest, and who really, and honestly sets to work to gain for himself eternal life is far more likely to be awakened from his delusion. Just as if a man were bent upon flying with a pair of wings of his own construction, he would speedily be convinced of his delusion by making a trial of his wings. But the people who go on in a contented way in the course of this world, and seldom have a thought beyond that of pleasing themselves, will generally be found at last resting upon the reflection that they have done or felt something which will recommend them to God. They have at some time or other given money for which they were entreated for a charitable purpose, or they have gone to church, or they are communicants, or, what is there not upon which their hopes may be founded! "My family was always a respectable one, and I have a nephew who is a clergyman," said one poor sinner at the point of death, when the solemn question was put to him, "Are you saved?" "You take such pains to prove," said some one, "that people can never be saved by their works. But I don't find the people that are trying to do these good works. There is much more danger of their doing nothing but please themselves." This is so far true. But the person who said it had never remarked that it is just those people who never trouble themselves about working, who are most confident that they have something of their own which God will own at last. And even if they can recall nothing but sin and folly, they will fall back at the last moment upon their repentance and their prayers.

The Master had described the imaginary figs, which he still believed might be made to grow upon thistles. And this was all he could do. He had once mentioned the Lord Jesus. But it was not to tell of His precious blood, and His love to the ungodly and to sinners, the only way by which a

man could be brought near to God, and walk with Him here, and dwell with Him hereafter. He had but held up the Lord Jesus as an example to men and women, dead in trespasses and sins. He might as well have shown a beautiful picture to a dead man in his coffin. He did not understand that life must come first, and that work will follow. But the Master had done his best. And it may be he was as well satisfied with his sermon as the most devoted of his admirers.

Nicholas said nothing, but he went to his lodging and wrote the sermon all down, word for word, exactly as the Master had spoken it. And when he had finished, he went to the Master, and said, "I have written out your sermon, and if it be not troublesome, I should like to read it to you."

The Master replied, "I shall be glad to hear it." Thereupon the man read the sermon all through and then said to the Master, "Dear sir, pray tell me if there be a word wanting, that if so I may set it down."

Hereupon the Master was greatly astonished and flattered, and said "Dear son, thou hast written down every word and phrase just as it came out of my mouth. I tell thee if any one would give me much money for it, I could not write it down as exactly as thou hast done."

And the Master said also he was much astonished to think that he had never found out before how full of wit was so simple a man.

"Thou hast hidden thy talent," he said, "so that I never perceived it." To this the man only replied, "Dear Master, if God will, I am purposed to go home again."

But the Master said, "Dear son, what shouldst thou do at home? Thou must eat there as well as here, therefore stay in this place, for if God will, I am minded to preach again of a perfect life."

Then said the man, "Dear Master, you must know that I have not come hither for the sake of your preaching, but because I thought, with God's help, to give you some good counsel."

Quoth the Master, "How shouldst thou give counsel? Thou art but a layman, and understandest not the Scriptures, and it is moreover not thy place to preach if thou wouldst. Stay here a little longer," continued the Master meekly, "perchance God will give me to preach such a sermon as thou wouldst care to hear."

Then the man said, "Dear Master, I would fain say somewhat to you, but I fear that you would be displeased to hear it."

But the Master answered, "Dear son, say what thou wilt, I can answer for it that I shall take it in good part."

Hereupon the man said, "You are a great scholar, and have taught us a good lesson in this sermon. But you yourself do not live according to it. Yet you try to persuade me to stay here that you may preach me yet another sermon. Sir, I give you to understand that man's words have in many ways hindered me, much more than they have helped me. And this is the reason; it often happened that when I came away from the sermon, I brought certain false notions away with me, which I hardly got rid of in a long while with great toil. But if the highest Teacher of all truth come to a man, he must be empty and quit of all else, and hear His voice only. *Know ye, that when this same Master cometh to me, He teaches me more in one hour, than you or all the doctors from Adam to the judgment day will ever do.*"

CHAPTER III

NICHOLAS TELLS THE MASTER WHOLESOME TRUTHS

THE Master made no reply for a while, but he was a meek and gentle man, and, as he said, he took in good part the words of Nicholas. And moreover he entreated him, in the name of God, not to return to Switzerland, but to stay with him yet longer.

The man replied, that, in obedience to God, he was willing to remain; but he desired the Master to promise that he would permit him freely to speak to him, as under the seal of confession.

And the Master said, "Dear son, that I willingly promise, if only thou wilt stay here."

So the man proceeded to say, "Sir, you must know, that though you have taught us many good things in this sermon, the image came into my mind while you were preaching, that it was as if one should take good wine, and mix it with lees, so that it grew muddy."

The Master said, "Dear son, what dost thou mean by this?"

Then Nicholas explained, and said, "I mean that your vessel is unclean, and much lees are cleaving to it." And he further explained that the good precepts which the Master had preached did but condemn him, and were therefore to him the letter that killeth. "But the Spirit," said Nicholas, "giveth life. And know, therefore, that if so be you are willing, that same letter which now killeth, will by the power of the Spirit make you alive again. But in the life which you now have, know that you have no light, but are in the night. You can indeed understand the letter, but have not yet tasted of the sweetness of the Holy Ghost. Withal you are yet a Pharisee."

Then said the Master, "Dear son, I would have thee to know, that old as I am, I have never been spoken to in such fashion all my life." And the Master was offended.

Then said Nicholas, "Where is your preaching now? Do you see now what you are when you are brought to the proof? And although you think that I have spoken too hardly to you, it is but too true that you are guilty of all that I have said, and I will prove this to you from your own self."

But the Master answered shortly, "I ask for no more, for I have ever been an enemy to all Pharisees."

But the man continued and explained to the Master, that in learning the letter of the Word of God, he had always from his youth up sought himself, and not the glory of God. He told him, moreover, that the reason that the letter condemned and killed him was this — he had a leaning, not towards God, but towards the creatures of God, and specially towards *one* creature, whom he loved with his whole heart above measure, and had therefore not a single eye to God. "And therefore," said Nicholas, "I liken your heart to an unclean vessel. And when the pure unmixed wine of godly doctrine passes through that vessel which is spoiled and covered with lees, it comes to pass that your teaching has no good savour, and brings no grace to the hearts of those who hear you. And whereas I further said that you were still in darkness, and had not the true light, this is also true, and it may be seen hereby, that so few receive the grace of the Holy Spirit through your teaching. And whereas I said that you were a Pharisee, that is also true; but you are not one of the hypocritical Pharisees. You have, notwithstanding, this mark of the Pharisees, that you love and seek yourself in all things, and not the glory of God. Now examine, dear sir, and see if you are not

a Pharisee in the eyes of God. For know, dear Master, a man is a Pharisee in God's sight, according to what his heart is bent upon. And truly in the sight of God, there are many Pharisees."

As the man spoke these words the Master fell on his neck and kissed him, and said, "A likeness has come into my mind. It has happened to me, as it did to the heathen woman at the well. For know, dear son, that thou hast laid bare all my faults before my eyes. Thou hast told me what I had hidden up within me, and specially that there is one creature upon whom my affections are set. But I tell thee of a truth I knew it not myself, nor do I believe that any human being in the world can know of it. Doubt not, dear son, that thou hast it from God."

And the Master further said to Nicholas, "Be thou, dear son, my spiritual father, and let me be thy poor sinful son."

But the man would not consent to this, and said he would ride home again, for it was not seemly he should take such a place. And the Master then entreated him to stay and counsel him, and to do all that he deemed right, so that he might amend his life. And the man consented to stay, but he said also, "I tell you, dear sir, of a truth, it is no light matter that God should give a man such great understanding and skill, and mastery in the Scripture, and he should not put it in practice in his life."

CHAPTER IV

WHO WAS NICHOLAS?

WHO was this man Nicholas?

And how was it that he, a layman from the Swiss mountains, should thus speak to a learned doctor and to a priest?

For it was the strangest presumption in the eyes of most men in those days, that a layman should teach or preach — and more than all, that he should teach an ordained priest, who had power to bind and loose, and to work the great miracle which changed the wafer and the wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. How can it be explained that Nicholas came to Dr. Tauler with so strange and solemn a message?

This question has been much examined, and the answer is after all an uncertain one. A strange mystery attaches to this extraordinary man. Even his name is a matter of dispute. His history is one which appears to us so full of contradictions and impossibilities, that it is difficult to separate that which is true from much that is either invented, or told in allegorical fashion. It seems most probable that he was the Nicholas of Basle of whom an account will be given farther on. This Nicholas was a strange mixture of marvelous faith in God, devotedness to His service, love for souls, clear light upon many points which to Romanist Christians were utterly dark, abject superstition, credulity, and ignorance. To account for the possibility of such men, for Nicholas was but one of a numerous party, it is needful to go back to the early ages of the Church, and trace the history of a despised and persecuted people, who had been known far and wide under names of contempt, the origin of which we cannot now find out with any certainty. Had you asked them their name, they would have replied that they were Christians. They owned no name besides. But amongst themselves they were used to speak to one another as “Brethren.” They were therefore called in various countries “The Apostolic Brethren,” “The Swiss Brethren,” or “The Italian Brethren,” or “The Brethren of Lombardy.”

Sometimes they were known as “The poor men of Lyons,” or “The Leonists,” and very commonly they were called the Waldenses. They had their own history of themselves, which was handed down from father to son. It was this:

They said that about the year 320 after Christ, the Church had fallen into worldliness, and was corrupted through evil teaching. For the Roman emperor Constantine, instead of persecuting the Christians, had begun to honour them, and to give them worldly power and riches, and the bishops became lords and princes, and the things of God were judged by worldly judges, and not by the Word of the Lord. And because their fathers had held fast to the ancient teaching of the apostles of the Lord they had been persecuted and killed. And many of them had fled to the mountains of Italy, and Switzerland, and France, and some to other countries, and God had kept them as the apple of His eye, and they could never be destroyed, though they had to suffer hardship, and persecution, and death, from generation to generation.

And so as time went on they were to be found in many races, and in many lands, and wherever they went, they brought the Word of God, as they believed the apostles taught it.

And thus we find that in the year 1250 they were described in the following words by one of their persecutors, who was employed in the “punishment of heretics” :

“Of all sects, there is none so fatal to the Church as that of the Leonists. And this for three reasons.

1. Because they date back to a period so remote, for some say they date from the days of Pope Sylvester, 315 years after the birth of Christ.

2. Because they are the most widely spread, for there is scarce a known land in which this sect is not found.

3. Because, whilst other sects inspire horror by their blasphemies against God, this sect of the Leonists has a great appearance of piety, and especially for this reason, that they lead an honest life before men, and believe all that is right about God, and all that we find in the creed of the apostles. But at the same time they abhor the church of Rome and the Roman priests, to which sin the laity are but too much inclined.”

The inquisitor goes on to describe the marks by which these heretics may be known, so that the faithful Catholics may lay hands upon them when opportunity should offer.

“They are to be known by their behaviour, and their manner of speech. That is to say, they are in their behaviour staid, and modest; in their countenances there is to be seen neither pride nor fear. Their clothes are neither costly nor shabby. In business they are truthful. They avoid swearing and cheating. They do not seek after riches, but are contented with necessary things. They are chaste, and temperate in food and drink. They are not to be found in taverns, nor at dances, not at other idle amusements. Also they abstain from anger, they are always employed in their calling, or in teaching and learning, and are therefore absent from the instructions and prayers of the Church. They can further be known by their simple and modest speech, they abstain from idle words and light conversation, and also from lies and from oaths.”

It is true that we might have heard very different accounts of them had we listened to the gossip of the old women who sat spinning round the door on a summer’s day — or had we gone to hear the talk in the taverns and in the market.

“They call it going to worship, but I can tell you,” and the old woman would speak on in a solemn whisper, “I can tell you, for my grand-daughter’s husband’s uncle knows all about them — they meet together in dark cellars, and pray to the devil, and he comes in an awful shape, the very devil himself, and many of them have seen him.”

“Yes,” says an awestruck neighbour, “just what I heard myself. And there are devils that come in the shape of cats and frogs, and they kiss them and talk to them just as if they were Christians.”

“And I know for a fact,” says another, “that the devils come to them in the form of bumble-bees, and fly right into their mouths, and they fall down and worship Satan just as if they saw him in the midst of them.”

But an old chronicler, and enemy of the “Brethren,” David of Augsburg, who tells us that these reports were commonly spread, adds that “for his own part he thinks these stories were fables, and that on the contrary the Leonists are all the more dangerous, because they have such a gloss of piety.”

However, the old wives’ tales found many believers, and many a name was given accordingly to the despised “Brethren” — the “corner-sneakers,” or “hole-squatters,” or the “enthusiasts” —

which led to the belief that many sects were in question, when in fact the same people were called by different names in different places, and by different persons.

It has often been said that a man called Peter Waldo, who lived in France about the year 1170, was really the founder of this “sect that was everywhere spoken against.”

But history proves that such could not be the case, as the tradition of their existence from the days of the apostles can be traced back to the year 1311, and in the thirteenth century they are not only spoken of as having been known for a long while back, but as being numerous all over Western Europe.

For instance, in 1150 they are heard of at Cologne, in 1177 at Frankfurt, Nuremberg, and other German towns; in 1170 they were forbidden to preach at Lyons — large meetings were held by them at Metz in 1180; in Spain they were persecuted, in 1192, by Alfonso of Aragon, who mentions in his edict against them that he follows the example of his forefathers in forbidding their preaching. Pope Lucius III published an edict against them in 1184.

Early in the next century we hear of them at Turin, in Savoy, and in Austria, where they were severely persecuted — later on, 1260, we hear of forty-two communities of them near Passau; in 1257 they were persecuted in Bohemia; and in 1260, it is recorded, “In Lombardy, in Provence, and elsewhere, they have more schools and more scholars than the orthodox.”

They abounded at this time in Piedmont, and in Dauphiné; all over the South of France, at Naples, in Sicily and Southern Italy — in the Netherlands, Flanders, and Brabant — in Northern France, and in England.

They had been especially condemned at the Lateran Council of 1215.

In 1212, five hundred of the Brethren were seized at Strasburg. Amongst these five hundred were nobles, priests, rich and poor, women as well as men. They declared that there were many of their brethren in the countries above mentioned; eighty of the five hundred, including twelve priests and twenty-three women, were burnt alive. One of them, a man named John, spoke to the crowds around. His last words have been preserved.

“We are all sinners. But it is not for our false belief, nor for our evil lives, that we are brought here to die, and we have forgiveness of our sins, but without the help of the priests, and not because of the merit of our works.”

It is about this time that we find them spoken of in connection with the Beghards and Beguines, and it would appear from the light lately thrown upon the history of these latter, that they were up to about the year 1375 neither more nor less than “Brethren.”

But it was not the name given to the “Brethren” in general; only to a class amongst them who devoted themselves specially to the care of the poor and infirm, the homeless and the sick. They lived together in large houses, calling themselves “the poor of Christ.” The crippled and feeble ones were employed in any little work for which they had the strength, the men copied books and taught children, the women wove or spun. All begging was strictly forbidden amongst “Brethren,” and therefore the care of the helpless and infirm amongst the poor was one of their first duties.

The Beguines were just what would now be called “nursing-sisters,” or “deaconesses.” They were not nuns. Their large roomy houses were hospitals, called generally “the houses of God.” Such houses can be traced back amongst the Waldenses, or “Brethren,” to the year 1218.

Some of these houses were places where able-bodied people out of work found regular employment. We do not find that they ever built churches, or places of worship, without attaching

to it some such house. And more frequently the “house of God’s poor” was their only meeting-place, for they said the temple of God is His people.

They believed in fact that the knowledge of Christ, followed out practically, is a real remedy for the sin, and misery, and poverty around, for they took in and nursed, and cared for, not “Brethren” only, but any who came in their way.

It is therefore easily accounted for, that the nicknames Beghard, and “good men” (Boni homines), are found really to apply to the same persons. But after the middle of the fourteenth century the names of Beghard and Beguine were given to a very different class of persons, namely, to a Roman Catholic order, who still retain it.

There might be much related of the labours and the persecutions of the “Brethren” in the various countries of Europe, before the time when Nicholas came from Switzerland to listen to Dr. Tauler’s sermons. But in this short account it will be needful only to say a few words more regarding the belief and the practice of the “Brethren,” before we return to Strasburg, and to Dr. Tauler and his friend.

CHAPTER V

THE BELIEF OF THE BRETHERN

IN order, they said, to learn the mind of Christ, and to understand His desires for His Church, it is needful to go back to the teaching of Christ and His apostles.

They said also that it is an error to suppose that the directions given in the New Testament for Christian worship and practice, were only fitted for those times. On the contrary, they were to hold good even to the end, for God changes not, and He gave rules and precepts which needed no change to make them suitable for following ages.

Human learning, they said, could add nothing to God's teaching. For did He not choose and send forth fishermen and working men, armed only with His power and wisdom? And was not that the time when He was most glorified before men? And was it not, because men fell away from the teaching of these apostles, that ruin, and misery, and darkness came upon the Churches of Asia, Europe, and Africa?

"Therefore," said they, "let our object be to go back to the days of the apostles, and draw from the fountain head, rather than from the polluted streams."

"These heretics teach," wrote one of the inquisitors, "that the teaching of Christ and the apostles is all that we need for salvation, even without the statutes of the Church."

It was also a charge brought against them, that they had no science, and learnt and taught "nothing but the Bible." "All of them," said one of their judges, "men and women, great and small, by day and by night, never cease learning or teaching the Bible. The working man who has no time by day, learns it in the night. Consequently they neglect their prayers" (that is, are not to be seen at mass).

As early as 1203, they had translated parts of the Bible into German, and so in other countries, otherwise this universal study of the Bible would of course have been impossible.

Meanwhile at the Council of Toulouse (1229) the decree was passed, "We also forbid that the books of the Old and New Testament should be on possession of laymen, and we desire to prevent by the severest measures that translations of these books in the vulgar tongue should be in the hands of laymen." It was perhaps to avoid some of these severe measures, that the "Brethren" translated parts of the Bible in the form of poems. And far from troubling themselves about any edicts to the contrary, they required of every grown up person that they should make a regular practice of reading the Bible.

Thus stood the forces of darkness and light arrayed against one another. Is it otherwise now?

It is but three years ago that a young student in the Church of Rome awoke to the fact that in spite of Pope and priests, of services and sacraments, infidelity is spreading far and wide, in so-called "Catholic" countries, and that the one remedy, as yet untried, would be the reading of the Word of God.

But, alas, even here in Eastern Europe, there were millions living around him, into whose dialect the Bible had never been translated. He determined therefore to begin this work by translating the New Testament from the Greek.

But time went on, and the first portion (one of the Gospels), which was to be printed and published first, whilst he worked at the remainder, remained always unfinished. Sometimes his papers were lost. Sometimes when posted to the publisher they never arrived. Sometimes they were locked up, and the key was not to be had. At last, some months ago, came the explanation.

“If I have not sent you the Gospel which I promised you, it is because I have been told that the Catholic religion forbids the circulation in the vulgar tongue of the Bible, without notes. However, I have not myself arrived at an absolute certainty that this prohibition is right. I should like to talk it over with you.”

But soon after came the further news, “I have been threatened with the greater excommunication of the Church if I proceed with such a work. You can well believe that for a Catholic this is a terrible sentence. And as an obedient son of the Church, I can but desist from my labours. This is the true explanation of all the delays and difficulties of the past two years.”

This, too, is the true explanation of the darkness of those ages in which the despised “Brethren” shone as lights in the world. Without creeds or catechisms — scattered abroad from Spain to Hungary, from Calabria to England, from Provence to Eastern Prussia, their faith was one and the same, their teaching all alike — for their one authority was the Word of God.

But, alas, there is a sad side to this bright picture, and to trace back the cause of it we also must go to the Word of God. We there read that even in the days of Paul, many had turned aside from the truth that he taught, and he foretold that in this respect, matters would wax worse and worse, that men should turn away their ears from the teaching of the apostles of the Lord, and give heed to those who would add the law to the Gospel.

And so it came to pass, that long before the first flight of the ancestors of the Waldenses to the mountain valleys, the blessed Gospel of the Lord was but half believed amongst the most enlightened. They had forgotten the great and wonderful teaching of Paul, and understood but little that which they remembered. They went back to the days before the death and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus, not seeing that as the seal set upon His blessed work, God was calling out from all nations those who should be joined to Christ in heaven by the Holy Ghost, to be one body — the body of Christ.

Already in the days of Paul we see how many there were who would fain make up “another gospel” by adding on the law; as if the Church of God were but a continuation of His Old Testament people. Many who would prefer the old garment patched with the new cloth, and who would put the new wine into the old bottles.

And for this reason the solemn messages of God in Galatians, in Colossians, and in Hebrews, stand as warnings — how often disregarded now!

We need not therefore be surprised to find that whilst the “Brethren” regarded every word of Christ as infallible, they considered the word of the apostles as of less authority. They went consequently to the Sermon on the Mount, rather than to the Epistles, for rules of practice; and supposed that the apostles were more or less enlightened according to the state of their souls.

They did not therefore regard the Epistles simply as the word of God Himself, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. They held them in reverence, and do not seem to have denied or disputed any part of them, but they considered that the words spoken by Christ when on earth were more to be regarded.

They did not in consequence understand or teach clearly those “many things” which the Lord declared He could not make known to His disciples till He was ascended into the glory, and the

Comforter was come; and thus many of them no doubt taught the Gospel as if it were only a more perfect law. And as it always happens with people who do not fully understand the difference between the law and the Gospel, they failed to learn from the Old Testament that which God would teach us thereby.

For in the Old Testament we find types and shadows of “good things to come,” which we never understand or value till we know what those good things are.

The Old Testament, as has often been said, is like a transparency, which is dim and confused till the light is placed behind it, which brings out every part into view.

But while most of the “Brethren” were thus cloudy and misty as to the full clear Gospel, as taught by Paul, we must not confound them all together, as though God did not teach each one by His Spirit as he was able to receive it. We sometimes talk of people, as though all who are called by the same name, and profess to hold the same doctrines, must necessarily be as much alike as fragments of the same bit of limestone.

But the truth is, that the doctrines we profess, even if perfectly in accordance with the Bible, may or may not have been taught us by God Himself. Each one really learns only as much as he has himself received from God. And the Lord teaches most to those who look most simply to Him, and who walk according to that which they have already received.

CHAPTER VI

THE LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

IT therefore came to pass, that amongst the “Brethren,” as amongst believers now, there was, as it were, an inner circle of those who lived in constant communion with God, and who were consequently known amongst men by the name which speaks so much — “The Friends of God.”

Such men owned one another, and found one another out, and took sweet counsel together, even though some were “Brethren,” and some still went by the name of “Catholics.”

It was quite true then, and is true now, that an ignorant Roman Catholic, who is, nevertheless, taught by the Spirit, and therefore trusting to the Blood of Jesus only, may have a constant and blessed communion with God, which the most orthodox Protestant may never have or know of.

But we are not to imagine, on the other hand, that provided a man thus trusts in Jesus, and loves Him truly, it is a matter of indifference whether he is otherwise misled, and ill taught. Even with the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, we suffer loss in our souls from ignorance of any truth that God has revealed. We cannot add to, or take away from, the Word of God, without being beclouded and lamed in our walk with God.

Nevertheless, the Lord, who looks at the heart, will own and bless much love and little light, more than much light and little love. And this little history of the “Friends of God” will not have been written in vain; if it serves as a proof that God answers, in His grace and love, the most ignorant prayer and desire of the heart that believes in His love and longs for communion with Him. And it may perhaps lead us to ask ourselves the solemn question: Have we, in the midst of our light and knowledge, the same thirst for the living God — the same sweet and constant intercourse with the Lord Jesus — as some of those who, in past ages of darkness, spake often one to another of Him? And have we in our hearts the same tender love and care for all, however ignorant, however benighted in many ways, to whom the Lord Jesus is precious and lovely?

It is not that mere feeling is the mark of communion with God. We may have our natural hearts touched and melted with the wonderful story of the Saviour. For the hard rock of the natural heart is often covered with a thin layer of the soil of natural feeling, in which the seed which fell from the Hand of Christ will spring up for a while, till the same natural feeling which welcomed it with joy, will shrink from the cross; and the sun of this evil day will scorch the seed, so that it withers away.

And it is a fact very remarkable in the “Friends of God,” that it was not merely feeling and devotion which drew them together, but rather the *object* of the heart, Jesus, God and Man, the Saviour, the Beloved of their souls.

And thus many a Catholic “Brother,” who had no thought of leaving his Church, or condemning the services and ceremonies to which he had been accustomed, would find himself in full sympathy with the Waldensian “Brother.”

And at last he would find himself, he scarcely knew how, in opposition to his priest or bishop, and whilst still regarding himself as a member of the Roman Church, he might have to give his last testimony in the dungeon, or at the stake.

The “Brethren” were in the habit of marking those who walked after the ensample of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they believed that a man walking with God will learn of God. We find that they were in fact practically and constantly acting upon this truth.

It was not a question with them of this sect or that, but simply whether this or that man had been taught by the Spirit of God. “We must receive the Spirit,” they said, “to dwell in us, before the image of God can be restored in our souls. We learn the way to God by the written Word, and the inner Word, namely, the Spirit, but not by gifts supposed to be handed down in the Church, nor by ordinances and ceremonies. The Church, or the Assembly, is only so far a means of intercourse with God, as it is the possessor and keeper of the written Word, and the habitation of the Holy Ghost.”

Thus they did not believe that a priest was more capable of teaching than another man, nor that he had power imparted to him for the forgiveness of sins, but the power of *declaring* God’s forgiveness was, they said, left to the Church. That is to say, that a man in communion with God, and holding the faith once delivered to the saints, is the true successor of the apostles, and that such persons, meeting together, have authority to exercise discipline in the Church.

Those “Brethren,” who were, properly speaking Waldenses, had no images, and though they had a reverence for the saints of old, they did not worship them. But as they were in the habit of owning as “Brethren” and “Friends of God” any in whom they saw the marks of faith in Christ, and of communion with Him, many were thus included who had not cast off all the false teaching and the delusions and superstitions which they had learnt from Rome. Nicholas of Basle was evidently one of these. How far he was in communication with the Waldensian “Brethren” who stood altogether apart from Rome, we cannot tell. But that he was known and persecuted as a Beghard, and that he was called constantly by the name of “The Friend of God,” which was the usual way of speaking of a Waldensian “Apostle,” confirms the belief that he was commonly regarded as belonging to these heretics.

That he was in full sympathy on most points with the “Brethren,” is quite as evident as the fact that he was in some respects blinded by the superstitions of Rome. Little by little the scales appear to have fallen from his eyes. But he is more remarkable as a converted man, truly devoted to his Saviour, than as an enlightened teacher. His aim was rather to save souls, than to examine how far the teaching of Rome was accordant with Scripture. He did not remark the want of light, nearly as much as the coldness of the love, of those who professed a belief in Jesus. Amongst the German “Brethren,” there were many such, still called Catholics — still saying masses, and imagining that they could gain help from the prayers of departed saints, but yet having the life of God in their souls, and knowing Christ in their inmost hearts, as “the chiefest amongst ten thousand and altogether lovely.”

The enlightened Waldenses taught that no man has any merit before God, and they denied that any who died, having a simple faith in the Blood of Christ, had any purgatory after death. And amongst the less enlightened Catholic “Brethren,” we find that in spite of the articles of their faith, thus they felt and spoke.

The Waldensian “Brethren” made a great distinction between the world and the Church. By the Church they meant those who had known the love of God, who therefore loved Him in return, and who were known by the mark that they loved the children of God.

On the other hand, there were many “Catholic Brethren,” who, in spite of their ignorance and superstition, felt in their inmost hearts that they had a common faith with the Waldensian “Brethren,”

and loved them with the love which God sheds abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost that is given us.

When they saw the wars and strifes carried on, not only by emperors and kings, but by popes and priests; when they were sickened by the vice and selfishness, and worldliness of the clergy of Rome, and when by the Pope himself their services were stopped, and their churches shut up, then “those that feared the Lord spake often one to another,” and the Catholic “Friend of God” would welcome the Waldensian “Brother,” and they would “comfort themselves together, and edify one another,” and forget all but Christ.

It may be that the Waldensian “Friends of God” did not see distinctly how offensive to God were the superstitions and ceremonies of their Catholic brethren. They were so much in the habit of making nothing of external things, and regarding them simply as symbols of the unseen, that the mass did not appear to them, as it really is, an act of idolatry, but merely an unfit way of expressing the thought so dear to themselves also, that Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us. They had not “known the depths of Satan,” and they were so deeply concerned about the work of God in the soul, that they perhaps thought too little of the doctrine expressed as a matter of form by the lips, not seeing that the belief of the truth lies at the root of right feeling and practice.

The ceremonies which in England strike us the more from their novelty to us, were such an everyday sight to them, that they regarded them not. They were not reformers of doctrine, or of manners of worship, but they were seekers after the sheep of God, who had been scattered upon the mountains in the cloudy and dark day.

There are two pitfalls, one on each side of the narrow way. We may earnestly contend for the faith, and try those who say they are apostles and are not, and find them liars, and at the same time the first deep love to Christ, and tender affection to every member of His Body, may grow cold in our hearts. And instead of having compassion on the ignorant, and on them who are out of the way, we may despise and spurn them.

On the other hand, we may put the members in the first place, and Christ in the second, and think lightly, rather than sorrowfully, of false beliefs and strange worship, if only the love of God is in the heart of the one who is thus wandering from His path.

Into the first of these pitfalls did the Church fall at the beginning, and thus the apostasy began. For where love has waxed cold, the power is lost which might have won back the wandering feet. “I have somewhat against thee” — are the solemn words of the Lord spoken to the Church which was the first to fall, and spoken for this reason only.

It would be well for us to take earnest heed to this warning, needful for us, as well as for the Church of Ephesus.

In our days we find the people of God falling into both these pitfalls — perhaps more commonly into the last. But the Lord, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, who is jealous for every word of His truth, has never spurned the ignorant and the foolish who have turned to Him; if He did, where would the wisest of us be? He loves, He nourishes and cherishes all who in simple faith cast themselves upon Him and Him alone. It was this simple faith which Rome would have trodden down. It was for this reason that the “Friends of God,” even if Catholics, were persecuted and slain. To Rome it was a question of obedience to the Pope — to the “Friends of God” it was a question of the rights of Christ to the obedience and love of His redeemed. It probably never occurred to the Catholic “Brethren” that it was possible for them to belong to any other communion than that of Rome. When they sighed and cried over the abominations that were done in the midst of the Church

they owned, they do not seem to have discovered that the root of the evil was in the false beliefs which had crept in amongst them. Or rather they did not dare to think so. They compared the practice of their Catholic neighbours with the life and words of the Lord Jesus — and they owned the sin, lying low in the dust before God. But the bright light which God has shed forth in these latter days, was darkened then by the clouds which to us are cleared away. They would accuse their own hearts, their own minds, but they would not allow themselves to think that the Church they revered and loved had lost the truth the Lord had committed to her trust, and had turned away from Him.

CHAPTER VII

THE PREACHING OF THE BRETHERN

IT should not therefore surprise us to find that amongst bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and Roman Catholics of all sorts, there were many, very many, who believed and taught the blessed Gospel, but who at the same time had not light to see how ill it accorded with their services and ceremonies. Many of the Carthusian monks were at this time numbered amongst the “Brethren,” and so in face were most of the preaching friars in England and elsewhere.

The “Brethren” themselves were great preachers, for there had always been amongst them missionary preachers, called “apostles,” simply meaning thereby, persons sent. These apostles went out two and two, generally an older and a younger man. They were accustomed to go in the guise of travelling merchants or peddlers. They took with them packs of small articles for sale, knives, pins, beads, &c. They took in exchange eggs or cheese, or small articles of clothing, for they were forbidden to take money. And when they reached the house of a “Brother,” they were lodged and fed gladly, for all the “Brethren” were taught that God was pleased if His messengers were lovingly welcomed in His name. Many of these preachers were students of medicine, and therefore their journeys from land to land were what we should call a “medical mission.” But the object was the soul. And faithfully, bravely, and diligently did they give themselves up to this great and blessed work.

It was a day to be remembered by many, now “present with the Lord,” when the “Friends of God,” as they were commonly called, were lodged for awhile — perhaps in some stately castle — or perhaps in some cowherd’s cottage — wherever there was an open door, they were to be found preaching and teachings Jesus Christ.

Let us admit that of much they were ignorant, and there were ancient errors still clinging to them, but let us thank the Lord for this exceeding great army, sent forth by Him, with their lives in their hands, to spend and be spent in His blessed service.

It was the custom amongst those who could not travel about, but who had been taught of the Lord, and who cared for souls, to send letters addressed to the different meetings of brethren in distant places. Thus was the teaching spread abroad, by means of the travelling apostles, who were told privately to which meetings the letters were to be taken. It would have been dangerous to write any address, so they were merely directed to “Christian Brethren” in general.

The apostles preached wherever they could, generally in the open air. They had also prayer meetings and Bible readings in private houses. We find that amongst all the “Brethren,” in whatever country they might be, they were regular in the habit of daily family prayers, and of giving thanks before their meals.

They went from time to time with their neighbours to the services in the churches, but though this was not against their conscience, it was against their inclination. In those days, when the magnificent cathedrals of Europe were rising in all their glory from amongst the dark and narrow streets, the “Brethren” turned sadly away, and said, “The Lord dwelleth not in temples made with hands, for we are the living temple in whom God the Spirit dwells.” They built for themselves simple and modest houses of prayer, and refuges for the poor adjoining. There they sang no masses,

and made no attempts to please the eye or charm the ear. "For Christ," they said, "has promised, that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there is He;" and where He is, there is the solemn sense of His presence, and there is comfort, and strength, and joy.

They ate together the Lord's Supper, taking each one both the bread and the wine. They said that the Supper was a remembrance of Him who became the Bread of Life for His own, whose body was broken on the cross. And it should remind us also, said they, that we are all one body in Him, and that we should be ready to lay down our lives for the brethren, loving one another as He has loved us.

As to confession, they said God alone can forgive sins, and needs no man by whom to transmit His forgiveness to another. He gives it Himself to the soul who comes to Him.

And as to penance, Christ gave none, they said, to the sinful woman who was brought to Him. He said only to her, "Go, and sin no more." And therefore they told not the sinners to whom they preached to do penance and to torment their bodies, for God needed none of these things, and if He saw that suffering would be for their good, He would send it them Himself. We may now go back to Dr. John Tauler and to the "Friend of God" who came to him.

CHAPTER VIII

NICHOLAS TELLS HIS STORY TO DR. TAULER

DR. TAULER was now convinced that Nicholas, though only a layman, knew some secret of the Lord which he himself had never known. So he said to Nicholas, "I pray thee, for God's sake, to tell me how it is that thou hast attained to such a life. Tell me how thou didst begin thy spiritual life, and what has been thy history."

The man said, "That is indeed a request which I cannot fulfil. For I tell you truly, if I should recount, or write all the wondrous dealings of God with me, a poor sinner, for the last twelve years, I verily believe you have not a book large enough to contain it. However, I will tell you somewhat thereof for this time."

So the man went on to say how he had striven hard at first to bring his flesh into subjection, and that he had so great a desire to be saved, that he was ready to do anything at any cost, if only he knew what to do. And this desire he says, God found in his heart. But for a while he had no knowledge of the right way, and he thought that he should attain his end by ill treating his body.

"The devil," he said, "often stirs up a man to practise great austerities, with the intent that the man may grow sick and infirm thereby, or weak in his brain, or do himself some other injury. I will tell you," he went on to say, "how it befell me in the beginning. I was reading the German books about the lives of the saints, when I thought to myself, 'These were men who lived on this earth as well as I, and perhaps it is that they had not sinned as I have.'

"Therefore because of my sins I began to practise some severities, but grew so sick thereby that I was brought to death's door. And it came to pass one morning at break of day, I had been so chastising myself all night, that my eyelids closed from very weakness, and I fell asleep. And in my sleep it was as though a voice spoke to me and said, 'Thou foolish man, if thou are bent upon killing thyself before thy time, thou wilt have to bear a heavy punishment. But if thou didst suffer God to exercise thee, He could exercise thee better than thou by thyself, or with the devil's counsel.'

"When I heard speak of the devil I awoke in a great fright, rose up, and walked out into a wood nigh to the town.

"Then I thought within myself, 'I will go to the old hermit who lives in the wood, and tell him all that has happened to me. And I did so, and told him the words I heard in my sleep, and besought him in God's name to give me the best counsel he could.

"So the hermit said, 'Thou must know that if I am to advise, thou must first tell me all that thou hast done to thyself.'

"So I did, and he said, 'By whose counsel hast thou done these things?'

"And I answered, 'Of my own will.'

"Then the hermit said, 'Then know that it has been the devil's counsel, and thou must not obey him any more as long as thou livest, but thou must give thyself up wholly to God. He can exercise thee much better than thou thyself, or the devil.'

"Behold, dear Master, thereupon I ceased from these exercises, and yielded up myself and my doings altogether to God.

“For the rest, dear sir, you must know that I was by nature a very clever, ingenious, kind-hearted man; but I had not the Scriptures in my hand, like you, but could only learn to know myself by my natural intelligence. And once upon a time, I thought within myself, ‘Thou hast such good understanding, it may be, if thou shouldst, give thy mind to it with all earnestness, thou couldst attain to comprehend somewhat of the things of God.’

“But as this thought came into my head, I marked straightway that it was the devil’s counsel, and saw that it was all false.

“So I said, ‘O thou evil spirit, what impure counsel hast thou put in my heart, thou bad, false counsellor! If we had such a god’ (he meant a god who could be understood by natural reason) ‘I would not give a berry for him!’

“After that, another night, when I was saying my matins at three o’clock in the morning, an ardent longing came over me, so that I said, ‘O eternal and merciful God, would that it were Thy will to make known to me something that should be above all our sense and reason!’

“As soon as I had said it, I was sorely affrighted at this great longing, and I said fervently, ‘Ah, my God and my Lord, forgive me of Thy boundless mercy for having done this, and that it should have entered into the heart of a poor worm like me, to desire such a great gift of such rich grace. I confess I have not lived as I ought to do. I confess, moreover, dear Lord, that I have been unthankful to Thee in all things, so that methinks I am not worthy that the earth should bear me, therefore my body must be punished for my sin.’”

Then the man went on to relate, how in spite of the advice of the hermit, he “threw off his garments and scourged himself till the blood ran down his shoulders.”

Poor heart of man! the Lord had indeed answered his prayer. He had showed him great and mighty things which till then he knew not — even the greatness of his sin — his unworthiness, and his guilt. He felt as Peter felt when he entreated the Lord to depart from him, for he was a sinful man.

And yet the next thought in that heart into which the light had begun to break, was not the thought of Christ the Saviour, but the strange dark delusion that he must punish himself for his sin.

In these days perhaps, the second thought would have taken a different shape. He would have said, “I must turn over a new leaf,” or “I must attend to religion,” or “I must begin to live a useful life.”

Let us not think that the heart of Nicholas was more benighted than ours have been — or are. You may say we have now higher thoughts of God — we should not suppose He would be pleased at the sight of a man scourging himself till the blood ran down. But to suppose that He can be pleased with any of our vain attempts to put away our sin, is an ignorance equally great. Our own religion, our feelings, our tears and prayers, and our works, are of as much value before God as the stripes which Nicholas laid upon his shoulders, and of no more. He had been taught in his day of one false way to heaven, and men have been taught since of many other ways equally false. But one true Way has through all the ages remained the same, unchanged and eternal. And in all ages those taught of God have found it, and passed in by that way into Paradise — Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Jesus only.

Yet the Lord did not consider the unworthy thoughts that Nicholas had of Him. He knew the thoughts He had towards that poor benighted man, “thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give him,” not “an expected end,” but an end far beyond all that he could expect or hope for.

“In that same hour,” continued Nicholas, “as the day broke, and the blood was flowing down, in that same hour God showed His mercy upon me, so that my mind was filled with light and clearness. And in that same hour it seemed to me that my natural reason was gone from me, and I had an understanding far above it. The time seemed all too short to me. I saw that it was a supernatural and mighty wonder wrought by God, and I could have cried with S. Peter, ‘Lord, it is good for me to be here!’

“Now know, dear sir, that in that self-same short hour I received more truth, and more illumination in my understanding, than all the teachers could ever teach me from now till the Judgment Day by word of mouth, and with all their natural learning and science. Now, dear Master, I have said enough at this time, as to how it stands with you.”

Then said the Master, “If God should give thee grace to say still more, I should heartily rejoice in it, for I tell thee in all sincerity that I have listened to thee gladly, dear son. Now I beg thee, for God’s sake, do not leave me, but stay here, and if thou lack money I will not let thee want for anything, if I have to pledge a book for it.”

Then said the man, “God reward you, dear sir — know that I need not your kindness, for God hath made me a steward of His goods, so that I have of earthly wealth 5000 florins, which are God’s. And if I knew where there was need of them, or where God would have them bestowed, I would give them away.”

Then said the Master, “Dear son, thou art indeed the steward of a rich man and a great Lord!”

CHAPTER IX

THE MASTER OWNS HIMSELF A SINNER

AFTER this the Master said to Nicholas, "I am in great wonderment about that thou saidst, that I and all teachers could not teach thee as much by the Day of Judgment as thou hast been taught in an hour. Now tell me, for I wish to hear, has the Scripture proceeded from the Holy Ghost?"

Nicholas was astonished at this question — he now saw that the Master was beginning to understand, for the first time, that there is a great power far above all the thoughts and reason of men, and that power is the Holy Ghost.

"Sir," he said, "it seems impossible to me, that after I had said so much to you, you should talk in such a childish fashion!" And he told the Master that were he to relate to him the wonders that he had seen, that were worked by the Holy Ghost, it would make such a long story that one might write a large book about it. "There was," he said, "a heathen, who was a very kind-hearted man, and often cried to Him who had made, as he believed, both himself and all the world; and said, 'O Creator of all creatures, I have been born in this land. Now the Jews have another faith, and the Christians another. O Lord, who are over all, and hast made all creatures, if there be now any faith better than that in which I have been born, or if there be any other better still, show it to me in what wise Thou wilt, so that I may believe it, and I will gladly obey Thee and believe.' Now behold, dear sir, a letter was sent to that heathen, written by me, a poor sinner, in such sort that he came to the Christian faith, and he wrote me a letter back again, telling what had befallen him. Dear sir, can you instruct me how I should write to a heathen far away in a heathen land, in such fashion that the heathen should be able to read and understand it, and make the letter such that the heathen should come to the Christian faith?"

Then said the Master, "Dear son, these are the works of the Holy Ghost. God is wonderful in all His works and gifts. Dear son, thou hast told me very strange things."

Then said the man, "Albeit I am unworthy of it, yet so did the Holy Ghost work through me, a poor sinner."

The man desired by this story to make the Master understand that wherever the truth of God is taught to the soul, it can only be by the power of the Holy Ghost. And that therefore the supernatural power of the Word of God is the proof that it is not the word of man, but that the Holy Ghost is the author of it. And the man also desired that the Master should see that this Word must be taught to the soul by the Spirit, for that the natural mind could neither produce the word, nor teach it, nor understand it.

And Nicholas said further, "Dear sir, I fear that I have said some things to you which have vexed you greatly in your mind. It is because I am a layman, and you are a great doctor of Holy Scripture, and yet I have said so much to you after the manner of a teacher. But that I have meant it well and kindly, and sought your soul's salvation in it, and simply the glory of God, and nothing else, of that God is my witness."

Then said the Master, "Dear son, if it will not make thee angry, I will tell thee what vexes me."

Then said the man, "Yea, dear sir, speak without fear. I promise not to take it amiss."

The Master said, "It amazes me greatly, and is very hard to receive, that thou being a layman, and I a priest, I am to take instruction from thee. And it also troubles me much that thou callest me a Pharisee."

Then said the man, "Is there nothing else that you cannot take in?"

The Master answered, "No, I know of nothing else."

Then said the man, "Shall I also explain to you these two things?"

He answered, "Yes, dear son, I pray thee in all kindness to do so, for God's sake."

Then the man reminded the Master of a story which he had often heard, and which he fully believed. It was this — long ago, in ancient times, there was a young maiden, called Katherine, who was barely fourteen years old. But so marvellously did she speak of the things of God, that fifty great masters who heard her learnt by this means the blessed Gospel, and went willingly to martyrdom. "Who wrought this, dear sir?" said the man.

Then said the Master, "The Holy Ghost did this."

Quoth the man, "Do you not believe that the Holy Ghost has still the same power?"

"Yes," said the Master, "I believe it fully."

Then said the man, "Wherefore then do you not believe that the Holy Ghost is speaking to you at this moment through me, a poor sinner and unworthy man, and is minded to speak to you? He spoke the truth through Caiaphas, who was also a sinner; and know, that since you take what I have said to you so much amiss, I will refrain from saying anything to you for the future."

Then said the Master, "Dear son, do not do that — I hope, if God will, to be the better for thy words."

The man said, "Ah, dear sir, it vexes you also that I should have called you a Pharisee, and yet I gave you such full proof of it that you could not deny it. But since this is not enough to content you, I must say still more, and prove to you once again that I am right, and that you are what I said. Dear Master, you know very well that our Lord Jesus Christ said Himself, 'Beware of the Pharisees, for they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.' Now, dear sir, look at yourself. In this sermon of yours you have bound and laid upon us twenty-four articles, and you keep few of them enough yourself.

"Again: our Lord said, 'Beware of the Pharisees: whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.'"

Quoth the Master, "Our Blessed Lord spoke these words to the men of His own day."

The man said, "Nay, but He speaks them still, now and evermore, to all. Dear Master, look at yourself. Whether you touch these burdens, and bear them in your life, is known to God, and also to yourself. But I confess, that as far as I can judge of your present condition, I would rather follow your words than your life. Only look at yourself, and see if you are not a Pharisee in the eyes of God; though not one of those false hypocritical Pharisees whose portion is in hellfire."

The Master said, "I know not what to say. This I see plainly, that I am a sinner, and am resolved to better my life, if I die for it. Dear son, I cannot wait longer. I pray thee, simply for God's sake, to counsel me how I shall set about this work, and show me and teach me how I may attain to the highest perfection that a man may reach on earth."

CHAPTER X

THE MASTER LEARNS HIS A. B. C.

IT was plain, from these words, that the Master did not yet know that he was but a lost, dead sinner. He did not know that he needed, not to better his life, but to receive from God a new life which he could not give himself. He was still hoping so to cultivate the dead tree, that it should at last bear fruit.

How far Nicholas could have put this truth into words, I know not. But the Lord directs the heart, and He puts His words into the mouth of those, however imperfectly taught, who look to Him for guidance.

And thus, just as when the Lord replied to the rich young man, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," so did Nicholas reply to the Master.

He said, "Dear sir, do not be wroth with me, but I tell you of a truth such counsel is scarcely to be given you; for if you are to be converted, all your wonted habits must be broken through with great pain, because you must altogether change your old way of life. And besides I take you to be near fifty years old."

Then said the Master, "It may be so; but, O dear son, to him, who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, was given his penny, the same as to him who came in at the first. I tell thee, dear son, I have well considered the matter and my heart is so firmly set, that if I knew this moment that I must die for it, I would yet, with the help of God, cease from my carnal life, and my earthly reasonings, and live according to thy counsel. I beseech thee, for God's sake, not to keep me longer waiting but to tell me this moment how I must begin."

Yes, to begin a work! To begin to build the tower whose top was to reach to heaven! To wash and mend the foul and ragged garment, and make of it a dress fit for the courts of the King, whilst he who was to wear it had no place within those courts, even could he have cleansed it and made it new!

Then answered the man, "Dear sir, because through the grace of God you are willing to humble yourself and submit yourself to a poor, mean, unworthy creature; for all this let us give the glory to God, to whom it is due, for this grace proceeds from Him, and flows back to Him. Since then, dear sir, I am to instruct you, and counsel you in God's name, I will look to Him for help and do so for love of Him. And I will set you a task such as they give children to begin with at school, namely the four-and-twenty letters of the alphabet, beginning with A."

And Nicholas wrote down for the Master one of the alphabets of practice which were used by the Waldenses from ancient times.

This Alphabet had no pretence to be the Gospel. It was simply a set of rules which were taught to young Christians relating to their daily conduct. Good and wise rules, and taken from the Bible.

It is perplexing to find, that in many of the oldest printed accounts of Dr. Tauler's conversion, one rule in this Alphabet stands as follows: "Ye shall evermore, without ceasing, beseech our lady that she help you to learn this our lesson well." But a far older MS. account reads thus, "Ye shall beseech our lady that *He* help you, &c." And the word "lady" is evidently written over the true

word, "Lord." "Fronen" (in old German, Lord) could easily be turned into "Frowen" (lady), but the unfaithful scribe overlooked the pronoun following, which tells the tale of the original text.

The master looked ruefully at the little Alphabet.

"Now, dear sir," said Nicholas, "take kindly this child's task of the A. B. C."

Then said the Master, "However thou mayest call this a child's task, methinks it needs a man's strength to attack it.

"Letter A. 'After a manly, and not a childish sort, ye shall with thorough earnestness begin a good life.'

"Letter B. 'Bad ways ye shall hate, and practise all goodness with diligence, and with full purpose of heart.'

"Tell me now, dear son," continued the Master sadly, "how long a time wilt thou give me to learn this lesson?" The man answered, "We will take five weeks, in honour of the five wounds of Christ, that you may learn it well."

To what purpose were the five wounds of Christ, if men could inherit eternal life, by making rules and keeping them? *We* should perhaps have put the Gospel, clearly, as now we know it before the Master at once. But Nicholas perceived that the Master had first to learn his need of it. It was well that he should find even the children's Alphabet too much for him.

It was well that the Master should be thus reminded, that it was not by his own work but by the work of another, that life was to be won. But the Master did not understand, for his eyes were holden, and he thought only like one of old, "What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?"

So the man proceeded, and said "You shall be your own schoolmaster, and when you are not perfect in any one of these letters, and think yourself hardly able to learn it, then cast aside your garment, and chastise your body, that it may be brought to submit to your soul and reason." And the Master replied, "I will gladly be obedient."

So the man went his way, and at the end of three weeks he went again to the Master, and he said, "Dear sir, how goes it with you?" The Master said, "Dear son, thou must know that I have received more stripes in these three weeks about your lesson, than I ever did in all my days before."

Then said the man, "Sir, you well know that no man giveth his pupil a new task before he have learnt the first lines."

Then said the Master, "If I said that I knew them, I should say what is not true."

Then said the man, "Dear sir, go on as you are doing till you know your lesson right well."

At the end of another three weeks the Master sent for Nicholas, and said to him, "Dear son, rejoice with me, for I think, with God's help, I could say the first line. And if thou art willing, I will repeat over the whole lesson to thee."

"No, dear sir," said the man, "I will gladly rejoice with you, and take your word for it that you know it."

Then the Master assured Nicholas that it had been a hard task, and he prayed him now to teach him further.

Then answered the man, "I can for myself teach you nothing further, but if so be that God willeth to teach you through me, I will gladly do my part, and be an instrument in the Lord's hand by which He may work out His purposes.

"Hearken, dear Master, I will counsel you in godly love, and brotherly faithfulness.

“If it should happen to you as to the young man in the Gospel, to whom our Lord said, ‘Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me,’ I will not be answerable.”

Then said the Master, “Dear son, have no fears on that score, for I have already left all that I have, and with God’s help, am resolved to go forward, and be obedient unto God, and unto thee.”

Then Nicholas perceived that the Master had only grown more proud, and satisfied with himself. And he saw that to humble himself, would be like the task which the Lord put before the young man who was bent upon gaining for himself eternal life.

Therefore he told the Master that he must needs first of all be willing not to do, but to suffer; not to fill his treasury with his own works, but to empty it of all things.

That he must be content to be despised and hated, even by his brethren, and that he must let go his proud and ingenious reason, and that he must cease his studies and his preaching.

And should any come to him to confess their sins, he should only say to them, “I will learn how to counsel myself, and when I can do that I will also counsel you.”

“And if,” he continued, “you are asked when you will preach, say, as you can with truth, that you have not time at present, and so you will get rid of the people.”

The Master said, “Dear son, I will willingly do so, but how then shall I occupy myself?”

Nicholas replied that he should sit in his cell, and read his book of prayers, and also go to services if he felt inclined.

“And,” he said further, “what time is left, you shall set before you the sufferings of our Lord, and look at yourself in the mirror of His holy life and meditate on your wasted time, in which you have been living for yourself, and how small has been your love, compared to His love.”

And Nicholas also said that when the Lord saw that the time was come, He would make of the Master a new man, that he should be born again of God.

For Nicholas saw that the Master could as yet only come to God as rich and increased with goods, and thus be sent empty away. He would have to be hungry, and thirsty, and poor, before he could be filled with good things.

All worldly honour, Nicholas told him, he would have to renounce, all that in his carnal pride he called his own, all the pleasure and delight he had taken in himself, and he would have to fall down, like the sinful woman, at the feet of Christ.

“And then,” he said, “the Lord will put you to the test, that you may be tried and purified as gold and He shall give you to drink of the bitter cup of suffering and persecution that He gave to His beloved Son. And one bitter drop of this cup,” he went on to say, “will be, in my belief, that all your good works and refraining from evil will be despised and turned to nought in the eyes of the people. Those who learnt from you heretofore will forsake you, and think you are gone out of your mind, and your good friends and brethren will be offended, and say that you have taken to strange ways. When this happens, dear sir, be not dismayed, but rejoice, for woe be unto us when all men speak well of us. I see well, for the Lord shows it me, how you are thinking in your heart that I have said very hard things to you, and this is why I begged you beforehand to let me go, and I told you that if you went back like that young man, I would not have it laid to my charge.”

The Master said, “Thou sayest truly. I confess it does seem to me a hard thing to follow your counsel.”

For the Master had just been rejoicing that by means of the Alphabet, he had added somewhat to “those things that were gain to him,” and now must he count them all as loss? as dress and dung, and be nothing before God and man?

Yet he determined that he would try even this, and that he would set to work again with greater earnestness, and with fuller purpose of heart than before.

On the eleventh day after this, he sent again for Nicholas. He told him he had had great agony and struggle, and fighting by day and by night, against the flesh and the Devil. "But, by God's grace," he said, "I am purposed to remain steadfast in this work, come weal, come woe."

He also told Nicholas that the moment he had left him eleven days before, he had written down carefully all that Nicholas had told him, word for word.

Nicholas said he was rejoiced that the Master was so bold and steadfast.

"And now" he said, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, set forward."

And so saying the man took his leave, and the Master began his work afresh in good earnest.

CHAPTER XI

HOW IT FARED FURTHER WITH THE MASTER

NOW it came to pass that before a year was out, it happened to him as Nicholas had foretold.

He grew to be despised of his familiar friends, and his spiritual children all forsook him, as entirely as if they had never seen him. And this he found very hard to bear, and it caused him such grief that his head was like to turn.

Then he sent for Nicholas, and told him how it fared with him, how he was ill in his whole body, and especially in his head.

Then said the man, "Sir, you must not be dismayed, but you must put your firm trust in God, and commit yourself wholly to Him. Know that this account of yours pleases me well. The same thing happened to me also. Meanwhile, you must take some remedies while you are in this state, and treat your body well with good food which may strengthen it. A box of spices was made for me, and I will have such an one prepared for you, to strengthen your head."

Then said the Master, "But thou didst tell me before, that I must shun good eating and drinking." The man answered, "Yes, sir, but when the body is sick, we may come to its help with remedies, else we should tempt God. Dear sir, commit yourself to God, and wait for His grace to show you what He will have you to do, whether it be bitter or sweet. Further, I beseech you, for God's sake, not to take it amiss of me, but I must go home on account of a very important matter. But if so be that you could not or would not do without me, send into the town for me, and I will gladly come; but if you can bear up without the aid of any creature, that would be best of all for you."

Then said the Master, "Dear son, say not so, for I cannot and would not do without thee for any length of time — it would be hard indeed if thou didst forsake me, for then I should have no consolation left in the world."

The man said, "Dear sir, I will show you a better Comforter, that is the Holy Ghost. I have but served Him in the work that I have done for you. It is His work, and not mine." So the Master answered, "Dear son, may God be your eternal reward! I will commit myself to God, and bear this suffering as best I may.

Then the man advised the Master to take care of his body, and not let it suffer from want of needful things.

"But," he said, "if you lack money, do not sell your books, for you may need them in time to come."

Then the man took his leave, and departed from that place, but the Master's eyes filled with tears, and he began to weep.

CHAPTER XII

JESUS OF NAZARETH PASSETH BY

TWO years passed by. Two years of sadness and sorrow for Dr. Tauler. He had sore temptations and assaults of the Devil, and his friends forsook and despised him, and he ceased to preach and to labour; and he fell into great poverty, so that he was obliged to pledge a part of his books.

Moreover he fell into great weakness of body, and continual sorrow of heart. He had lost all in which he once trusted, and all that had made him to be somewhat, and he had at last come to this, that he owned with bitter tears, "I am wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

One night, it was at the time known to Dr. Tauler as the "Feast of S. Paul's Conversion," he was as it were struck down by the assaults of Satan and the despair of his own heart, and he was thereby so overcome with weakness of body, that when the time came for morning service, he could not go to the chapel, but remained in his cell, and cast himself simply and humbly upon the Lord, without help or consolation in himself, or in any other creature.

And as he lay weak and exhausted after his sleepless night, he thought of Jesus.

He remembered the bitter sufferings of the Lord because of His great love that He had for us.

And he considered his own life, how poor his life had been — for he compared it with the love of God. Whereupon he was overcome with bitter sorrow for all his sins and his wasted time, and he exclaimed with his tongue and heart, "O merciful God, have mercy upon me, a poor sinner, for Thy boundless mercy's sake, for I am not worthy that the earth should bear me!"

And as he lay there, thus weak and stricken down with sorrow, but fully awake, he heard as it were a voice speaking to him and saying, "Trust in God, and be at peace, and know that when He was on earth as a man, He made the sick, whom He healed in body, sound also in soul."

Straightway when these words were spoken to him, he lost his senses and reason, and knew not how or where he was. But when he came to himself again, he was filled as it were with a new strength and might in all his being, and those things which aforetime were dark to him were now clear to him.

Then thought he to himself, "How is it that this has come to me? I cannot come to the bottom of this matter. I will send for my friend, and tell him all that has happened."

So he sent for the man, and when he was come, the Master told him all that had befallen him. Then the man said, "It rejoices me from the bottom of my heart to hear all that you have told me.

"Dear sir, you must know that you have now, *for the first time*, received the true and mighty gift of God's grace.

"And I tell you of a truth, that now, for the first time, your soul has been touched by the Most High.

"And know that the letter which has slain you, also maketh you alive again, for it has now reached your heart in the power of the Holy Ghost. Your teaching will now come from the Holy Ghost, which before came from the flesh.

"For you have now received the light of the Holy Spirit by the grace of God, and the Scriptures which you already know will now be made clear to you, for you will have an insight that you never had before."

To many who read this, it may seem that Nicholas spoke with undue confidence. For we are so accustomed in these days to speak of salvation, and of conversion, in the clear and definite language of the Bible, that we should have no doubt enquired more fully what truth it was, that the doctor had believed. Had he a clear knowledge of the atoning work of Christ?

But conversion, the blessed work of God, is none the less conversion, in the case of those who are too ignorant to describe it. And yet those who have themselves known it in their own experience, will be able to see where this great miracle has been truly wrought, however imperfectly described. The Master had believed in Jesus, and in Jesus only, as the Healer of his sick soul, and like the blind man in the Gospel of John, who knew even less of the Person of the Lord than did the Master, he could say, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see." Nicholas knew that further light would follow, and it is often wiser to leave it to God to work, than to say much ourselves.

And it is a glorious proof of the reality of the great work of conversion, when we see that it is not merely an assent to a statement of truth, but a Divine act, beyond the understanding of him upon whom it is wrought, and in all cases a revelation to the soul, of Jesus, as the only Saviour.

"For, as you know," continued Nicholas, "the Scripture sounds in many places as if it contradicted itself, but now that you have, by the grace of God, the illumination of the Holy Spirit you will perceive that all Scripture has the same intent. You will now understand that it does not contradict itself.

"And you will also be able rightly to follow the ensample of the Lord Jesus. You ought now to begin to preach again, and to show to others the right path to eternal life. And know that now, one of your sermons will be more profitable than a hundred aforetime, and the people will receive more fruit therefrom.

"But it will be most especially needful that you keep yourself humble, for you know well that he who carries a great treasure exposed to view, must ever be on his guard against thieves.

"I tell you truly, the Devil is in great terror when he perceives that God has bestowed on any man the noble and precious treasure of His grace, and the devils will set all their arts and wisdom to work, to rob you of this costly gift. Wherefore look wisely to your goings.

"Now, dear sir, it is no longer needful for me to speak to you as a teacher, as I have done hitherto, for you have now the right and true Teacher, whose instrument I have been. To Him give ear, and obey Him in all things.

"And now, in all godly love, I desire to receive instruction from you, and I would fain, if God will, sojourn here a good while and hear you preach. If God give you to do so, methinks it were well that you should now begin to preach again."

Then the Master said, "Dear son, I would fain therefore get back some of my books, for I have pledged as many good books as come to thirty florins."

The man answered, "Look! I will give you that sum, for God's sake, and if you have any of it left over, give it back to God, for all that we have is His, whether temporal or spiritual."

So the Master redeemed his books, and gave notice that he would preach again three days after.

The people wondered much thereat, because it was so long since he had preached, and a great crowd gathered together to hear him.

And when the Master came and saw that there was such a multitude, he went up into a high pulpit, that they might hear him all the better. Then he held his hood before his eyes, and said —

"O merciful, eternal God, if it be Thy will, give me so to speak that it may be to the praise and glory of Thy Name, and the good of this people."

As he said these words, his eyes overflowed with tears of tenderness, so that he could not speak a word for weeping, and this lasted so long that the people grew angry. At last a man spoke out of the crowd, and said, "Sir, how long are we to stand here? It is getting late; if you do not mean to preach, let us go home."

But the Master remained in earnest prayer, and said again to God, "O my Lord, and my God, if it be Thy Divine will, take this weeping from my eyes, and give me to deliver this sermon to Thy praise and glory. But if Thou dost not do it, I take it as a sign that Thou judgest I have not yet been enough put to shame. Now fulfil, dear Lord, Thy Divine will as to me Thy poor creature, to Thy praise, and my necessities." This all availed nothing; he wept yet more and more.

Then he saw that God would have it so, and said with weeping eyes, "Dear children, I am sorry from my heart that I have kept you here so long, for I cannot speak a word to-day for weeping; pray God for me, that He may help me, and then I will make amends to you, if God give me grace, another time, as soon as ever I am able."

So the people departed, and this tale was spread abroad, and resounded through the whole city, so that he became everywhere a laughing-stock, despised by all.

And the people said, "Now we see that he has become a downright fool!"

And his own brethren strictly forbade him to preach any more, because he did the convent great injury thereby, and disgraced the order with the senseless practices that he had taken up, and which had disordered his brain.

Then the Master sent for the man, and told him all that had happened. The man said, "Dear Master, be of good cheer, and be not dismayed at these things. The Bridegroom is wont to behave so, to all His best and dearest friends, and it is a certain sign that God is your good Friend, for without a doubt, He has seen some speck of pride concealed within you, that you have not perceived, nor found out in the secret places of your heart. And therefore it is that you have been put to shame. It may be that some great gifts of God are to be given you, by means of this disgrace, for patience is needful to us that we may be perfect and entire. Therefore we must learn to suffer. Be of good cheer then, and be joyful and humble. Neither should you think this a strange thing, for I have seen many such instances in other people. Do not, I beseech you, despise this cross which God has sent you, but count it a great blessing and favour from God."

We can ourselves see in this true story, the blessed Hand of God, holding back the Master awhile from preaching, in order that he might the better learn his message. For the Master as yet knew more of the great change that was wrought in him, than of Him who wrought it, nor could he have preached the Gospel clearly, whilst his own feelings, rather than Christ Himself, were uppermost in his mind. It is often thus with the soul at first, and the Lord has patience, and leads us on from the knowledge of the sin-offering, to the knowledge of the burnt-offering — from our first sight of Christ as the Saviour, to the blessed knowledge of Himself.

And the man further counselled the Master, that he should wait in silence for five days, and that he should then ask the Prior of the convent to permit him to read a lecture to the brethren.

And he did so, and he then read to the monks such a lecture as they had never heard in their lives before, so grand and deep and godly was his doctrine. Then they gave him permission to preach a sermon.

And after one of the monks had preached in the church where the Master was wont to preach, he gave notice to the people, and said, "I am ordered to announce that to-morrow the Master intends to preach in this place; but if it should befall him as it did lately, I will not be answerable for it. So

much I can say with truth, that in our school he has read us a lecture containing such great and profound instruction, with high and divine wisdom, as we have not heard for a long time. But what he will do this time I know not; God only knoweth.”

The next day after, the Master came to this church (which was the church of a convent of ladies), and began to preach, and of his sermon you shall hear anon.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SERMON TO THE NUNS

BEFORE relating the history of the Master's sermon, it is needful to say a few words without which many might be perplexed and misled. In our days, God, in His wonderful grace and love, has poured out a flood of Gospel light upon His Church, whose history has been so sad and humbling. To us is preached clearly, as perhaps never before since the days of the apostles, the blessed tidings of the work done for lost sinners by the Son of God.

We are told, as the Israelites were told by a sign in the wilderness, that looking up to Jesus, to Him who was made sin for us, to Him who took our place on the cross of judgment, we receive eternal life. We are told that by the work done for us long ago, we are saved from eternal death, from judgment and from sin. We are told that when the sword of the Lord smote the Shepherd, it was the judgment of God upon our sins, and that from the moment we believe in Him, we are stainless, spotless, and holy in the eyes of God.

But our forefathers in the days of Dr. Tauler were like men in a dense fog of error and of ignorance. It was not by Gospel teaching, but in spite of evil teaching, that some, we may hope many, saw dimly through the mists and shadows the Saviour who loved them, and who gave Himself for them. They could scarcely have given a truly scriptural answer to any who asked a reason of the hope that was in them, but they knew the Lord as an infant knows its mother, and alas for us! we find that in many a case their love was deeper, and their confidence stronger, than in us their children.

When the Lord spoke to Dr. Tauler on the night which he described to Nicholas, he knew it was *the Lord*. He knew that a Hand had touched him and had healed him, and now to him all things were made new. For whom had he now in Heaven but Christ, and whom could he desire on earth in comparison with Him? And now that he had seen Him, and heard His voice, he abhorred himself, and repented in dust and ashes. It was not with him as with many now, that his first thought was the joy that he was saved from hell. Rather was it a thought of sorrow, that in the face of such love, such grace, such tenderness, the people of God could be as he saw them all around, and most of all as he saw himself to be.

We know that in Peter's life was a moment such as this. And to the Master it was at first much more clear that the Lord's love was unrequited and lightly esteemed, than that by the power and value of the atoning Blood all guilt was once and for ever washed away from the souls of His own beloved people.

We must remember also, that the nuns in the convent, to whom the Master was to preach, were not in his eyes, as in ours, poor misguided women, who were building up a tower of their own righteousness, and neglecting their natural duties. On the contrary, the Master really in his heart regarded them as persons who had professedly chosen the better part, and who belonged to God accordingly, in a special manner.

And yet at the same time the contrast between their profession and their practice had grieved him to the heart. They called themselves the Brides of Christ — but now that the Master's eyes were opened to see in any measure what was due to his beloved Saviour, he felt that the need for

these poor women was a call to repentance — a solemn questioning of themselves, whether in heart and life they were fit for Him whom they called their Bridegroom.

In his last years the Master had a dear friend, who wrote a book, of which more will be said hereafter. He writes his own experience of the popes and cardinals, the priests and bishops, the monks and nuns. “So also the nuns,” he says, “they are helpful to none, on account of their ungodly and careless walk. They have forgotten all godly seriousness. They sing and they pray with their mouths, but their hearts are far from God. And if they see any who desire earnestly to turn to God, they mock at such persons, and despise them. And though, because they live in convents, they are called spiritual persons by the world, by God they are called the enemies of the Lord, for they drive Him from their midst by their ungodly ways. And some are ensnared by covetousness, and some by pride, and some by evil temper, and some by self-will, and some by impurity. And they love the creature more than the Creator, with an inordinate affection, and are impure in their language, and wear costly garments, and live in worldly pride, and love worldly persons. And they live in secret sins, whereof it is better not to write; but should they read these words, they will know full well of what I speak.”

And thus were the hearts of God’s dear people grieved and perplexed, at the sight of the high profession and the godless life.

And when the Master was called to preach in the Church of the Convent, his heart was full of that which the Lord delighted to see in those espoused to Him, and it was this contrast to themselves, which he desired the nuns to see, if by these means they might be brought to repentance.

Could he but show them Christ, and His path of rejection, and shame, and suffering; could he but show them the joy of the blessed meeting, when the Bride shall be presented without stain or spot to the Lord who loved her, when the marriage of the Lamb shall come, and the Bridegroom shall rejoice over the Bride; would they not turn to Him from the vain world they loved, and humble themselves before Him?

So the Master gave out his text in the vulgar tongue, and it was this: “Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him.” “The Bridegroom,” he said, “is the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bride is the Holy Church of all Christian people.” And he proceeded to say how unfit, alas! are most of those who profess the name of Christ, to meet the Bridegroom of the Church. “The true paths, and the straight highways,” he said, “are now-a-days quite deserted, and fallen into decay, till we have come hardly to perceive where they are. Nay, this highway is to many quite strange and unknown, so that they do not go out to meet the Bridegroom, for they know not how to find Him.”

And the Master said also that there are many who call the Lord their Bridegroom, and yet they are delighting in things which are displeasing to Him, and unfit for Him. The world, with the vain glory and pride and envy thereof, and the delights of the flesh, ease and self-indulgence, and riches and pleasures, have taken the place of Christ in the hearts of those who are called by His name. The Bride, he said, when she is well-pleasing in the eyes of the Bridegroom will have learnt to despise all these things, and she will earnestly beseech Him to show her that which is pleasing in His eyes. And He will teach her how to walk so as to please Him in all her ways, and they will not be ways of ease and pleasure, but in the footsteps of the Bridegroom — in ways of sorrow, and suffering, and humiliation, and He will give her the great and costly cup to drink, of shame, and persecution, and contempt and dishonour.

“And He will give her a humble spirit, so that she will not be pleased with herself for her self-denial, nor her endurance, nor anything that is her own, nor satisfy herself with her own works and sufferings; but find her satisfaction and delight in her Bridegroom only. And He will bring her to see, in herself, nothing but unworthiness, so that she will say in her heart, ‘I am not worthy that the earth should bear me.’

“And when she is thus emptied of herself, and filled with His love, so that she is willing and glad to suffer all things for His sake, He will yet leave her for a while in temptations, and tribulations, and He will cleanse her by the washing of water by His precious word, and at last the time cometh that He beholds her fair and pure, even without spot or wrinkle, having been cleansed by Him till all stain is washed away, and she is fair and unspotted in His eyes.

“Then doth He say, ‘Now rise up, my beloved, my pleasant, my beautiful Bride, for thou art pure, and without spot, and altogether lovely.’ And He looketh upon her with infinite, mighty, divine love.

“To this joyful high-tide cometh the Father of the Eternal Bridegroom, and saith to the Bride, ‘Rise up! my lovely one, chosen and beloved, for the time of the marriage is come.’

“And He taketh the Bridegroom and the Bride, and marries them to each other, and binds them together with divine love. Yea God doth bind them together in bonds so fast that they can never be parted, in time or eternity.

“And on this great day of His espousals, the Bridegroom sheds forth by the Holy Ghost the torrent of divine love upon the Bride, and this love flows out unto the Bridegroom, insomuch that the Bride loseth herself, and is intoxicated with love, so that she forgets herself and all creatures also, and beholdeth the Bridegroom only.” We must not suppose that the Master was here speaking of the marriage of the Church with Christ in the future glory. It was rather the soul of each believer which he had in his mind, as being each one espoused to Christ the Bridegroom. And the wedding-feast of which here he speaks, is the joy which he had now tasted for the first time, and which he desired for others. “In whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” It was to this present blessed feast that the Master had entered in, and of the fulness of his heart his mouth spake. Would that all amongst us knew it as richly and as fully!

“Now,” continued the Master, “he only who is bidden to such a spiritual, glorious marriage-feast, and has obeyed the call, does for the first time perceive and taste the real, true, blessed, gracious sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

“And this Bride is a true worshipper, for she worshippeth the Father in the Holy Spirit. In this marriage-feast is joy upon joy, and there is therein more peace and joy in one hour, than all the creatures can yield in time or in eternity. The joy that the Bride hath with the Bridegroom is so measureless, that no senses or reason can apprehend it or find it.”

As the Master spake these words, a man cried out with a loud voice, “*It is true!*” and fell down as if he were dead.

Then a woman called out from the crowd, and said, “Master, leave off, or this man will die on our hands.”

Then the Master said, “Ah, dear children, and if the Bridegroom take the Bride and lead her home with Him, we will gladly yield her to Him, nevertheless I will make an end, and leave off. Dear children, let us all cry unto the Lord our God in Heaven. And indeed verily we have all need so to do, seeing that, alas! our hearts are dull and foolish, and there are few who are willing to fight

their way against the flesh, and follow the Bridegroom, in order to reach a nobler joy, and a glorious wedding-feast. It behoveth therefore each one to look at himself, and consider his ways with great earnestness. For the time is at hand — nay, it is already come — when it may be said of most who are now living here, that ‘they have eyes and see not, and ears and hear not.’

“Dear children, let us all strive to enter into this wedding-feast, most rich in joy, and honour, and blessedness.”

And then as the Master ended, and was to come down again to the path through the wilderness below, he said —

“See, when the Bride has to come back for a while from the festival into which by faith she had entered, she says within herself, ‘O woe is me! that I am here again!’ Yet is she content to do and suffer yet awhile the will of her Bridegroom, and He doth not for a moment forsake her, but looketh on her all day long because He well knoweth, that none will or can comfort her, but Himself alone.

“And now that you have heard this, let it not surprise you that I have *not* told you how lovingly the Bridegroom talketh to the Bride. It might well happen that none would believe me (except such an one as had tasted it himself).

“We find too, in the Scriptures, that the loving soul oftentimes holds such converse with her Beloved as words cannot express.

“Now, dear children, I fear that I have kept you too long; but the time has not seemed long to me — and I could not well this time make my sermon shorter — therefore receive it kindly.

“That we may all become true and real, and perfect brides of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in sincere true humility go out to meet our glorious Bridegroom, and abide with Him for ever, may God grant us, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Thus ended the Master’s sermon. It was not preached as you have seen, to tell to sinners the way to be saved, but rather, as he was speaking to those who called themselves the “Brides of Christ,” to tell what the glorious calling is, wherewith the Church is called, and to warn them of that which was the hindrance in their hearts to communion with the Lord. And out of the fulness of his heart had the Master spoken the blessed words of love and consolation, which the Lord had spoken to his own soul since that wonderful night when he had “known for the first time,” as Nicholas had said, “the grace of God.”

He spoke of Jesus, Jesus only, as now he knew Him, and as he never had known Him before; and if we compare this sermon with the former one, how great and wonderful does the work of God appear, which had been wrought in the Master’s soul!

He had preached before the righteousness of man. He could now preach of nothing but the love of Christ.

We who have greater light can see that his light was yet in some respects dim and uncertain — but let us ask the Lord to fill us, each one who reads these words, with the love that was shed abroad in the heart of this His servant.

Dark he was still in many ways, and ignorant, and misled, but have we with our greater light, more to tell of the love and the beauty and the preciousness of his Saviour and ours?

CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT POWER OF GOD

WHEN the Master had finished his sermon, he went down from the pulpit, and read the service. Meanwhile Nicholas observed that a good many people, it might be as many as forty, remained sitting in the churchyard. Therefore when the service was over, he told the Master of it, and they went out to where he had seen the people sitting, to know wherefore they were there. But some of them had by this time gone away, and only twelve remained, and they lay still as if they were dead.

Then Nicholas went from one to another, and touched them, but they scarcely moved. Then said the Master to the man, "Dear son, what dost thou think we had best do with these people?"

For the Master knew not what to think of this strange thing, the like of which he had never seen before. And he said to the man, "Tell me, what dost thou think? Are the people alive or dead?"

Then he smiled and said, "If they were dead, it would be that the Bridegroom had called them through the words you spake. How then should you bring them round again?"

The Master said, "If it be the Bridegroom who has called them, ought I to seek to awaken them?"

The man answered, "Sir, these people are still in the body. I wish that you would ask the convent ladies to let them be carried into their cloister, that they may not take some sickness and harm, by lying in the open air on the cold earth."

And they did so, and the people were brought into a warm place.

Then the convent ladies said, "Dear sir, we have a nun here to whom the same thing has happened, and she is lying on her bed as if she were dead."

Then said the Master, "My dear daughters, be patient, for God's sake, and look to these sick people, and when any one of them comes to himself, give him something warm to take. If he will have it, give it him in Christ's name." And the ladies said they would willingly do so. So the Master and the man went their way, and entered into the Master's cell.

Then the man said, "Now, dear Master, what think you of this? Has the like ever happened to you in your life before? Now I wot you see what wonders God works with good tools. Dear sir, I perceive that this sermon will stir many, and one will tell it to another. If it please you, methinks it were well that you let these sick children rest for a while, for this sermon will give them plenty to digest for some time, and if you think it good, and God give you so to do that you preach a sermon also to those who are in the world."

And the Master said, "I will gladly do so," and he preached also to those who were in the world, whereby certain of them were converted.

I grieve to say that I have been unable to find these first sermons "preached to the world." But it is plain that the Master's sermon to the nuns and the congregation in the convent church, had at least reached the hearts and consciences of some. They saw that there was that in the heart of Christ, which hitherto they had never known, and it was to them as to the Queen of Sheba, of whom it is said when she saw that which was in the house of Solomon, "There was no more spirit in her." The Lord had shown Himself in His great love to those poor men and women who had been accustomed to regard themselves as holy persons, taken out from the evil world. And therefore it was that some of them now abhorred themselves, and repented in dust and ashes.

And we may believe that there were some also amongst them, who were already the children of God, for in those evil days, when the churches were closed by the order of the Pope, and the preachers were silenced or banished, there were many of God's true servants who without taking vows, or entering religious orders, joined themselves together in little companies, and lived it might be in convents, or in houses set apart for a life of retirement, and prayed together and, as far as their light went, "comforted themselves together, and edified one another."

And in their hearts the Master's words found an answer, and they knew that the One of whom he spake, was the One whom they also knew as the chiefest amongst ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

From this time for about six years, we find that the Master preached continually in the city of Strasburg. Sometimes, indeed most often, to these little companies, sometimes in convents and in Beguine houses, and the words he spoke were blessed to many souls, and were as food to the hungry, and living water to those who were athirst.

And during those six years there were many who needed to be comforted and strengthened, for the troubles and sorrows of the city were many and great.

Just after Dr. Tauler had begun again to preach, the Pope, Benedict XII, died. The new Pope, Clement VI, was a yet bitterer enemy than Benedict had been to the Emperor Lewis. The curses and excommunications which were launched forth against the friends of Lewis, were far more terrible and severe than those of Benedict. Many who had hitherto taken part with Lewis, now deserted him out of sheer terror. Amongst them Berthold, Bishop of Strasburg, who humbly asked the Pope's forgiveness, and renounced all obedience to the Emperor Lewis. He was rewarded by the release of his city of Strasburg from the interdict, in the year 1345, two or three years after Dr. Tauler had begun his new sermons. But two years later the Emperor Lewis died, and the "Parson-emperor," as he was called, Charles IV, was chosen by a certain number of the electors. Charles was aware that his election was very displeasing to the city of Strasburg, and he appealed to Pope Clement for the renewal of the Interdict. Therefore in 1347 the city was again laid under the curse of Rome. And meanwhile had there come upon the city troubles and calamities more real and more terrible than the curse of Pope Clement.

Earthquakes, tempests, and famine spread terror and desolation all around, and at last, in the years 1348 and 1349, came the awful visitation of the "black-death." Whilst this fearful pestilence was raging, 16,000 people died of it in the city of Strasburg — in the city of Basle 14,000.

More than ever precious to those who remained were the words of the faithful preacher, who stood at his post, regardless of the curse of the Pope, and of the dangers and death that surrounded him. The Lord was drawing to Himself the sorrowful and afflicted. And at the same time, as it always happens, His judgments did but harden those who knew Him not.

Some of the people rose in fury against the Jews. Those who had crucified the Lord were the cause, they said, of the calamities and the sickness. They had poisoned the wells! They had brought down the curse of God! And thus at Strasburg and elsewhere, thousands of Jews were seized and burnt, and the days of terror were made yet darker and sadder by the senseless rage of ignorant men.

It was no wonder that when the earth was overclouded by death and misery, and when the church was the battle-field of proud and covetous and selfish men, that the eyes of many turned to Him who can never fail nor forsake His own, and were ready to welcome any message sent by Him to their sad and weary hearts. We with our greater light can see that the messengers were still

beclouded with the mists of past ages, and were ignorant of much that we know, holding fast to ancient errors from which God has delivered their children. Dr. Tauler still believed that the Mass was a holy and blessed service. He still believed there was a purgatory, not to release from condemnation, but to cleanse from evil ways and evil tempers.

But he saw at the same time that there were those who departed, not to purgatory, but to be with Christ, and that such a blessed departure only, was according to the Lord's desire for His own.

It is not very easy for us to judge how far the Master clung to any of the errors of his Church. Some sermons, which are evidently not his, have been printed with his own under his name, and some no doubt of those he preached before his conversion, were printed with those of his later years.

It is also to be remarked that before the age of printing, when books were copied and recopied in manuscript, it was not uncommon for the copyist to take the opportunity of adding to the text his own thoughts and remarks which he considered edifying, or which might, as he supposed, increase the sale of his book.

A "friend of God," Henry Suso, who lived at the same time as Tauler, and who wrote books which were widely copied, thus remarked, — "As several of my books have been copied in lands far and near by ignorant writers, it has so happened that each one has added something, or omitted something, according to his own ideas, I therefore have collected my books and revised them, that there may be a faithful copy written according to the light which God has given me."

This may account for the strange and contradictory passages in the printed sermons of Tauler, which must have been copied and recopied many times before the invention of printing, and which no doubt found a wider circulation when they had been interlarded with errors regarding the Mass, saint-worship and other matters, errors which are in entire contradiction to the plain and bold teaching of Tauler in other passages.

The following remarks also, taken from Dr. Keller's History of the Early Reformers, may throw further light on the subject. He refers to writings sent anonymously by Nicholas to the Knights of S. John, in a house near Strasburg, of which an account will be given later on.

"In order to preserve his influence with the Knights, and to guard against the risk of their breaking off all relations with him (the severe laws against heretics and their writings being borne in mind), the 'friend of God' used purposely, in a certain degree, expressions which would be in harmony with the ideas of his readers, or would even speak from their point of view to a certain extent, as we find to be constantly the case in Waldensian writings.

"He calls, for example, the Lord's Supper 'The Mass,' he speaks of 'our dear lady,' and of the saints, though without a syllable which might countenance the practice of praying to them or worshipping them."

It is therefore the more likely that when the sermons of Dr. Tauler were copied or circulated, this language was used for purposes of concealment, or he may himself have seen no harm in thus becoming "a Romanist to Romanists," though it was easy to carry it out too far, and to imagine unduly that the end justified the means.

We can therefore judge better by the truth which we find in his teaching, than by the error (often so contradictory) which we find in other sermons, how much he had learnt by the teaching of the Spirit.

And now let us go back to those ancient days, and listen for a while to the dear old saint, and gather up for ourselves some of the bread of life which came in those days from the hand of God.

CHAPTER XV

THE SERPENT LIFTED UP

MASTER TAULER was preaching on a Friday. His text was from John v. verses 1-11. And he read these verses all through in the German tongue, and he said, “The pool I have been reading about is the blessed and glorious Person of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ, and the water that was stirred in this pool, is the precious priceless Blood of the Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who is truly God, and truly man.

“He has washed us in His holy Blood, making us pure and clean, and in His free and tender love He will wash all those who come to Him, repenting of their sins.

“Dear children, the men and women of old time are the sick people who lay around the pool, waiting for the stirring of the water. For so did men of old wait for the grace that was to come to them, through the solemn bitter death of the Son of God. Then did the precious Blood flow forth, and the stream is flowing still. For these last days are the days of salvation — and know, dear children, that no man is made whole, nor can be made whole, in any other way, than by the blessed precious Blood of our Lord Jesus.

“Dear children, there are many crosses that we are called to bear in following the Lord. We are called to bear about in our bodies the dying of Jesus, and to take up our cross daily. But there is only One Cross upon which the work of our Salvation was wrought and finished, the cross of Christ, of Him who is God and man. There is no other way to be delivered from the burden of our sins, no other way to grace and holiness and blessedness, no other way to come to God, than by the cross of Jesus.

“By this way, and by this way alone, have all the saints drawn near to God. How much might I not say of this the Cross of Christ, and yet never could any man say enough! For it is far beyond the mind of the high angels to understand how the eternal God in His great love became a man, and suffered the deepest shame, and the bitterest sorrow for us.

“See Him, dear children, hanging between two thieves, that the sin might be laid on Him, for He in His love desired to bear it, in the place of His enemies. What greater and more perfect love could He have shown us, than to take upon Himself the mighty burden and bear it, not for His friends, but for those who hated Him?

“He who knew no sin bore Himself thy sin, O sinner — bore it as if it were His own. And thus thy sin was as it were His sin, and the work He did for thee is the only work thou canst bring to God. Thy sin His sin — His work thy work — for He suffered for thy sin as if He Himself had been the sinner.

“Oh how light to us should be any suffering for Him, as a good knight would give no thought to his wounds and his weariness, if he saw his king wounded for his sake!

“Dear children, the Lord gives us a cup of suffering, but it is the cup He drank before. He suffered for us, before He called us to suffer any grief for Him.

“And see, dear children, how the chains were broken which bound us in our sins, when He was bound on the cross for us — how the curse and the wrath of God that lay upon us was borne away,

for He made peace between God and sinners by the Blood of His cross — peace — perfect peace. And the sign that the peace is made, is the blessed gift of the Holy Ghost come down from Heaven.

“Therefore bear in mind, no works of ours, no merit of ours, have any value in the eyes of God — for all is of grace, and all the merit is that of the Lord Jesus — flowing not from us to God, but from God to us.

“See also how by the Lord’s death of shame and suffering, the devil was overcome, and thus was the wisdom of God made known in all its fulness. For it would seem as though the devil had gained the day when of all men upon earth the Lord Jesus seemed to be the accursed and forsaken one. When He cried ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’ He was forsaken as no saint has ever been forsaken by God. It was to this forsaking He looked forward, when He sweat great drops of Blood upon the Mount of Olives — and yet all the while He never ceased to be that which He is now in Heaven, God over all.

“Therefore, dear children, if sorrow and suffering come upon you, and it seems to you as though you were forsaken, remember the cross of Jesus.”

I have put together in copying these words different parts of different sermons, for it is well to bring together, as far as possible, all that the Master taught concerning the precious Blood of his Lord. That blessed truth, denied and despised in our days by many who call themselves Christians and Protestants, sounded forth in the great Cathedral, and in the old churches of Strasburg, in the midst of the darkness.

Many now are to be found amongst us, who believe that they have light to see a nobler way to be saved. Many who regard the Lord Jesus as a martyr for the truth, but not as the One who took the sinner’s place, and upon whom the Lord, not man, laid the iniquity of us all.

That His sword was unsheathed against His Shepherd, and against the Man that was His fellow, for our sins, is that foundation truth of the great work of atonement, which Satan will resist, as he has resisted it, to the last.

It was this which stirred up the wrath of self-righteous Roman Catholics against Master Tauler, it is this truth which English Protestants who have never known themselves as lost sinners, will turn from with contempt in these “enlightened days.” “Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks, walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of Mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

CHAPTER XVI

THE MERCHANTMEN IN THE TEMPLE

IT was not easy for the Beghards and Beguines and for the “convent ladies” to see at once that the only work they could present before God is the perfect work of His Son. Nor could they bring themselves easily to believe, that the penances and prayers, and fastings of so many “holy men and women” around them, could count as worthless in the eyes of God.

“How is that, Master Tauler? Have all these good works been done in vain? Tell us what you mean?”

And the Master answered them and said, “Have you not, dear children, seen a painter at his work? and have you not perceived the care with which he draws each line, neither too long, nor too short, nor too broad, but in the exact size and form that he needs to make his thought appear on his picture? And he colours it also with care and thought — the red here — the blue there — and at last his picture tells his mind, and he is satisfied and glad. Is not God far more intent upon bringing out, in each one of His own, the Image that is well pleasing in His eyes? How many a stroke, how many a shade and colour, must the Lord bestow upon His handiwork! And thus He gives to some the stroke of sorrow, and to some He gives bright colouring, and to some sad colouring — to some He gives to drink of a cup of bitter myrrh — to each one that which will best conform him to the Image of His delight.

“But there are some who are not content with the myrrh of God, but think that they need to mix up bitter cups for themselves, and they gain for themselves thereby weak brains, and disordered fancies. But they gain no grace, and no reward, for they are building up a tower of their own deeds. Therefore God has to wait till they have done with their own endeavours, and are come to the end of themselves, and then He will work, and His work will never be in vain.

“For God has determined, dear children, that He will reward no work but His own. In Heaven, when He gives the everlasting crowns, it is not your work He will crown, but His own. The work which was yours will count for nought before Him.

“We read in the Holy Gospel that the Lord Jesus went into the temple, and He cast out those that sold and bought therein, and He said to them that sold doves, ‘Take these things hence, make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.’ It was as if He said, ‘I have a right to this temple, and I will have it for Mine alone, and none shall rule therein but I.’

“What is this temple, which God will have for His own, and where He alone will rule?

“It is yourselves, dear children, for you are the house of God.

“And who are those whom the Lord scourged with a whip, and drove out of the house of the Lord?

“Mark well, it was not people who were committing great crimes, but the good people who were buying and selling therein. And the Lord is driving them out even now. He will leave not one in His temple who makes merchandise there.

“Ah! dear children, those are the merchants you see all around, who keep themselves from open sins, and set themselves up to be good men and women, who honour God by fasting, and watching and praying, and all sorts of good and holy works. But they do these things, that the Lord may give

them something in exchange, and make all go well with them; for it is themselves they seek in all these works and penances. Any one can understand that this is but a trade and a merchandise — they give one thing to get another, and think they can thus drive a bargain with the Lord, and will find at last there is nothing they can get by all their doings, for whatever they may do, God will never owe them anything for it.

“If there is a good work to be found anywhere, it is God who wrought it and not man.

“No, God can never be the debtor of any man, for none can give Him anything that is not His own already. And as to rewards, He gives them, it is true, but of grace, and not as debt. Did not Christ say, ‘without Me, ye can do *nothing*’?

“Ah, children, they are hard and foolish people who desire to bargain with God. They have known nothing or little of His truth, therefore the Lord meets such people with a scourge, and drives them out of His house. Light and darkness cannot dwell together. When the Lord, who is the light comes into His temple, He drive the darkness out, and fills His temple with His own glory.

“The merchantmen are all cleared away, when the truth is known, for the truth needs no exchange and barter. God does His works from His own pure love, and he who is joined to the Lord will work from love also, not seeking anything for himself.

“And this work which has God for its object, has also God for its author.

“O children, it is a blessed thing when all the merchantmen are driven out of the temple of the heart, and God alone remaineth and none beside! It is the Lord who worketh by the man whom He has joined to Himself, therefore it is not the man’s work, but the Lord’s. Do you not remember how Jesus said, ‘The Father, who dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works!’ and so it is with the man in whom the Lord abides. To the man therefore, they are no more his own works, than the works of one far away beyond the sea could be his, for it was not he who wrought them but God.”

CHAPTER XVII

“THE HERITAGE OF THE HEATHEN”

AND the Master said further, “We read in the lesson to-day a verse which tells us that the Lord has ‘a pleasant land to give us, a goodly heritage of the hosts of the heathen’ (Jer. iii. 19). And He has also said that ‘He hath shewed His people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen.’

“What, dear children, is this pleasant land? and what is the heritage of the heathen the Lord has promised you? The pleasant land is none other than the heritage of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He is the heir of His Father, and we are joint-heirs with Him. And what is the heritage of the heathen?

“Children, the heathen are people who have no claim upon God, they have no holiness, no ground to stand on, but all they can receive must be by God’s free grace, without any deserving on their part.

“But the Jews had a ground on which they stood, of works and doings, of ceremonies and laws, and many a thing of which they boasted themselves.

“But the heathen had nothing to build on but the grace and mercy of God. And that is your heritage and mine, for we have nothing else but grace and mercy upon which we can set our foot. We have no worthiness, and no fitness — we have nothing to bring to God.

“But many a Jew is now to be found, standing upright on his own ways and his own doings, propped up by his own works. ‘If I have not done my part,’ they say, ‘then all is lost,’ and on the other hand they think that if they do their part, all is well. They have no need to believe in God, nor in any one but themselves.

“Do not mistake me, as if I meant to say that there are no works for a godly man to do. But a godly man does not take his stand upon them, or lean upon them. Many a one, on the contrary, is trusting the whole of his salvation to his hair shirt, and his iron collar, and his fastings, and his vigils, and his prayers. Perhaps he has taken a vow of poverty, and kept it for forty years. And thus he thinks he has paved the way to God, and if you could take away all his holy deeds, you would take away all his hope and all his confidence.

“But suppose a man could have done in his own person all the good works that had ever been done by all the holy people in the world, now, and in all the ages that are past, he would have no more ground to stand on than a man who had never done a good work at all, great or small. And he would have nothing else to rest upon but the free grace of God, grace upon grace, bestowed upon him for no deserving of his own.

“And that, dear children, is the heritage of the heathen.

“May God give it to each one of us, and then shall we say My Father! and we shall not turn away from Him.

“And suppose, dear children, you could be satisfied with yourselves and your doings, that is the greatest evil that could happen to you. The Holy Ghost leads a man to judge himself, and condemn himself, and to feel deeply sorrowful, intolerably sorrowful, in thinking of his sinfulness, and of the resistance of his heart to the will of God. This is a sorrow the world knows nothing about, and therefore it is the surest sign of the working of the Spirit of God. We should be very thankful

if we are brought to see that we have done wrong in any one thing. For a thousand sins which a man confesses, and for which he judges and condemns himself, are not nearly so dangerous to him as one sin that he does not find out, and will not own.

“Therefore remember, whenever you meet with any of those spiritual people, who are well pleased with themselves and their doings, they are living in the most dangerous sin, and their end is destruction, if they remain in that condition.

“Ah, merciful God! what a poor, scanty, wretched thing in Thine eyes is our righteousness! Woe be to us for our righteousness, dear children, for the Lord spake by Isaiah, ‘All your righteousnesses are but as filthy rags.’

“People who have that righteousness say their prayers, but instead of getting bread thereby, they get a stone. But that is not the fault of God. The stone they get is a hard stony heart, dry, and barren, and cold, like ashes when the fire is all gone out, no communion with the Lord, and no grace. They read their religious books from beginning to end, one after another, but they get no food, and no water, for they are neither hungry nor thirsty. They have not even a desire for the true bread. And having gone through their round of religion, in their blind and ignorant way, they lie down and sleep, and begin again next morning, the same thing all over again, and when they get to the end of their prayers they think ‘that will do.’ And by means of this religion of theirs, their hearts become as hard as a millstone, that can neither be broken nor bent. This is proved, as soon as anything happens that crosses their will, you can find out then how impossible it is for them to give way, or yield themselves to God.

“Dear children, when you meet with such people; take care; it is best not to argue with them, but to say a word of warning and then to leave them. You may get a stone thrown at your head, or you may be led to throw a stone in return. One finds great people and small people of this sort, stones and pebbles. Beware of them all.

“I have known such people go to confession, twenty or thirty years, but never once have they truly confessed their sins, and they go to the Sacrament, because they have received absolution.

“But the absolution of the Pope himself would not release them from one of their sins, and the more they go to the Sacrament, and the more they pray, and the more good works they do, the more blind, and hard, and stony and stupid in heart they become, for they grow more and more pleased with themselves, and put more confidence in their goodness. Better were it they did nothing at all, for all will be brought into judgment at last, and then they will find that instead of the fish they expect, God will give them a serpent.

“Meanwhile they work and pray and sing, and read good books, and the world says they are good and pious people. It is Satan who makes their way so smooth, that he may keep them in his dungeon, to all eternity.

“And if any warn them of the awful danger in which they are living, and of the sorrowful end that is before them, they mock such persons, and say they belong to some of these new-fangled sects.

“For them, unless they repent, and confess their sins, there remains nothing but to be shut out of the presence of God for ever.

“‘Why so?’ they say, ‘we should be very sorry to do anything wrong.’

“Think you then that you are doing anything good? You give to God your mutterings and vain repetitions, your reading and your praying, all done with the mouth. But your love, and your heart,

that which Christ died to win, you give to yourselves and to other creatures. Ah, for such a service as that the Lord will not give you three beans.

“Such people are the ninety and nine, who are left to themselves, whilst the Lord goes to seek the sheep that was lost.

“Are you lost sheep, dear children? God is not seeking great horses, and strong oxen; not the men who are doing great wonders and great works. He is looking for the small and the weak, and the lost and the forsaken, He is looking only for His sheep.

“O children, what does the Lord do when He finds His sheep at last? He puts it on His shoulder, and He calls His friends and His neighbours together, and He says ‘Rejoice with Me, for I have found My sheep.’

“The friends and neighbours — who are they? They are the holy angels, and all the dear friends of the Lord in heaven and on earth. And they all are glad, and the gladness is exceeding great, and all because of this little lost sheep. No one can understand or conceive such joy as that, it is like a bottomless sea.

“Then the Lord holds fast the beloved sheep, and carries it on His shoulder — and the sheep no longer walks, for He carries it home, and all the work is His alone.

“Before that, dear children, we talked of our works, and did them out of our own minds, but after that, God carries us, and it is He who works all the works in us, and by us. Whether we walk, or stand, or eat, all the works we do are wrought by God in us, we dwell in God and rest in God.

“Let us cast away boldly all outward services and works that hinder that blessed joy of the rest in God, and let our hearts flow forth in love and delight whilst we look unto Jesus, Jesus who died and suffered for us pain and sorrow so sharp and bitter — Jesus whose precious blood flowed down for us — Jesus, the eternal God, the everlasting love.

“For the blessed life is not blessed because it is long, nor because it is a life of many works, but because it is love eternal.

“How many men there are who are hard at work in the cornfields, and in the vineyards of noble wine, but who are living on rye-bread and cold water, and who never know what it is to feast upon the finest of the wheat, and the wine of the joy of God.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FREIGHTED SHIP

LET us think as we read the Master's words, if we in our own hearts have known the joy the Lord had given to him? And let us fall down before the Lord and adore Him, because He did not measure the love and joy that He poured forth into the Master's heart, by his knowledge, and his light, but regarded only the longing of the Master's heart after Him. So that the Master could say, "When the true light of God ariseth, the light that is God Himself, then must all created light vanish and fade. When the uncreated Light shines forth and glows and beams, then must needs the created light wax pale and dim, as a little candle in the noonday sun. O children, could a man but see this glorious Light for one short moment, he would say that the glory and the joy of all the world fade and disappear in the glory and the joy of that little moment — and it is now, in our mortal bodies, that we can know such joy and gladness."

How are we to have such joy in our hearts as this?

Many must have asked this question in those sad dark days. For there was little around but sorrow and strife, and suffering and death, and many marvelled at the Master's peace and gladness, and wondered whence it came.

Then the Master explained this to them, and said, "The Holy Ghost speaks oftentimes to our hearts. Sometimes by teachers, sometimes when we are all alone, and it is as if He said, 'Dear man, if thou wouldst but leave thyself to Me, and be led by Me, I would work in thee, and by thee.'

"O children, it is sad and strange that men are dull and deaf when this wise and loving Friend thus counsels them. They like to try their own ways, and to do blindly those things which are right in their own eyes. And thus they hinder the sweet and blessed teaching of the Holy Spirit, and His words spoken to them are as it were a strange tongue that they do not understand. How well would it be at such moments to cease from all works and to be still, to listen and be silent. For when God speaketh, let all the earth keep silence before Him. His work and thine will never go on together. He must work and thou be still, or if thou workest, He worketh not.

"But in one moment of that stillness, the Holy Ghost will lift thy heart far into the heights of heaven — far above thy works and ways — far above thy thoughts and imaginings. And this does God delight to do with His beloved children.

"But many there are who are like men adrift on a great sea with a treasure in their ship, and they know not which way to steer, and they drift far far away into the darkness and the mist, and their treasure is wet with the rain, and they are lost, and sorrowful.

"And if then there came a true and stately man, and said to them, 'Follow me, and turn your rudder round, I will lead you by a glad and shining way, where the light is fair and clear, and all is still and glorious, and where the sun shines, and where your treasure will be safe and dry, and where you need no more toil in rowing, as now you do,' who would not say in the gladness of his heart, 'We have found the Man who can steer the treasure safely over the stormy sea of this world below, and keep it from all harm, and land it in the haven at last.'

“O children, such is the Guide whom God has given. Trust the treasure of your soul to Him. But is it not so with you, that when the drops of temptation and sin fall upon your treasure, you go off to your confessor, and wander farther and farther into the mist and darkness?

“But were you to turn to God, and confess to Him, you need no more. And the Holy Ghost would speak to your hearts, and lead you in the fair and shining way, and blessed are ye if ye will but follow Him.”

CHAPTER XIX

THE APPLE TREES

BUT there was a warning the Master had to give, when he had spoken of the joy and gladness of the men who eat the corn, and drink the wine of God.

“Understand me, dear children,” he said, “we may have this good and blessed enjoyment, and then glory in it, as if it were something of our own, and even the blessed work of God may be a temptation to our pride and self-righteousness. For nature will take pride even in the blessed joy of the Lord.

“Have you never been into an orchard, and seen the apples that had dropped from the trees, and had been left lying on the ground? After they dropped down, the unclean worms and maggots came and made holes underneath the apples, and ate out the heart beneath the rind. And though all the apples might look fine and sweet, and ripe and yellow, so that to you they were all alike, as long as you only saw them lying there, yet if you were to take them up one by one, and handle them, and turn them round, perhaps you would scarcely find two that were not worm-eaten and full of holes.

“And so, dear children, there are great experiences, and beholdings of the Face of God, times of joy and adoration, so that we may feel ourselves in the third heaven like the blessed Paul, and yet so much may we be exalted by the very joy of God, that we shall need a messenger of Satan to buffet and beat us.

“Yes, we might be great prophets, and do great signs, and heal sick people, and discern spirits, and foretell things to come.

“In one word, children, we might have and do all things, and yet be worm-eaten apples after all. Therefore beware.

“We have been speaking of the high things of God, which the pride of the heart may feed upon. So is it with lower things — for pride will feed on the lowest as well as the highest. Thus in giving money — if we give it in loving service to another, or for the Lord’s work, and neither tell other people, nor commend and praise ourselves in our inmost hearts, it is well. But those who give great gifts, and do great works, are very often worm-eaten apples. When people put up beautiful windows and altars in churches, and perhaps have their coat-of-arms upon the windows, do they not desire that every one should know what they have done? But a little sum given in quietness to God, to be known by Him alone, is far better than if we were to build a great church, and ask for the prayers of men as a payment for our good works.

“Leave it to God, dear children, and trust Him to make it up to you, if you think you are losing anything by not asking for prayer to be made for you.

“Be sure of one thing, that the only possessions you have, are your nothingness and your sin. All besides is not yours, but God’s. A man who owns this is a fruitful tree in the garden of God, and on such a tree alone will the sound fruit be found.

“There may be far finer apples, large and yellow, on the trees around, and on a fine day you see them all on the trees, and you think the large yellow apples are the best.

“Then comes the wind and the storm, and the apples fall from the trees, and you find out how many are eaten out by the evil worms, and are nothing worth.

“Dear children, I have said enough of the worm-eaten people, and I should like to say a word to you about those in whom the works are wrought by the blessed Spirit of God. They are God’s beloved children, who stand listening and waiting to hear His voice, and to follow Him.

“He leads them oftentimes in a lonely and a lowly path. But they dare to go forward, and have no fear, for they trust the Spirit who guides and keeps them. Then it is no longer they who work, but God who works in them, and the works of God are works that are far above all sense, and nature, and reason.

“Were a man to do nothing else for a whole year but yield himself up to the work of God within him, he would never have spent a year so well and with such blessing, even if he had done no good work besides. Even if for one moment only, his eyes had been unsealed to see the hidden work of God, he would have spent the year better than any who had themselves worked hard from the beginning of the year to the end, out of their own hearts and minds.

“As God is high above His creatures, so is the work of God far above all works of men, and where the work of God is filling our hearts, there is less to show in busy works that men can see — for to wait on Him and listen to His voice is often all we have to do.

“Children, be sure that every plant our Heavenly Father has not planted, must be rooted out at last. But give the Lord room in your hearts to work His glad and blessed work, and then you will know the love wherewith the Father loves you.

“Love, so great, so deep, so marvellous, that it passes all our thoughts and all our understanding. For we are loved with the love wherewith the Father loveth His only begotten Son. And this is the work of God, to shed abroad in our hearts this deep and precious love, this love which is a depth unfathomable.

“It is by living faith alone, that our hearts are thus left at rest for God to work in them, and all the great works which men can do are as nothing when compared with this. But when God thus works in us we need above all things to be emptied utterly of self, or we shall give ourselves credit for the work which is His alone. For could we find a man who knew this surpassing joy and rest of heart, and who was lifted up thereby in his own eyes, this would be the deepest fall of all the falls that could betide. May He who alone can give, and alone can work, grant to us thus to yield up our hearts in stillness and in peace to Him.”

CHAPTER XX

WORK

It has sometimes happened, even in these busy days, that there are dreamy people who would hail such words as these with a joy that springs, however little they may know it, from their fallen nature. The Lord has given them, it may be, some moments of His presence, and because they cannot but know that such moments are worth, as the Master said, a year of the labour and toil of man, they begin to despise and neglect the common, it may be the low and earthly work, the Lord has given them to do.

Or more commonly they despise it in their neighbours.

For such people are generally to be found amongst those who are not obliged to earn their bread, or to be at the beck and call of others. And if they cannot deny that the poor have to earn their living, or that a wife, or a daughter, or a mother must of necessity be at the service of others, they pity such people, and feel assured that they must be less spiritual, and have less communion with God, than if they could have all the day their own, and no need to be busy.

And in their inmost hearts they are apt to think of themselves as Mary, sitting at the feet of the Lord, whilst the poor neighbour at her wash tub, or the mother with her children, are Marthas who have failed to choose the better part.

Such “worm-eaten people,” as the Master would say, were assuredly to be found in the city of Strasburg five hundred years ago. For the Master found that it was needful to explain, in very homely words, that he by no means intended his dear children to sit down and do nothing, and imagine themselves to be thereby more holy and more spiritual.

That which he desired them to understand was this — that great works done for God are a very different thing from works great and small which God does by us. And if the natural heart is busy or idle, it matters not, it is always ready to pride itself upon the one or the other. But if we yield ourselves to God, it does not follow that He will do nothing by us. He may do a great work, or a very small one, which seems low and common.

“Sometimes,” said the Master, “the Holy Ghost does great and marvellous things, in and by His friends in whom He dwells. He made some to be great prophets, and some to be martyrs, but great works such as these are not needed at all times. There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, and different ministries, but the same Spirit worketh all in all. Children, you see with your eyes, that one body has many members, and various senses, and each one has its own work. None can do the work of the other, nor can any be what God has made the other to be.

“So are we, dear children, if we have that true and living faith (which, however, some people called Christians have as little of as heathens or Jews). For those who have believed are one Body in Christ — and each one a different member. One is an eye, and one an ear, one a foot, and one a hand. And some are members that have small and common work to do, but the small and common work is needful also.

“Now, dear children, it may be God has given you only common work. One has to spin, and another to make shoes, and some are clever, and some are stupid. God gives to all the gift for the work He gives them to do. If I had not been called to minister among you, and were one of the

working men of the town, I should be very thankful to the Lord if He made me able to be a shoemaker. It should be a pleasure to us to earn our bread with our own hands.

“Children, if you are only feet or hands, do not aim at being eyes. Let every one do the work the Lord gives; very common rough work it may be. He knows how to give the fit work to each.

“Our sisters, too, they have their own work given them by the Lord, and their own gifts. To some He gives a sweet and tuneful voice, let such sing psalms. Some have smaller gifts, but no good gift is so small that it can come from any but God. And it is a great and precious gift of God that some can do for others that which the others cannot do. If there is one of you who is of no use to his neighbours, that man will have to account to God for his useless life. For God gives to each member something which the other members have not, in order that each may be for the good of all.

“And yet how comes it that I hear so many grumbling and complaining that their common daily work is a hindrance to them? You may be quite sure that the work the Lord gives you, He does not give in order to hinder you. Whence comes that lamentation over it? And how comes it you have conscientious objections to doings it?

“Dear children, be sure it is not your work that is the hindrance, but your discontent, and the want of a single eye in all that you do.

“If you did your work, as you ought to do it, for the Lord, and not for yourselves — if you neither aimed at pleasing yourselves, nor mortifying yourselves, but did it simply for the Lord, fearing Him and loving Him alone, you would never have a reproachful conscience at being obliged to do common things.

“If you are a spiritual man, be ashamed only of doings your work badly, or not simply and honestly for the Lord.

“The Lord never reproveth Martha for her work, for it was a holy and good work; He reproveth her only because she was doing it in a careful and anxious manner. We should take the work just as God gives it, and commit it all to Him, and do it quietly and with a restful heart, and be sure that we are doing it to Him. Let us work or rest, just as He desires it, and be at peace either way.

“If you meet with any old helpless infirm man, there is a call from God to go and help him, and we should vie with one another in doing such works of love, and in bearing one another’s burdens. If you do not, be sure God will take the work from you, and give it to another, who will do it gladly, and the loss will be yours.

“But there are a good many amongst you who would like to be rid of all these common works of helping and serving others. You would like to be all eyes, and neither hands nor feet. You would like to be beholding high things, instead of doing low things.

“That comes, dear children, from laziness.

“I know a man, the dearest it may be of the friends of God. He has worked in the fields all his life, more than forty years, and there he is working still. This man once asked the Lord if he should give up his work, and go and sing and pray in the church, But the Lord answered, No, he should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and feel it an honour to do so.

“Yet you should each of you make sure of a certain time in the course of the day for simple and still and peaceful communion with the Lord. One can do this best in one way, another in another way. We ought to find at least a good hour for such intercourse with God, and turn it to account in the way which we find most profitable, for we are not all eyes, and different things help different

people. But in any case it should be without images, or forms, or any outside things. The heart should turn simply to God.

“If you are serving God according to His desires, He will remember your desires; but if you are serving God according to your own desires, He will answer to it by carrying out His own, which may be very contrary to yours.

“But men, with their scrap of wisdom, are always thinking that they could manage matters better than the Lord, and choose out the right work for themselves and others, better than He can. Sometimes people ask me when they come to confess, what they are to do, but I am not a judge of that, I can only look to the Lord about it, and if He does not tell me, I say, ‘Dear children, go to the Lord yourselves, and He will tell you.’

“Yet we are often apt to judge one another, and say one should be doing this and another that, just as it seems good in our own eyes. Yes, our own wisdom is one of the worms and maggots I have told you of before, that eat up the plants in the Lord’s garden.

“Some people say this is all a part of the new-fangled teaching of these days, and only because they never heard a thing before, they cast it aside, not considering that it is not wonderful if the hidden wisdom of God is indeed a new thing to them.

“Dear children, if we do not take now, day by day, the work the Lord gives us, we shall never do it at all, and we shall suffer eternal loss.

“May He grant us to be faithful and honest in doing the work He gives, and doing it as His Spirit teaches each one for himself, and to His praise and honour.

“Under the old covenant the Levites carried the ark, but now the ark carries us — He who is the Ark of the new Covenant bears us and carries us with all our sorrows, and all our sufferings. The Lord Himself it is who bends His shoulders beneath our burdens, and therefore, dear children, to us the burden is light.

“And if you have to sit at home and mend shoes, or go out to work in the fields all day to support your wives and children, if only your heart is with the blessed Lord, your souls will be a hundred times better off than many of the spiritual people who neglect their callings.

“Poor, blind, spiritual man! whoever you are who may hear these words, set to work in good earnest at the task God gives you, and take it from Him, and let not your heart wander off after something higher. And then it will no longer be your work, but God’s work, whatever it may be. And to those who thus give themselves restfully to God, He shows Himself at all moments, and draws their hearts very near to Himself.

“Swiftly, as the lightning flashes — more swiftly yet, even as an angel flies, does the light of God shine forth, down into the depths of the soul. The more swiftly, the more is it glorious and sweet. And those who have known this, are the true worshippers of God, who worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth.

“And to them all natural things of this world have become poor and empty, for that which their soul loveth is not there, and they wonder and say — ‘Where are now all my bowings before the altar, and my services, and my penances? Why is my prayer-book lying idle on the shelf?’

“For before that moment came, they loved to have something, they loved to know something and they loved to will something; and now, all that would be gain to themselves is as nothing to them, and the burdens are gone, and the eternal joy is theirs already.

“In the stillness of the night they delight their souls in God, and cast into the unfathomable depths of God their cares and sins and sorrows, asking for nothing but resting and joying in His

love. But it might be at such a moment the Lord would call them to go and nurse a sick neighbour, and they would leave the rest and gladness, to go forth, and yet be glad to go. And the Lord would then give them more in this outward service, than He gave them in the stillness and the rest before.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE RELIGION OF MAN

IT is not strange that many of these things were new to the people of Strasburg, and some of the priests and the “devout women” were fully persuaded that the doctor had become a heretic.

“In ancient times,” he said, “God’s saints were murdered and persecuted by Jews and heathens, but now, dear children, prepare yourselves to be martyred by people who seem very holy, and do many more works than you do. They will tell you, you are all in the wrong, and they have seen and heard and learnt much more than you, and that you know nothing at all. That touches you to the quick — but keep quiet, set a watch upon yourselves, and be silent. Speak only to the Lord, and say, ‘Dear Lord, Thou knowest well I seek only to please Thee.’ But do not expect to please others, for many will condemn and judge you, if you do not follow all the outside religion to which they pin their faith.

“You have seen the fields harrowed and smoothed, after the seed has been put in. Now just so do many people smooth down and harrow their souls with confessions and penances and religious doings, but the evil roots of noisome weeds are left untouched below, and as the seed springs up, the weeds spring up too, and choke and spoil the good seed. The pride, and the uncleanness, and the hatred, and envy, and anger, and many another weed, come up thick and strong, and the blessed fruit, and the fresh life of the plants of God, are spoiled and smothered.

“This is just the history of many of those old fathers who went to live in the woods, and exercised themselves with all sorts of penances and holy works, for thirty or forty years, and yet never reached down to the roots of the noisome weeds; and therefore at the end of all their performances, they were but a display of all that is evil.”

But the Master took no heed to the anger of the “religious” people of whom he spoke, and as time went on, he spoke out more strongly and plainly.

“The work of the Holy Ghost in the souls of men can be hindered,” he said, “in various ways. The first great hindrance is self-will and the love of created things.

“The next are the seven Sacraments. People are taken up with outward signs and symbols, and thereby a veil is drawn between their hearts and the inward truths of God. The worship of God is spiritual at all times and in all places, as S. Paul says he would that men prayed everywhere, and in all things gave thanks.

“Another hindrance is, that even good men look at divine and spiritual things in a carnal way — they have natural and fleshly thoughts of the Lord Jesus, and think much of visions, and represent to themselves the Lord Jesus, or the angels, in some bodily shape of their own imagining” (it could indeed scarcely be otherwise where crucifixes abound), “and work themselves up to think they are specially favoured by God because of these workings of their imagination, and a love for Christ which is the excitement of natural feeling. Therefore the Lord said to His disciples, It is good for you that I go away, for they knew Him after the flesh, and thus even the presence of His blessed manhood had become a hindrance to them.

“People are, notwithstanding, satisfied and proud when they have let their natural hearts occupy themselves with the things of God. ‘I am always thinking,’ they will say, ‘about the Lord, how He stood before Pilate and Herod, and was scourged,’ and so on.

“Dear children, whoever you may be who are thus taken up with your feelings, remember that He of whom you speak is not a man only, but the great and mighty God, who created all things, and upholds them with the word of His power, and that He became as nothing for your sins, and therefore let the thought of His sufferings lay you low in the dust before Him with shame and sorrow.

“Oh, how little fruit has the blessed and glorious suffering of the Lord brought forth in men! Even the remembrance of it can fill the heart with pride, and with self! You hear people talk of these deep things of God, just as if they had flown up into the highest heaven, and have yet never taken one single step out of their own wretched selves!

“How many are there who will stand there, clothed in shame, when all things are made manifest, who pass now for the spiritual and the holy! They will wish then they had never heard of these high and deep and holy things, nor had gained to themselves a great name amongst religious people — they will wish then that they had spent their days rather in herding cattle in the fields, and working in the sweat of their brow! ‘How little do they know that their spirituality is but sense and nature!

“They talk of ‘the dear Lord Jesus,’ and His birth and death, and are filled with an enjoyment which they think is of God, or they weep tears over the sufferings and the cross of Christ, but all these things pass smoothly through their souls, as a ship through the Rhine, and leave no trace behind. For their love is a love of the enjoyment of their own feelings, and not a love of God. Outside things have touched their hearts, and the inner truth has never reached them. But natural love, and divine love, look often so much alike, it is more than easy to mistake the one for the other.”

Yes, how can we know the one from the other?

Master Tauler tells us this also. “If it is natural love and enjoyment,” he says, “such a man will drag himself away with a great effort from the things of the world. But if it is divine love, the things of the world will drop off, and he will despise them, and they will become to him nauseous and loathsome. It will be as though he can see no longer, for the glory of the light that has shone down upon him, for the natural eye is darkened by the radiance of the glory.

“And when this has happened to a man it does not exalt him, but casts him down, and he fades away as it were into his own nothingness. Thus can we know that it was the light of God.

“And therefore, dear children, it is exactly contrary to the spirituality of the natural heart, for that hoists people up to a wondrous height in their own self-satisfaction and self-conceit, and makes them look down on others from this giddy height, and they say they are above this one or that one — this thing or that. Remember, dear children, a godly man never talks of being above any person or thing, however small or mean, but when it is God who has raised him up above the things below, he loves and honours more than before, those whom he loved and honoured for natural reasons; for he sees himself less than the least, and above none.

“Neither does he despise the body, which is the work of God, or anything that God has made. You see people tormenting the poor body, and leaving the evil flesh untouched. What has the poor body done, that you should torture it? Such people are trying to break through stone walls with their heads. They break their heads and leave the wall standing. They may shut themselves up in convents, and have their hearts wandering all over the world after the things that perish.

“And, on the other hand, you may find people at the great yearly market in the town, with buying and selling, and all sorts of din and noise all round them, and yet they have their hearts so shut in with the Lord, in peace and rest, that nothing disturbs or distracts them.

“That is the best convent to live in, the blessed convent of communion with God, whereas some closed in by stone walls could not keep their thoughts from wandering for two minutes.

“But because they do the works which men can see with their eyes, people praise them, and hold them up as examples. And thus they become quite convinced themselves that they are holy and good, and they have a false peace and rest of heart, and no sense of sin to trouble them. But if from time to time their consciences are awakened, they think of the penances they have done, and count over their good works, till they are more proud and vain than they were before.

“They do not understand that what they need is to be converted.

“And at times when they fall into sin and feel uneasy, they give way to self-indulgences to raise their spirits; but the next day you may find them doing penance again, for they do not want to lose their good name before men.

“Or to ease their consciences, they will talk about the things of God, and look out texts which may give them comfort, turning away from those which would warn and convict them. And thus they again gain for themselves a peace and rest that are not of God.

“But conscience may be put to sleep for a time, and then it is sure to wake and trouble them afresh, and they are beset with fleshly temptations to covetousness, and uncleanness, and laziness, and such like. Then they think to themselves, they are thus beset, in order that they may make a valiant stand, and win for themselves crowns of victory at last. And for a while they fight with the temptations, but little by little they give way, because the flesh is too strong for them, and the end is, they give themselves up hopelessly to the lusts of the flesh, to eating and drinking, and gadding about, and amusing themselves.

“But for the sake of their good name they keep themselves from disgraceful crimes; and they keep up religious services, which in their hearts they hate, for they are utterly wearied of them. They have become just like the men of the world around them.

“So, dear children, the guilty conscience may find rest, which is a false rest, in two ways. It may be stifled with pleasures of the world, or it may be puffed up by abstaining from pleasures, and suffering penances, till the man is convinced that he is highly esteemed by God, and that he is standing on a pinnacle from whence he can look down on all the people who are not like himself, and in fact upon all people, for he is in his own eyes spiritual, and the rest are low and carnal; he is doing all sorts of holy works and penances, and they are livings like common men and women.

“All this while, however, notwithstanding their good opinion of themselves, the fear of hell is gnawing at their hearts. Because they are trusting in themselves, and not in God, they are afraid of Him, and therefore cannot love Him, and they take every trouble He sends them as a dire misfortune which they have never deserved.

“To quench the fear of hell, they count up their good deeds, and yet they are always in fear and darkness, though they believe at the same time God is greatly their debtor. Yes, a man may be as proud of a wooden walking-stick as of a jewelled sword.

“And at last, after all this, the Lord in His grace, who loves them as a tender mother loves her child; who knows the mortal sickness of their souls, as a wise physician who cannot be deceived — the Lord, in His great mercy, oftentimes opens their blind eyes, and then they fall down and say,

‘My sins are more in number than the sand of the sea, I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee,’ and the grief and agony of their souls are such that words cannot tell them.

“And it is then, dear children, that they are near to the door of the Lord’s great grace, and He welcomes them into the bride-chamber of His beloved Son. He heals and binds up the wounds of the broken-hearted. He fills them with His joy, with the riches of His consolation.

“Dear children, when this has happened to a man, when he has been brought into the gladness and the glory of that wedding-feast, of that high festival, then to him are earthly festivals amongst the things that are past away. He rejoices no more in Christmas nor in Easter, nor in any feast-day in the calendar, but he rejoices every day in the high festival of God’s marvellous and surpassing love. Whatever day of the year it may be, in that day all festivals meet, and are complete with the fulness of joy.”

CHAPTER XXII

REST

THE Master had much to say to his beloved children about this festival of God. It was of this that he delighted to tell them. Whilst the pestilence, and the war, and the persecution of Rome, were desolating the city, Master Tauler dwelt in the gladness of the bridal chamber, and told to the weary and sorrowful around him, the things that he had seen and heard. And thus it came to pass that many entered in, and found themselves in that inner chamber of rest, and peace, and joy, and to them “the curse causeless came not,” but passed as a bird that wanders, and a swallow that flies, far above the heads of men.

Meanwhile they feasted with Him they loved, in the banqueting-hall of His joy, and when Master Tauler preached and spoke of the blessed feast, they well understood him, and rejoiced with him.

“It is called a supper,” the Master said, “and thus in truth it is. For after supper follows no other meal, nor doth there follow any work more, but rest only. And this let us well consider. For in the supper-chamber the rest cometh for the heart and mind, rest to all the being, rest from work and toil (Heb. iv. 10), rest where all things find their rest, rest in God, for in Him is rest eternal. Then is there no more work to do, and there is no meal to follow, for the soul is satisfied.”

“No more work to do! to sit still, and dream away the time?”

“To sit still and dream away the time, is the rest,” said the Master, “of the natural man, and such a rest, a rest of emptiness and idleness, is no rest to the godly man. But the holy rest and stillness which the soul has found in God, is a sweet and blessed seclusion, the secret place of the Most High, where the soul beholds in simple adoration the inconceivable glory of God.

“This rest attracts and draws the soul at all times with a longing that is deep within, and it is found not in idleness, but in the activity of following the Lord; and in burning love is it eternally possessed, and when it is possessed it is sought after all the more.

“But the mere rest from work, sought after for its own sake, a heathen or a Jew can find and love. And this natural rest is not in itself sinful, but to sinful man it is a snare and a danger, and because it may be mistaken for rest in God, it oftentimes puffs up the heart with pride and vanity.

“But in the rest of God, it is thus we speak, as said S. Augustine of old, ‘O Lord, when I turn to Thee, with all the desire of my soul, I am emptied of myself, and for me there is no more any labour nor any burden, and my life is filled with Thee, and Thou dwellest in me, and givest me to drink of Thy love, so that I forget all sorrow and pain.’

“And so is it said in the Holy Scripture, ‘I held Him, and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of rest.’

“O children, the soul has at times more love than it can understand, for love enters into the inner chambers, whilst the understandings stays without, and cannot follow within. And there does the soul hear the voice of the Beloved, and is melted in His love. And as the gold or silver that take the form of the vessel wherein they are melted, so is the soul shaped into the form of the love of the heart of Christ.

“So doth S. Paul speak of it, when he says that God has chosen us to be conformed to the image of His Son, for our God is a consuming fire of love.

“And when the soul is thus melted in the furnace of His love, and rests and is still in Him, then is it given to us to know that we are one with Him, and changed into the same image, from glory to glory, so that we can speak to Him and say, ‘I have nothing more of my own; but Thou and I, O Lord, have but one house, one heritage, one table, one seat, one bed of rest.’

“Then only can we be faithful witnesses for Him, for the truest witness is that God is all, and there is none beside.

“It is the man who dwells in the secret place, in the Paradise of God, who is in himself nothing, for he is lost and swallowed up in God. And that which there he sees and hears, the glory and the sweetness, he can tell to none, for it is beyond all words, and all thoughts, and all understanding, it is God Himself.

“But from that high place (mark this, dear children) the soul looks down with careful thought to the small and low things with which it has to do down here, to see whether they cannot bring forth more fruit to the praise of God.

“Thus the man of faith, who is delivered from himself, hangs as it were between heaven above and earth beneath. For his spiritual life is lived in heaven, high above himself and all things here — it is hidden in God at all times, all day long; but his bodily life is lived in the lowest place, for he is humbled beneath all around him on the earth below. And yet he is not dragged down in his spirit by the lowest and the meanest work. He has peace at all times, and everywhere, in doings and refraining, in loving and in suffering, in spiritual things and natural things. And thus he is a true witness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, humbled Himself, and took the lowest place on earth below, and is sitting now far above all heavens in rest and glory.

“But if it is to the things down here the heart is cleaving, we cannot know this rest in God.

“Dear children, with all our hearts and souls must we enter in to that high festival of eternal joy, and leave behind the low things of this passing world. We must do as Abraham did of old; he left below the servants and the ass, and he went with his son, high up on the mountain to God. For this we are answerable; for the will of the new man is set in command, as the prince over his country, as the father over his house. And this princely will leads ever up, above the earth to God.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SUMMER FIELDS

“LET us search and try our ways,” the Master said another time. “Let us set in order and judge our ways and doings, lest there should be in any of them some aim and object which is not God. We should do, dear children, as the husbandman does in March. When he sees that the sun begins to shine forth, he clips and cuts his trees, and digs up his ground, and turns over the soil with toil and care.

“Thus should a man with earnest care turn over the soil of his heart, and clip and prune the trees of his outward senses, and root out from the soil all useless weeds that draw the nourishment from the ground.

“How thickly do such weeds spring up! Pride of outward things, and pride of spiritual things. Covetousness, hatred, envy, and many more, uncleanness of heart, and laziness that hides itself here and there under a fair covering — all these things should he confess and condemn in his heart before God.

“Yet when he has done this, it is as the fields in March — the sun is shining, but the great warmth of the sun is not gone forth as yet, and the ground is cold and hard.

“But the summer follows soon, and the Sun of the Face of God shines down apace upon the bare and empty field. The sun, the sweet full sunshine, strikes down into the soil, and then cometh a gladsome summer, and fair fresh flowers of May spring up, and all is green, and the blossoms unfold, that are to turn to fruit at last. And no tongue can tell, and no heart can conceive, how great the joy and bliss that make summer in the soul where the Holy Ghost abides.

“For He in His great glory, and in His sweetness and in His joy, fills all the soul with the delight of God. He is, and He is called, the blessed Comforter, and thus is He found to be to the soul that is His home.

“Oh, how great and high is the feast He maketh there! Then is the festival spread out, and the odours of the spices and of the pleasant fruits are so sweet, that the soul longs yet the more, and the May time and the flowers are there, and the joy is poured out till every vessel is filled and runneth over, for the Holy Ghost gives richly, and gives sweetly, to the guests around His table.

“O children, one only drop of that comfort, drunk by one soul alone, surpasseth far, and extinguisheth utterly, all delight and sweetness that all created things can give.

“What should we do, dear children, when God has given to us this blessedness and rest? For there are some who afterwards rest in their enjoyment, and trust in it, so that they become careless and unfaithful, and seek after joy, rather than after God.

“And when the enemy sees that it is thus with us, he pours into our souls a false delight and sweetness, that he may pacify our hearts with that which is not God.

“What then should we do? Should we cease to yield ourselves up to this rest and sweetness? No, in no wise. We should receive it with the deepest thankfulness, and offer it up as a sweet odour to God in humility of heart, and praise Him for it, and own ourselves unworthy of it. And then as one who runs upon a message, so should we do. It may be such an one has run four miles, and feels the need of food and drink. And when he has eaten and been refreshed, he is so glad and strong

again, that he can run ten miles more. Thus should the man press forward, whom God has thus fed and strengthened with His blessed comfort and delight. He should serve more actively than ever before, he should love more, and thank more, and praise more, and long more than ever before after God, with a burning love and deep desire, so that God may still his longing with yet deeper consolation and fulness of delight.

“For it will be with him as with one who brings a crown piece to another man, and the man runs to meet him, and gives him in return a hundred thousand pounds of gold. For as often as he turns to God in love and thankfulness, God runneth in His love to meet him, and giveth him a hundred thousand times more grace and comfort in each moment that follows.

“And thus the sweetness of the joy will lead us into yet further depths of the heart of God. Just as one who has to go on a journey, and he gets into a cart which is for use, and not for enjoyment. The gifts of God should be to us as the cart, and the enjoyment should we find in God alone.

“For there is a depth of glory and of gladness in the heavenly place, where dwells the sweetness of which I have been telling you, for ever and for ever. There is the heart so still, so real, and so solemnised, and ever more and more secluded, and ever further drawn into the inner chambers of God, and therefore more simple, more satisfied, and more free, as regards all outward things.

“For God is in that secret place of joy, and it is He who acts, and rules, and fills the house with Himself. And there does the soul breathe the life of God, and passes into the light and into the warmth of the Spirit, who is the radiance and the glory, and walks in the burning furnace of love, the love that is God Himself.

“And it is from this love and glory that such an one goes forth into the sorrow and need of the house of God below, with holy prayers and desires for that which God desires for all. And he will return again to the rest above, and thence look down upon the sorrowing and suffering saints of God.

“Thus goeth he in and out, and yet is evermore within, in the still and lovely place, for there is his life and being, and thence the spring of all he works and does.

“Dear children, when once a man is become as nothing before God, when he is delivered from himself, so that he is nothing, and hath nothing, then through this time of loss and sorrow, he enters into the surpassing joy. For it is sorrow and suffering to a man to be stripped and emptied of all, and to learn through tribulation and temptation what it is to rest in God alone. But had we to give up a thousand worlds, all would be as nothing to the joy of God.

“Did not the dear saints of old suffer and die with gladness and delight, for they had the comfort of God in their inmost souls, and for Him they counted all as bliss? For, children, there is no true pain, nor sorrow for the man who dwells in God. No sorrow here, no hell to come, for the eternal God could as soon forsake Himself as forsake the heavenly man.

“And therefore if all the sorrow of the world were to come upon this man, it could not harm him, and it would be to him as though it were not, for even sorrow to him would be joy and sweetness.

“For heaven is begun for those who dwell in God; there do they walk, and there is their eternal Home; they need but to set the other foot, which is still in this world below, in the land of life eternal, for the eternal life is theirs already. It has begun now, and it lasts for evermore.

“For they have entered in through the one true door, through Jesus Christ our Lord — they have entered into life eternal, and into the depths of the Father’s love. Then do they go in and out, and find unfading pasture, and to them are the words fulfilled which the Lord has spoken through His

prophets of olden time, 'I will feed My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God.'

“And there, dear children, the rest and the work are one.”

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECT

IT is true that the Master had never learnt, as we learn now, many blessed truths of the New Testament. Even Nicholas, could he have been questioned by well-taught Christians of these days, would have given very many incorrect answers.

And yet at the bottom it might be found that the Master and Nicholas had received the same truths which we are now taught, but with this difference: we are taught in the first place to believe the actual facts that God has done this, or that, in the work of our redemption, quite apart from the practical effect of it in ourselves. The "Friends of God" learnt from Scripture the practical effect, and judged thereby of the work of God.

For instance, we are taught that the Holy Ghost united all believers to the Lord, on the day of Pentecost, and that from that day to this, the Holy Ghost thus joins to the Lord every one who believes in Him, and that this is equally true of believers who are walking consistently or inconsistently.

We are also taught that God regards the believer as one who has died, and is risen again to die no more. That is to say, that he reckons the death of Christ as our death, because it was in our place, as our substitute, that He died. And therefore the guilty sinner is regarded by God as dead, for guilt no longer rests upon the head of him who has believed in Jesus; and the new man, alive with the life of Christ, and joined to Christ by the Holy Ghost, stands before God in Christ, not only free from all spot and stain, but one with Christ, and loved with the love wherewith the Father loves Him. And this again we know (to our shame) is true of all who believe, whether walking consistently with so wonderful a place before God, or alas, as too often, inconsistently.

Yet it is true that notwithstanding all our inconsistencies, there is always to be found, more or less, in the life and walk of a believer, that which is the consequence of the great work of the Lord Jesus, and of the gift of the Holy Ghost. And this consequence, love to God, who first so loved us, is found in the life and walk of all those, who, though ignorant of much truth, have received by faith God's great gifts. The saints of the fourteenth century had not as clear a knowledge of the great facts upon which our salvation rests, nor of our perfect acceptance in Christ, as we now have, if we have been well taught in the Scriptures.

We are taught that we are dead, and that our life is hid with Christ in God. The true practical effect (which, alas, we overlook so often) is, that we reckon ourselves as dead, and no longer feed the flesh, or give way to the desires of the old man, but have our joys and interests in heaven above.

And as the practical effect is also the work of God, we find that these dear saints of old were led into the sense and the enjoyment of that which God had done for them, and consequently walked in holiness of life, no longer loving the world, nor serving the flesh, but following the voice of the Beloved, and delighting in His presence. And they judged by the effect of the cause. We know the cause, and too often think little of the effect.

We find too a great difference between such writings as those which go by the name of Thomas a Kempis, and the writings of the Friends of God, who had drawn their water nearer to the fountain-head, from the teaching of the ancient Waldensian "Brethren."

That life in God, and walk with God which is spoken of by the author of the “Imitation of Christ,” as an attainment, won by mortifications and effort, is spoken of by Tauler and by other “Friends of God,” as an unmerited gift of grace, never to be attained by penances and mortifications, but on the contrary making such efforts to cease, and to be cast aside, as the work of man, which hinders the work of God, who alone worketh in us, to will and to do, of His good pleasure.

Let us listen to Master Tauler as to this matter also. “If God speaks, let the soul be still and hearken. It is not doing that helps here, but ceasing to do. And it is this which is hard to us and painful. To be as dead and gone, by the power of the death of Christ.

“Yes, dear children, the sacrament itself is a hindrance to you, for all that you regard as a help and stay, only hinders you from feeling that you are nothing, and can do nothing.

“But your reason will start up, and say there must be something of which you are to make a prop and stay, and will tell you ‘you are idle, and negligent, you ought to be up and doing. Why are you sittings here doing nothing? Go and pray. Be off, you are wasting your time — do this good work or that.’

“And then come untaught men, who are full of their own doings, and say, ‘Dear man, why do you sit here idle? Go and hear some preaching. Bestir yourself! Go to the sacrament.’ Make sure, children, that you do not go to the sacrament as a step up to God!

“I tell you if you came thus to me, and told me you wanted to receive the sacrament, I should speak to you and say, ‘Who sent you here? was it God, or was it your natural heart that wanted a prop? or was it habit?’

“Dear children, do not misunderstand me. I do not mean that to hear the preaching of God’s Word, or to go to the Lord’s Supper, are thing forbidden to believing people. But I do say they are hindrances, and not helps, if you make of them a ground to stand on before God — a prop or a stay.

“Nature would much rather go on a pilgrimage to Rome, than be cast wholly and entirely on God.

“Therefore I say, if you depend on these things, it is just as much as if you turned your back upon God, and said to Him, ‘I will not depend upon Thee, I will go elsewhere to find that which my soul needs.’

“It is just the same as if the Lord had never been crucified for you, in order that He might do the glorious work for you and in you.

“O children, could you but cease from doings, and let go the last prop and the last stay, where would it land you? How blessed is the end of the man who is cast only on the Lord! How blessed is the proof of this in Paul the Apostle!

“For he was taught the truth, unveiled and glorious, in the one true school, the third Heaven above. There did he see and gaze upon the Truth Himself, and beholding Him, he learned from His lips, and thus he says, ‘We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord!’

“For it is as S. Augustine taught, when the Lord revealed this truth to him, ‘Thou shalt be changed into Mine image, it is not that I was changed into thine.’

“What is this change? Those men know it who have experienced it, and none besides. It may come to a man in a moment, as a veil suddenly lifted which shows the glory within, and the blessed vision of the glory is the gift of God, without any deserving on our part.

“He gives it freely of His own pure grace, and those who have known it, and have entered into the secret chamber, can feel it, but cannot tell it, for it is unspeakable.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE FULL MEASURE

“DO not be afraid,” the Master said another time, “to let go all else, and to cast away all that is less than God. We should be as men who are asleep to all light and sweetness that is not the Lord Himself. Let the wisdom and the folly of this world go, for they are of the things that pass away.

“It was needful to the disciples that they should lose even the blessed company of the Lord Himself — for they were to be transformed into a higher nature, taken out of themselves, and they were to leave themselves, as it were, behind. Thus does S. Paul say, ‘Forgetting the things that are behind, and pressing forward to the things that are before,’ for it is with a high calling that we are called, and all that is less and lower than that beauty and that glory, must drop off and be left behind.

“It is when we are emptied of ourselves, dear children, that the Lord comes with the measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, and pours Himself into the measure; for nothing short of that will satisfy His love, and then does the measure run over indeed with the goodness and the sweetness that He the Lord is, evermore; and far and wide there spreads the overflowing tide, and yet the measure remaineth ever full.

“For it is as if you plunged a bowl into the unfathomable sea, it would be filled, and would flow over, and yet it ever would be full. For the Lord gives Himself to the soul in an overflowing tide beyond all that it can ask or think.

“And it is to the emptied and the hungry that thus He comes, as it is written of the King Ahasuerus, who saw the beloved Esther pale and trembling, and who saw that her spirit sank within her. Then did he hold out his golden sceptre, and he rose up from his royal throne, and he embraced her, and gave her the kiss of love, and he promised her to give her even the half of his kingdom, that she might share it with him.

“Thus so is it with the Father in Heaven, when He sees His beloved ones standing before Him, pale and sorrowful, desolate and uncomforted. Then quickly does He hold forth His golden sceptre, and rises up from His throne, so to speak, and He comes forward with the divine embrace and kiss, and He lifts up the mourning soul above all sorrow and fear, into the arms of His love.

“What passeth then, think you, dear children, what wonder passeth in the soul He loves? He gives His only begotten Son in that touch of the golden sceptre, and in the sweetness of His kiss He gives the blessed, and the marvellous delight of the Holy Spirit the Comforter. He shares His kingdom, so to speak, with that soul He loves, for He gives her power over Heaven and earth, yea, power over herself, and that she should be set above the things that He has made and that He rules, and the power that is His by nature is hers by grace.

“So doth the measure overflow that in due time it will be seen that all creation shall be filled with the Glory that He gives His own. Were there not in Christendom these beloved friends of God, the world would not stand for an hour, for their works are the works that far surpass the busy works of all Christendom beside. God it is who works the works in men such as these, and therefore there are no works to be measured against the works they do, for the works of God are high above all works of men.

“So full and deep is the measure of their joy, that it passes all the sense, and all the understanding, of angels and of men — peace and delight eternal. And thus does S. Paul speak of it, of this true and blessed peace.

“Dear children, to walk with God is not a fearful and a hard thing, as some of you imagine. But there is only one path to walk in. In other paths you may come to a knowledge of God which is by reason; but red copper, though at times it looks like gold, is yet not gold, but copper only.

“No, dear children, there are many religious ways and doings, but only one way to the living God. That man would be a great fool who planted his vineyard behind a mountain, where the sun could never reach it. And he would also be a fool, who, when he desired to see the sun, should turn his back to it, and his face the other way.

“Amongst a hundred men who desire to pass for good and Christian men, scarcely will you find one who has turned simply and wholly and only, to Him who is the living Truth. They are content to live in lower things.

“And so it is with them as with some rude peasant who is not fit to be the companion of a king, nor to be with him in his secret chamber. Far less are the full, and the rich, and the outwardly religious men fit to be there, where the friends of God abide eternally in Him.

“But the friends of God are anchored in the stillness of His rest, and the waves of outward things can never reach them there. He has given to them a jewel that is a secret sign and pledge, a peace so deep and so divine, that none can understand it, saving he who hath it. And in the anchored ship the Lord is sitting, and thence He teaches those who stand upon the shore. Thus does God, through the men who have found Him, teach and guide the world below.

“It is a way of sorrow, children, that leads into the rest, but that which costs nothing is worth nothing. You see the young and strong and healthy and glad, whose flesh and blood have never been tamed or conquered. They are active and busy, in natural ways, but they complain that it is labour and toil to follow the Lord, for sense and reason are strong within them.

“Yes, it is labour and toil, for they have not gone the right way to work. They are of the race of Simon the Cyrenian, who bore the Lord’s cross from compulsion and not from love.

“But for those who bend down in love beneath the cross of the Crucified One, it is far otherwise than this. Do they need to sleep, they lie down upon the cross and rest, and their heart remembers and desires the Lord. And to them His faithful breast is their bed, and His tender heart their pillow, and His loving arms their covering. To those stretched-out arms, those arms stretched out once upon the cross, and for evermore in love, flee, dear children, for shelter in all sorrow and pain, and you shall be sheltered well. When you eat or drink, let each morsel of food be dipped, as it were, in the precious Blood of Christ. And if the way be narrow, look onward to the end. For he who shoots an arrow fixes one eye, one eye singly, on the mark, and thus he aims truly, for he looks at nought beside.”

CHAPTER XXVI

THE HEART OF GOD

THUS were many sorrowful hearts nourished, and cherished, and comforted in those old days, for the words which the Master spoke, came from the depths of his heart, and reached the hearts of those who heard him. It was very plain to them that he had not learnt his lesson from learned doctors and books of theology, but that he was speaking of the things which he had seen and heard. He had been rooted and grounded in love, and he had learnt his lesson from “the lips which are as lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh.”

“Well did Mary Magdalene call Him Rabboni,” he said, “for Rabboni is ‘my teacher,’ and Christ is the Teacher of love. And this in three ways. He rewards nothing but love. He rewards nothing but out of love. He rewards nothing but by love. For no work is accounted before God, but the work that is worked by love. The work passes, but the love is eternal, and he who loveth, loveth for evermore.

“And further, God rewardeth only out of love. It is out of love that He gives Himself, for it is Himself that He gives us, and gives Himself wholly. He giveth not by measure, not a part, nor for a time, for He loveth with an everlasting love. And He gives nothing less than Himself as He said to Abraham of old, ‘Fear not, for I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward.’

“And thirdly, He rewardeth only by love. And this love consists in the unveiling of His glorious face, so that we may behold Him, and enjoy Him, and possess Him for evermore.

“Could you take away from God His love to the souls of men, you would take away His life and His being — it would be, if thus one dared to speak, to put an end to God.

“Did not Jesus say, ‘I am the Door of the Sheep-fold’? What is to us the Sheep-fold, dear children? It is the heart of the Father, whereunto Christ is the gate that is called Beautiful. For that door which was closed to sinful men, the door to God’s heart of love, has been unlocked and opened wide by Christ the Lord. And there within is the meeting-place of all the saints of God.

“O children, how sweetly and how gladly has He opened that door into the Father’s heart, into the treasure-chamber of God! And there within He unfolds to us the hidden riches, the nearness and the sweetness of companionship with Himself.

“For none can think, and none can understand, how ready is the welcome to those who enter in. For God thirsteth after the souls He loves, God runneth forth at all hours and all moments to meet them on their way.

“Children, will you refuse the blessed call? Will you deny to God the longing of His heart? Will you refuse the welcome and the kiss? Were you but emptied of yourselves, it never could be thus. For as surely as the flame goes upward, as swiftly as the bird soars high into the air, so does the emptied soul arise, surely and swiftly, to God.

“O children, God needs us and longs after us with a longing so deep and so strong, that it is as though all His blessedness, as though His very Being, depended upon us.

“All things that God has made, in Heaven and in earth, in His wisdom and His power, all has been created and all has been done, that He might win us back to Himself, and bring us into the depth of His Heart.

“Every creature we see should remind us of the desire and the purpose of God. This, children, is the reason of His call. And whereunto does He call us? He calls us to be to Him as His beloved Son, for unto Christ He calls us, that we may be joint-heirs with Him. Christ the First-born amongst many brethren, by nature Heir of all things, and we, joint-heirs by grace.

“We read in the Gospel of S. John, how the Lord turned and spake to the two disciples of S. John the Baptist, who were following after Him. He said to them, ‘What seek ye?’ And they answered ‘Rabbi’ (that is, being interpreted, Master), ‘where dwellest Thou?’ And He answered and said unto them, ‘Come and see.’

“Dear children, thus He speaks to us, ‘Come, soul,’ He says, ‘come and dwell with Me, and in Me, and behold Me, that thou mayest learn of Me. I will open to thee the depths of My heart, that therein thou mayest enter, and learn, and see what is the joy that is thine for evermore.’

“Thus by the Holy Ghost have we even here an unclouded vision and a perfect enjoyment of Jesus our Lord, and as the Spirit gives us this blessed joy, so He gives to us to delight in it not for our own sakes, but for the sake of God, and for God’s great glory.

“For all this blessedness was won by Christ to satisfy the need of God; it is Christ who has merited it, not we, and it is as to a son beloved, that God gives it freely to His own.

“And thus we can in sorrow be evermore rejoicing, even as the Lord Jesus when He was here below.

“For from the beginning to the end, His life was a life of sorrow and of joy.

“It was sorrow to Him to leave the throne in Heaven, and come down into this world below. Joy, that He yet was one with the Father in the glory above.

“Sorrow, that He must taste of death, and that the death of the cross. Joy, that He had the while a life undying and Divine.

“Sorrow, in that He was tempted by the enemy. Joy, that the angels came and ministered to Him.

“Sorrow, that He was an hungered and athirst. Joy, in that He was the Bread of life to men.

“Sorrow, in that He was wearied by the way. Joy, in that He is the Rest to all the hearts of His beloved.

“Sorrow, that for many His blessed work was of no avail. Joy, because of the blessedness He won for His friends for evermore.

“Sorrow, that He had need to ask from the heathen woman a drink of water. Joy, that He had to give to her the living water, so that she should thirst no more for ever.

“Sorrow, when He wept with Mary at the grave of Lazarus. Joy that His voice awakened Lazarus from the dead.

“Sorrow, when with nails He was hung upon the cross. Joy, when He promised to the thief to be with Him in Paradise.

“Sorrow, when He hung athirst amidst His enemies. Joy, that He should quench for His beloved the everlasting thirst.

“Sorrow, that He drank the bitter cup of death. Joy, that He arose on the third day in the body of His glory.

“Thus from the manger to the cross, was His life woven of sorrow and of joy. And this dying and this life, has He left to us, dear children, as a precious legacy of love, that we may evermore remember Him, and walk even as He walked through this world below.

“And it is because of God’s great love that He lets us be as the hare that is chased by the hounds of temptation and sorrow. Yes, it is His great faithfulness, and His immeasurable love, which let loose upon us the hounds great and small.

“A small temptation is often to us sinful men more dangerous than a great temptation. For we are taken unawares by a little trifling thing — a game, or a companion, or a jewel, or a little chat, or the friendliness of a worldly man. And so we are caught, and we fall into darkness and sorrow.

“But if when driven by temptation were we to flee to God, as the hart that is athirst for the brooks of water, in Him should we find the gladness and the peace and the delight, that are all the sweeter because of our weariness and thirst.

“Sweet and blessed and delightsome, here in this life below and afterwards in the eternal home — the fountain of sweet water, whereof we may drink our fill, may drink, yea drink abundantly and immeasurably — may drink from the fountain-head, from the Father’s heart.

“O children, he who has drunk from the glorious river of God, forgets himself and his sorrow — it is to him as though he could go bravely and joyously through fire and water, and through a thousand naked swords — he fears no longer life nor death, nor joy nor sorrow. Children, why is this? It is because he has drunk to the full of God’s eternal love.”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE UNVEILED FACE

IT was strange to many of those who listened to the Master, to hear that they would find this blessed welcome, if only they would go straight to the Lord Himself.

They had learnt in former days that Mary and the saints would speak on their behalf to God. And many a one would go to kneel before the image of the Virgin Mother, and implore her to intercede with her Son, and to incline Him to show mercy upon the poor faithless soul, who believed in the love of Mary rather than in the love of Jesus.

“Children,” said the Master, when he had read to them the story of the woman of Canaan, “what should a poor and sorrowful and comfortless man do now, when trouble has taken hold of him, and there seems no way of deliverance? He should do as this dear woman did. He should go to the Lord Jesus, and with a loud voice call upon Him. The loud voice, dear children, is the strong desire. And he should say to Him, Lord, Son of David, have mercy upon me.

“Ah, children, this call can reach into the measureless depths — a thousand miles and far beyond, it will reach beyond all created things, for it is an immeasurable sigh. But it is so, because it is the voice of the Holy Spirit, for it is He who maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.

“Dear children, this woman had a perfect trust in Christ. And this is the one true way to God. This way leads a man straight to the Lord Himself without any to stand between.

“Let me tell you of a good woman, to whom it happened four years ago, just as it happened to the woman of Canaan.

“It seemed to her as though Heaven were opened to her, and that she saw the Lord, and Mary His mother, and all the saints around Him.

“And a great, and deep, and bitter sorrow came upon her, a sorrow too deep for words, and she felt as if in that moment she knew what hell must be.

“For the saints stood near to the blessed Lord, and she, though she could behold them there, was far, far away. Separated from God and all His saints, and it is this separation, that alone is hell.

“And she felt in her soul that it was an eternal doom, and her heart died within her.

“And in her anguish and despair she turned humbly and imploringly to Mary, and to one saint after another. But then she saw that all these saints perceived her not, nor turned to look at her, nor heard her bitter cry.

“For they one and all were gazing upon the face of God, and they were so filled with the joy of His countenance, that they had neither eyes nor ears for aught beside.

“Then she turned, as the natural heart will turn, to the bitter suffering and death of the Lord Jesus Christ,” (those people who so often knelt before their crucifixes would understand these words,) “and it was answered her, ‘Why shouldst thou take comfort from the sufferings of the Lord whom thou hast never honoured? of Him of whom thou art not worthy?’

“And when she saw that neither Mary, nor the saints, nor the cross of the Lord could help her, she turned herself to God, and called mightily upon Him, and owned to Him that she was a sinner deserving hell alone.

“And the Lord, who waited till she would come to Him alone, and to no other, spake comfort to her heart, and drew her to Himself, and showed her His unfathomable love.

“For unto God can no creature come through any other creature, nor through any image, nor any symbol. Therefore cast but from your hearts all saints and angels, if you would behold the Face of God. For all that comes between your souls and God is a hindrance to beholding Him, and therefore is it a hindrance to our being conformed to Him. If you place a plate of gold over your eyes, it will hinder you from seeing, just as much as if it were a plate of iron.

“But our poor sinful hearts like to have something to see or hear with our outward senses, and when the outward man is reached and touched, we deceive ourselves, and think that it is well.

“Whereas the blessed mouth of Christ has spoken, saying, God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Not in outward things, not by the senses, not through images and pictures.

“Do not think, dear children, when I say this, that I would forbid to you every image. I would fain impress upon you one Image which should be ever with you. That Image will be stamped upon you, when you have found the way to the Father’s heart.

“That Image is the Image higher and fairer than all beside, and dwelling in His secret place, and beholding Him, so that as a mirror you reflect His glorious face, you will be changed into that blessed Image, in soul and spirit, and in all your being.

“And whether you walk or stand, or eat, or drink, or sleep, or wake, that Image of the Lord will be seen in you. And beholding Him, as a painter beholds the fair picture that he will copy, each line, each colour, will be that of the beautiful and glorious One on whom your eyes are set.

“This is the true Image, the fair picture of delight. There do we behold the lowliness and the gentleness and beauty of the Lord. Dear children, at all times, and in all places, let this mirror in your hearts reflect the blessed face of Christ. And let all your ways and all your works be compared therewith, and measured thereby.

“If you have to be a porter or a labourer, let this mirror be bright and undimmed as much as if you were sitting alone in your room or in a church.

“Let all things be done, and all words be spoken, as if you stood before Him and beheld Him. When you eat, let each morsel be sanctified to you by His precious Blood. When you drink, think how He has given you to drink from His smitten side. When you sleep, lie down and rest upon the heart of Jesus. When you speak, remember how He stands before you, and hearkens to each word, and that every movement, and every gesture, and every meaning of your heart, are watched by His eyes.

“And thus more and more will you be lost in the divine Image, and He will be revealed.

“Do you think it will be a loss to lay aside all outward forms?

“Do you think, ‘Is it not well that I should remember the sufferings of the Lord, and look at His image?’

“Dear children, S. Paul has said, ‘We walk by faith, and not by sight,’ and it is a cloud and veil to that which is the truth and reality, not a help to seeing it, if you put an image between.

“Not that we should think lightly or seldom of the Lord and His bitter sufferings, but for the very reason that we remember Him and all He suffered with thankfulness and love, should we cast aside our images.

“If a man owed me five pence, and gave me instead five shillings, I should not say that he had wronged me. There is an outward way of beholding the Lord, and there is an inward way. And in

this inward beholding and understanding, there are degrees, as we find in Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. If a great master, and a rude and untaught peasant, were placed before a beautiful picture, they would both see it, and yet they would not see alike. For it needs the understanding of the heart. And as far as we are emptied of ourselves, and of all that is not God, shall we have eyes to behold His glory.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VINEYARDS

THE Master's words were so plain and simple, that the poor and untaught could understand them, but they were also deep and wise, so that only those could understand who were taught by God.

And the Master so often spoke of homely things, using them as figures and pictures of the things of God, that the workmen in the town, and the labourers in the fields, had as it were a great picture-book all around them, with signs and symbols that reminded them of the things of God.

"You know how it is," the Master said, "when a man works in the vineyards. He has a long day's work to do, but he must needs in the middle of it have his dinner, and a little while to rest.

"If he is to work, he must eat. And the food enters into every part of his body, for it turns to flesh, and blood, and bones, and marrow, and then it is used up again by the labour the man has to do, so that he has to eat afresh, in order that he may return to his work.

"And even thus should the godly man do. When he is an hungered and athirst after the heavenly food, he should for a while rest from his work, and feed upon the Lord, but it should be in order that he should render again according to the grace given him, and labour the more that fruit should abound for God.

"Thus in receiving and in giving, in rest and in labour, if all is from God, and for God, the godly man grows and increases, and becomes transformed into the likeness of the Lord.

"O children, where such people are to be found, it were well worth while to feed them with precious pearls, and with gold and silver, if such things could be turned to food. It were well worth while to set apart for them the best of all that the earth can give. But yet these men of God are poor, and have none of these things; they depend on God alone, and trust in Him only.

"And truly were you thus to live upon the Lord, and trust in Him, the Father in Heaven would well provide for you. Yes, even if you were shut up inside a rock, where none could reach you.

"The vines in the vineyard, children, are like these men. Look at the vine stumps, they are black, and hard, and they look dry and barren. And if you did not know they were vines, you would think, 'that wood is good for nothing but firewood.'

"But in that dry barren stump there are hidden the living veins, and the noble strength of the vine. And the strength and sweetness shall one day flow forth from it, and the fruit of it shall be fairer and richer than the fruit of all the fruit-trees besides.

"And so it is with those beloved saints, who are hidden and unseen, because they are dwelling in God at all places and all times. They may seem to you like useless wood, black, and dry, and good for nothing. They are humble, lowly people, they are small, and you esteem them not. They do not speak fine words, nor do great works, nor win for themselves honour amongst religious men. But there are living veins in these small and despised people, and the life that flows therein is God himself.

"And look, dear children, at the vine-dresser, when he is cutting and pruning the vines. You may learn a lesson from him. If he did not cut off the useless branches, they would spoil the sweetness of the fruit.

“How many useless branches do you need to cut off? All that is not according to the Lord must be cut off, down to the very stem.

“But stop, stay your knife for a while — what is it you are going to cut away? You must see to that.

“If the vine-dresser had not learnt his work, he would cut off the good branches instead of the bad, and woefully spoil his vineyard.

“So you see people who leave their sins and their evil desires untouched, cut away at poor nature, and spoil the vineyard of God. Nature is that which God has made, and is in itself good and fair. And when the time of fruit is come, they will find how much good fruit they have spoiled.”

And the Master reminded them further, that the vines are not left to grow here and there, and everywhere, but they are tied down to a strong prop. And that the Lord Jesus is the prop and strength of His people.

“And when weeds grow up that would keep the sun from shining upon the fruitful branches, the vine-dresser roots them up, great and small.

“And then,” he said, “the great sun draws up the moisture from the earth, and it flows through the veins, a living power, and the tender grapes are seen. And still the Sun of Glory shines down, and the sweet, and glad, and pleasant fruit is drawn forth from the branches, and is fair to see, and fragrant, so that toads and snakes, who love not this sweet odour, flee far away and are seen no more.

“So does the old serpent flee, when the vines with their tender grapes give a good smell, in the summer time of God. and the glorious sun shines forth with yet greater might, and the fruit ripens, and the sweetness fills it.

“O children, the Sun of Glory shines with a glow that is far beyond the brightness of all the suns in Heaven, and fills, and sweetens, and ripens the men who abide in His shining.

“And as the grapes ripen, the vine-dresser cuts off every leaf that would come between the sunshine and the fruit. And thus as these men of God abide in the glory of His presence, all outward forms and symbols fall away, the images of the saints, and the penances and the prayers; all outside things drop off and are no more, and they are lost in the glory and in the sweetness of God.”

“The prayers?”

“Yes, dear children. There are prayers that come between the soul and God. Do not rich people come to you, and give to you, poor, misled, weak children as you are, fourpence, or sixpence, and ask you to make so many prayers, or say so many paternosters in return?

“Of this merchandise, I leave it to God in His eternity to tell you the worth. But one thing I say to you, turn away from all things, and from yourselves also, and look to God Himself. No one can do this or understand what I mean, but by the Holy Ghost. Prayer is the ascent of the heart to God. And know, that as a farthing to 100,000 golden pieces, so is all prayer repeated by the lips, to one inward prayer whereby the spirit sinks itself into the depths of the heart of God.

“If you join to this, prayer with the lips, it is well, for two are better than one. But whether you speak with your lips or not, lead your heart forth into the wilderness, where you are alone with God, as Moses led the flocks and herds out of the land of Egypt.

“Prayer with the lips, is but as chaff to the goodly wheat. My cap and my clothes are used by me, but they are not myself. And one moment’s prayer in the spirit, is worth all the penances, and words, and works, and forms, that began in Adam’s days, and go on to the day of the judgment of God.

“Men who pray thus, receive all things in return from God for they pray to the Father for the Son as the Son has prayed for them. They pray for Him that His precious work, His bitter suffering, may bring forth fruit abundantly, and that He may receive the fulness of adoration and praise.

“And do not think that you have to do with God more when you are praying, than at other times.

“‘What,’ you say, ‘am I to think all employments of equal value?’

“No, dear child. No one can doubt that praying is a better thing than cooking or that thinking of the Lord is better than spinning. But you should still, I repeat, have to do with God as much at one time as at another, for your heart should be ever with Him. You find people who seem to themselves, to be full of love to God, when they are sitting in their rooms, or in a church, or doing some holy work. But when that comes to an end, they take leave of God, till such a time comes round again.

“Be assured of this, you do not know God in truth, and have no true peace, if you are depending on times and places.

“Such people go to church in the morning, and hurry back to the church when they have a spare moment, just as if there were no God in the street, or in their homes, but as though He were only to be found in the church.

“If this is the case with you, be sure you will find God nowhere. Such people are always on the move — now doing a good work, now saying a prayer, sometimes to God, sometimes to a saint, and thus they hurry on from one thing to another, and have no rest, and never know the living God.

“Remember that whatever God gives you to do, from moment to moment, that is the very best thing you could possibly be doing, and you little know where and when the Lord will meet you.

“He who does not seek and find God everywhere, and in everything, finds Him nowhere and in nothing. And he who is not at the Lord’s service in everything, is at His service in nothing.

“People adorn the church with gold and silver, and the bells ring, and the choir sing, and the organ peals, all to the praise of God. I do not say anything against outward marks of praise. But it is a higher thing, far above all the rest when the heart gives thanks to God.

“It is far higher than all these things when a man feels that God is so great, and he is so small, that he cannot praise Him as He should be praised. This praise is higher praise than praise spoken, or sung, as it is said by one, ‘He speaks most worthily of God, who has so known the riches of His glory, that he is speechless before Him.’”

CHAPTER XXIX

THE WATER-SPRINGS

“YOU know, dear children,” the Master said, “that if you want fresh pure water, you can get it best from the spring. The water that runs away through the pipes becomes warm and muddy.

“God is the fountain head of the true and living stream, and to Him alone can we go to drink our fill of pure bright water. ‘The King has brought us into His banqueting-house, and His banner over us is love.’

“O children, well and wisely does He order all for us, leading us by strange wild ways, to bring us at last into the great depth of love, into Himself, the unfathomable blessedness. And that which there we learn to know, is beyond all imagining, and all understanding and all the foretaste of eternal joy.

“All that He does for us, and all the hidden ways of God which no eye can see, are in order that He may bring us into the holy and blessed delight of His presence.

“Hear how He calleth with His mighty voice, ‘Whosoever is athirst let him come, and drink of the water of life freely!’

“Children, the thirst is first in Him, He thirsteth for the souls that are athirst for Him, and when He findeth us, He gives us to drink so gloriously, so freely, and so fully, that from us there floweth forth the living water, a spring of everlasting life.

“It is not reading of God, or hearing of Him, or knowing of Him by sense or by reason, that will satisfy us, but it is receiving Him, drinking deeply of the blessed fountain that springs from the eternal depths — drinking from Himself where He is, and from none other.

“You know what a spring is, children, and what a cistern is. The cisterns become foul and dry, but the spring leaps up, and sparkles and flows freely, fresh and sweet and pure.

“Thus does the soul know God in a nearer and a better way, than all masters and teachers can tell of Him. He is a good teacher who tells you to go straight to the school where the Holy Ghost is the schoolmaster. He loves to find the scholars there, who are waiting to receive the high and blessed teaching that flows forth from the Father’s heart.

“If we hindered not His blessed work, how gladly, how fully, would that tide of life and joy flow down, as a mighty rain, filling the valleys and the depths, as the blessed rain for which Elijah prayed, when the earth was dry and thirsty, so that naught could grow and blossom.

“Children, it is the dry and thirsty land that calls for the great rain. And it is because we seek to satisfy our thirst with other things that the Holy Ghost is hindered.

“Do you find that your heart is dry and barren? If you do, see that you do not run off to your confessor, but flee to God, and confess to Him. And He will lay His divine Hand upon your head, and make you whole.

“Oh how great, how inexpressible, how blessed, how immeasurable, is the gift of the Holy Ghost. Were you to compare a point, which has no dimensions, with the whole world, the difference would be as nothing to that of Heaven and earth and all that therein is, compared with the gift of the Spirit of God. The least that we can conceive of the Holy Ghost is a thousandfold more than all created things.

“The Holy Ghost prepares the house in which He comes to dwell. And He fills the house with Himself, for He is God. Every chamber, every corner, is filled with His presence, though often we are not aware of His presence and His work, because we are taken up with outward things, and He will not let us know the sweetness of His presence, till we have closed the doors, and sit down in the stillness of rest, to listen to His voice. The disciples shut the doors for fear of the Jews.

“Ah, dear children! beware of the dangerous Jews, who would take from you the secret of the Lord, and the sweetness of the company of God the Holy Ghost. The Jews in the disciples’ days could only hurt their bodies, but this present evil world will hurt the soul and take from you the blessed intercourse of the heart with God. Go into company, and join in amusements where God is not, and His honour is disregarded, and then will the presence of the Holy Ghost be lost to you, and His gifts will be powerless in your hands.

“Do you say, ‘I only go to harmless amusements! I mean no ill. I must have pleasure and enjoyment at times’?

“O God! thou blessed, thou precious, thou eternal God! how can it be Thou art not to the souls Thou hast created, the sweetest, the most beloved — the most glad and blessed joy! And rather than enjoy Thee will the soul turn to the sad, dark, polluting, deadly pleasure and enjoyment of this poor world, there to find peace and joy!

“You say it does you no harm? Go and say that to God, for if that is true, your case is sorrowful indeed. It is that you have no delight in Him, and see no beauty in Him that you should desire Him.

“In three ways, dear children, did the beloved Lord attract to Himself the heart of John.

“First, did the Lord Jesus call him out of the world, to make him an apostle.

“Next, did He grant to him to rest upon His loving breast.

“Thirdly, and this was the greatest and most perfect nearness, when on the holy day of Pentecost, He gave to him the Holy Ghost, and opened to him the door through which he should pass into the heavenly places.

“Thus, children, does the Lord first call you from the world, and make you to be the messengers of God. And next, He draws you close to Himself, that you may learn to know His holy gentleness and lowliness, and His deep and burning love, and His perfect, unshrinking obedience.

“And yet this is not all. Many have been drawn thus near — and many are satisfied to go no further. And yet they are far from the perfect nearness which the heart of Christ desires.

“S. John lay at one moment on the breast of the Lord Jesus. And then he forsook Him and fled.

“If you have been brought so far as to rest on the breast of Christ, it is well. But yet there was to John a nearness still to come, one moment of which would be worth a hundred years of all that had gone before. The Holy Ghost was given to him — the door was opened.

“Do you ask, ‘Have I gone further than John had gone, when he had reached the second nearness?’ I answer, none can go beyond the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But you may ask the question in another way. ‘Have you passed beyond all that is your own? all that has its sweetness in your enjoyment of the sweetness?’

“For there is a nearness wherein we lose ourselves, and God is all in all. This may come to us in one swift moment — or we may wait for it with longing hearts, and learn to know it at last. It was of this that S. Paul spake, when he said that the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart conceived, God hath now revealed to us by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

“The soul is drawn into the inner chamber, and there are the wonder and the riches revealed. And truly he who beholds them often, must spend many a day in bed — for nature must sink beneath

the exceeding weight of that great glory. John fell down as dead before Him — Paul knew not whether he were in the body or out of the body, when this door into the inner glory was opened, and he saw the Face of Christ.”

CHAPTER XXX

OUT OF EGYPT

YES, the Master had seen that which so filled his heart and soul, that even his own blessedness and enjoyment had passed out of sight, and Christ was all and in all. This is the truest worship, when the One whom we adore, fills to us Heaven and earth, and we have lost ourselves in the glory and gladness of His Presence.

How fully shall we know this, when the great call is made, and we are caught up to meet Him and to see His Face! And how fully even now do we know it by the Spirit, who is the earnest to us of the joy to come.

The Master spoke of this continually, and he desired all who heard him, to understand that this great joy and blessedness is not gained for us by righteousness of our own. "Mark well, dear children," he said, "how it was with the thief — the enemy of Jesus, who was hanging on the cross beside Him, as the due reward of his evil deeds — who had mocked and scorned the blessed Lord, even whilst hanging there.

"The moment that he turned to the Lord, and looked to Him for grace, the Lord received him as it were with open arms, and gave him not only all that he asked, but how much more!

"He said, 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.' And the Lord answered gladly and said, 'Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.'

"Was not that more than he had asked? For the Lord did not remember him merely. He gave him to behold Himself, His blessed face, His beauty and His sweetness, the true and livings Paradise of everlasting joy.

"So also Zaccheus, who climbed upon a tree because he desired to see the Lord. Dear children, such a little Zaccheus is every man who is converted to know the love of God.

"Zaccheus was a prince of sinners; he was not ashamed to own himself an open sinner, and a great sinner — and moreover to confess openly the sins he had committed.

"So also S. Paul, who said, 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.' It is these sinners who receive the riches of grace. For where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.

"Therefore let none of you despair because your sins were, or are, so great and grievous, but do as Zaccheus did, betake yourselves to the Lord, and look to Him.

"Oh how many warnings, how many calls, how many reasons, has the Lord given us, that we should turn and be converted to Him! He does as many signs and wonders to-day to bring His people out of Egypt, as He did in the days of Pharaoh. Yes, the conversion of each one amongst us, is as great a miracle as the miracles of the Lord in the old days, in the house of bondage. Were we but truly thankful to the Lord for these warnings and these calls!

"But, alas, there are many amongst us, as amongst the people of old, who are brought out as to their bodies, but their hearts are left behind in Egypt. Many, whose conversion is an empty show and shadow, and the truth and reality with them, is that their love and their desires are set upon the enjoyments and the pleasures of the world and the flesh.

“They are careful and diligent in their religion — in vestments, and in singing, and in bowing, all in due order; and when all this is carefully observed, they sit down quite satisfied, and think that all is well, and that they are clean out of Egypt.

“Alas, dear children, this is all an empty show — these things are the fig-leaves of Adam, the fig-leaves of the tree that bore no fruit. When the Lord seeks fruit thereon, He finds it not. He finds nothing that will satisfy Him. And let all such beware, lest the curse fall upon them from His lips, ‘Let no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.’ Better is it to remain in the world, in it, and of it, than to come out of Egypt under false colours of holiness, and gain thereby a greater damnation.”

CHAPTER XXXI

THE WILDERNESS

AS years went on, there were many who began to understand from Dr. Tauler's preaching, that there is a life hidden with Christ in God — a land not of promise only, but of possession, where the soul dwells in peace and rest, in the midst of the strife and sorrow of the world — and yet apart from the world, and closed in all around, by the walls that are salvation, and the gates that are praise.

The Master often spoke of this, and had many names for this place of hidden joy and stillness.

He called it sometimes the wilderness whereunto the Lord allures the soul, and where He speaks comfortably to her, and makes her to sing as those that are brought up out of the land of Egypt. "It is a pleasant wilderness," he said, "where the storms are raging all around, and yet within that land of God there is blessed peace and quietness. And no man knows nor understands the words that God speaks to the heart, till he is brought into that wilderness, and is all alone with Him.

"It is a wilderness — for there are few who dwell there, but it is there that the soul meets oftentimes the Lord who loves her. 'Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, and all the powders of the merchant?' And who is this also, 'who cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her Beloved?' And the soul answers, 'I have found Him whom my soul loveth, I have held Him, and will not let Him go.'

"For he who has been afar in this wilderness can tell of things learnt and tasted in the stillness of the solitary place. And who that looks upon the face of God, receiveth not in return that which is Divine? It is even thus that S. Paul has taught us, 'We all with open face beholding His glory, are changed into the same image' — we are transformed into that which we behold.

"And again, it is a wilderness into which He leads us, inasmuch as many a fair flower groweth there, springing up all around, because no foot of man is there to tread them down. For the way into the wilderness is a strait gate, and few there be who enter there. But there within are white lilies and white blossoms — the pure in heart and mind — and there are the red roses which tell of the longing of the heart to suffer and to die for Christ. And there are the violets, the lowly and the small, and there are sweet roots and flowers of pleasant odours, the holy patterns left to us by many a saint of God.

"It is well to find a dwelling-place in this wilderness, where, as it is written, the flowers appear on the earth; even the saints who are gone and leave their memories behind, and the saints who are living yet.

"And again it is as in the wilderness of old, there is no want there. This seems to the men of this world an impossible thing — and it was so with the Israelites of old, who knew not that the bread of God was all they needed, and that thence was all their strength. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for the saints of God, and in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. To the lost soul we should say 'Believe,' but to him who is found we should say, 'Look upon the King in His beauty, and behold His face.'"

And the Master would often say that as man was made at first in the image of God, there is a craving in his soul which can never be satisfied with any other than God. But that when sin came in, and deformed the fair image, men became as the woman who was bowed together by the spirit

of infirmity, and instead of beholding God, they can behold none but themselves, and only seek themselves in all things. But that the man who has been brought back to God, has an eternal and quenchless desire after Him, and in Him alone has joy and rest.

“If you lift a stone,” the Master said, “and let it go, it will fall straight to the earth, for the earth attracts it, and it cannot do otherwise. If it were held up aloft 1000 years, and then let go, it would fall as swiftly and as surely, for the attraction is changeless and eternal. And thus the godly man has that which attracts and draws him with a changeless and eternal force — he may be occupied by necessity with this thing or with that — but as soon as his heart is free, he is drawn swiftly and surely to God. For Christ is to His own as the magnet to the steel, and He alone.

“Children, God has never spoken more than One Word, and that Word is still unspoken. That word is Christ.”

Let us think for a moment of this saying. Do we know what it was the Master meant when thus he spoke? Have we learnt by the teaching of God the Holy Ghost, that all that God has said or done, is but a revelation of the One by whom, and for whom, all things were created, and all things are redeemed, and in whom alone is God revealed and glorified?

Have we known that all the written Word of God, from beginning to end, leads up to the One concerning whom of old Moses and the prophets spake, and who is now made known to us by His holy apostles and prophets, speaking by the Spirit of Him? God has indeed spoken but One Word — and that word is still unspoken. For no man knoweth the Son but the Father, and in the bosom of the Father He is, and was, and ever will be, the mystery of unspeakable love. And thus is it said that we love Him with the love wherewith the Father loves Him — a love that is not our own, the love which flows from the Father’s heart, and fills the heart of him who abides in God, and God in him.

The Master said that it is to this great and deep and blessed gladness of abiding in His love, that God is leading us by all things great and small, that befall us on our way. “For this,” he said, “He counts the hairs of our head, and not one is lost but by His ordering. Eternally foreseen, and marked, and ordered, is all that can happen to the children of His love. Your finger aches, or your head aches, your feet are cold, you are hungry or thirsty, you are grieved by loveless words and deeds — all has been prepared by God, and ordered, that you may be fitted for the blessed joy, as you could not otherwise have been.

“The God who set my eyes in my head, might make me blind or deaf — and if the eyes and ears of the soul are then unsealed, I shall thank Him that He has done it.

“Children, it is a needs-be that things should go against us, that we should labour and suffer, for God thus shapes and fashions us for Himself. He might have made bread grow in the fields as easily as corn — but we should have missed the labour that is needed for us; we should not learn unless things are contrary to us, to press forward and overcome.

“But, children, the blessing comes not from our work and labour, but from yielding ourselves to His will. Thus to suffer and be still is the noblest work, for then it is not we who work but God, and His work is high above our works, as the heaven is high above the earth. And one spark of love in our hearts, which makes us glad that God should have His will, should give or take, do this or that, is worth more than if we were to give away all our clothes to the poor, or feed on stones and thorns, if that were possible, in order to mortify our bodies.”

And the Master explained that the great blessing which comes to us from God, even His great salvation, comes not by doing, but by hearing. “In hearing,” he said, “we must needs be passive and silent. The eternal Word passes into us from God, and the power is His, we receive only.

“And what is the end and purpose of all the work of God, of all His ways and dealings with our souls? It is to lead us up to the glory, where Christ is gone before. For where the Head goeth, thither must the members follow. Where the treasure is, there must the heart be also. Thus it is said, ‘Draw me, we will run after Thee,’ and who can hinder us? We go to His Father and our Father, to His God and our God. His Home and ours. His end and ours. His blessedness and ours. His welcome and ours, all are one, for He and we are one, and where He is, there must we be also, even in the glory of the Father.

“Oh, how blessed is it to be brought at last to be there where we are nothing, and where God is all!

“Dear children, own yourselves as nothing, and then is the better part yours, the better part which Mary chose, when to her there was nothing in heaven or on earth, but Jesus only. Sink down into this depth of nothingness, and let the tower with all its bells fall upon you — let all the devils come leagued against you, let heaven and earth stand as a barrier in your way — all will be well.”

And thus did it prove to be when the famine came, and the pestilence followed, when the curse of Rome was a terror to those who knew not God; for many there were whose hearts were filled with joy and gladness, and who died without “the sacraments,” thanking and praising God.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE MASS

IT is wonderful to us, that the doctor could yet go through the forms, and repeat the words of ceremonies and services, which strangely contradicted the glorious truths he preached. But it is very difficult, and perhaps impossible to us, to see things with his eyes, for we have known in many respects, as regards the outer service of God, a more perfect way, and we have never been accustomed to revere the decrees of Rome, or to attach the smallest importance to the authority of that, which to Dr. Tauler was the one professing Church on earth.

It is true that his heart owned and loved his Lord's dear people, wherever he met with them, and under whatever name. But he had never dared to imagine that anything that was commanded by "the Church," could be in itself an evil thing. He grieved over the abuses, as he would imagine them to be, and the unlawful acts done on all sides by the Pope and the clergy, but he did not see that it was to an utterly fallen and apostate Church that he outwardly belonged, and that the evil branches sprang from an evil root.

He saw in every outward form a sign and symbol, and his mind was so fixed upon the inner truth which he considered the only reality, that he did not observe, as far as we can tell, how contradictory and ill-matched were the symbol and the truth.

This seems to be the only explanation of his reverence for the mass, and for the ordinances of the Church of Rome. Did he believe that by the words of the priest, the bread and wine were transformed into Christ Himself? We must remember that though this strange delusion had existed in the minds of some, for centuries before the time of Dr. Tauler, it was scarcely more than eighty years before his birth, that it was first proclaimed as an article of faith, at the Council of the Lateran. There had been up to that time some who believed it, and some who regarded the bread and wine as symbols only. And the declaration made at Rome, had not the magic power of convincing all those who heard it, that so it was.

Many must have believed afterwards, as they did before, that the Presence of the Lord was spiritual, and that instead of a repeated sacrifice, the mass, as it was called by Romanists, was a remembrance of His death.

We must also take into account that in the days when books and papers, and magazines and printed announcements of all sorts, were not spread abroad, and carried by trains into every distant corner, changes in belief and custom came slowly and gradually, and the old-fashioned people in quiet places, went on in their old ways, undisturbed and unknown. It is therefore very probable that we are apt to rush unduly to the conclusion, that to every Roman Catholic of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the mass was, as now, a miracle worked by the priest. Since the Council of Trent gave fresh authority to this delusion, it is a necessary part of "Catholic" belief.

But when we examine the Master's sermons, it seems to us, that the One represented by the bread and wine was Himself so present to his mind, that he scarcely remembered aught beside. "The outward thing is nothing," he said, "but a sign of the inward thing. A signboard hung out means that there is wine in that house. But there may be wine where there is no signboard, and the wine is of no less value to the owner for that reason."

It may be well to give a part of a sermon which touches on the subject of the “Sacrament.”

He said that God would have us for Himself, and that as a deer is chased by hounds, so do the hounds of God, grief, and pain, and persecution, and affliction, chase the soul, till it is brought at last to seek Him only, and to yield itself up without reserve to Him. “This yielding of the soul to God, is better,” he said, “than all the services performed by men. Better than fasting, and watching, and repeating prayers; better than beating yourselves, and tormenting yourselves. If God has thus drawn you to Himself, and has satisfied your soul, so that the thirst for the things that perish has passed away, then it is good for you to go to the feast of the Lord as often as you will. But how often? We ask the Lord to give us our daily bread. But where shall we find the tender Priest, who would give us day by day this sacrament of love?”

“Dear children, do not trouble yourselves if earthly priests deny it to you;” (the interdict was still upon the city); “the Highest Priest, the Priest eternal and true, allows it you, and He will give Himself to you, in a manner more spiritual and more fruitful than in the outward sacrament. By the Holy Ghost you may eat Him and enjoy Him, even as He has said, ‘He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him.’ If you find that to go outwardly to the sacrament, helps you and furthers you, go there, but do not make a necessity of it to your soul, especially if you find that to abstain from the outward service, furthers you in communion with the Lord.”

Thus we find that the Master’s chief intent was the real and spiritual communion of the soul with the living God. We, with our greater light, may see further, that outward observances, as well as inward communion, are to be judged by the Word of God, and that it is not a matter of indifference to Him, when men in their manner of worship, add to His perfect word by rules of their own.

Thus it is not merely, as perhaps Dr. Tauler would have thought, a matter of indifference whether a man calls himself a priest, and invents for himself vestments and ceremonies, or regards such things as binding upon him, because other people have invented and ordered them.

But at the same time, we may be very careful to adhere to Scripture in all these outward things and omit the weightier matters of the Gospel, and know little or nothing of that “school in the third Heaven,” to which Dr. Tauler directed his “dear children.” “The school,” he said, “where the Holy Ghost is the schoolmaster, and where the lesson that is taught is the heart of God.”

To the Master, in spite of his firm persuasion that he owed respect and obedience to the Roman Church, in spite of his adherence to forms which told the tale of the fall and ruin of Christendom, the spiritual reality was all in all. “The friends of God,” he said, “cannot but see and lament, that their beloved Lord, whose honour they seek and desire, more than life itself, is dishonoured and despised by those for whom His precious Blood was shed. Look around, at the world and at the Church, at the clergy and the laymen — rarely will you find one whose eye is single, and who seeks God simply and only. A man may be baptized a thousand times, and wear a hundred monk’s cowls, and if God is not his object, and God only, what is he the better? Yes, a man may be in the devil’s hands, and wear the Pope’s triple crown upon his head. A man may have spiritual covetousness, which is like an ague, with hot fits and cold fits, he may be at one moment all in a fever to do something whereby he may be distinguished amongst religions people. Sometimes he abstains from speaking. Sometimes he will hold forth. Now he wants to be in one religious order, and now in another. Now he will give away all his money, now he will keep it: now he will go on a mission to some distant land, now he will shut himself up in a cloister: at one time reading is everything to him, at another time meditating.

“But a truly converted Christian man has learnt to know that he is nothing. He desires that men should not honour him, or think much of him. He desires to serve, and not to rule. He despises himself, and regards himself as a fool, and seeks the lowest place. God looks not at the greatness of the work, but He measures it by the love He finds in it. A grain of gold is as truly gold, as a pile of one thousand golden pieces. And where the grain of gold is found, it is precious in the eyes of God.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MYSTICS

IT is necessary to a true account of the Master's preaching, to observe, that not only do we find much of error and ignorance mixed up with the gold which I have so gladly sifted and stored up, but also that there was much truth, and much that is not true, very darkly expressed in the strange language used by those we commonly call mystics.

This language, which sounds to us very often as an unmeaning jargon, was no doubt understood more or less by people accustomed to hear it.

It was not that Dr. Tauler could properly be called a mystic. Those who are not aware that there is such a thing as true and real intercourse with God, by the Spirit whom He has given us, would of course include under the name of mystics all those who profess to receive spiritual light from any other than an outward source. They would class together the man who delights in his own feelings and meditations, and the working of his own mind, and the man who holds converse with the living God. In other words, they would see no difference between the water drawn from the cistern within, the natural heart and mind, and the living water that comes from without, flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. It is for ever true that He gives us to drink out of the great depths of the Smitten Rock, and this living water which flows not from our own hearts, but from the heart of God, is received into our innermost being, and becomes in us a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

This true and spiritual converse with God distinguished Dr. Tauler from those properly called mystics, whose dreams, and fancies, and feelings, were to them, that which God the Holy Ghost is to the believer. The two things may, it is true, be found more or less mixed up in the same person. But in the case of Dr. Tauler, it was plain that it was upon a sound, solid, and practical faith in a living and present God, that his experience rested.

The world is incapable of seeing the difference between the work of the Spirit in the heart, and mere human feelings. We hear it often said, "I am not one of those people who like to turn myself inside out, for the benefit of others." And this is given as an excuse for the entire absence of God from daily conversation. Or, "If people like to talk about their feelings, you may be sure they are not very deep." Thus is the man who knows not God, utterly incapable of perceiving that were it the inside of ourselves that we are called upon to exhibit, it would be a display of something even worse than the outside of ourselves, and that our own feelings, whether deep or shallow, are at best but a profitless exhibition.

But God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, that from us may shine forth, not that which we feel or think, but the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. And "they which come in, will see the light." It is the love and joy of Christ that flow as rivers of living water from the believing soul. Instead of a display of ourselves, it will be a display of Him in whose presence we forget ourselves and all that is ours, even as did the woman in the house of Simon, when with her tears she washed the feet of Him who loved her.

Thus did the Master say, "We fade as a little taper in the presence of the sun."

Yet Dr. Tauler had been accustomed in his youth to the language used by mystical writers, and he seems to have employed it often, as naturally as the early Quakers used their peculiar expressions. And thus, when he spoke of the “sinking of the soul in faith into the Divine darkness, and into its own groundless Nothing,” it is very possible that some of his friends, to whom these expressions were familiar, attached a meaning to them; and they would seem as natural to them as to talk of “coming up in Spirit through the flaming sword into Paradise,” and of “high professors living in airy notions,” would have been to George Fox; or as easily comprehensible as to George Fox’s friends, were his descriptions of “rugged and mountainous,” or “glittering and frothy” persons.

Sometimes, no doubt, the Master meant the right thing, and sometimes the wrong thing, by his mysterious expressions. Much error was abroad then, as now, besides the errors specially taught in the Roman Church. Some of the warnings given in the Master’s sermons against those who had “conscientious” objections to doing their common daily work, and who spent their time in dreamy contemplation, till they imagined themselves up in Heaven, were well understood by those who heard him.

For a sect had arisen shortly before, composed of persons calling themselves “The Brethren and Sisters of the free Spirit.” This sect, in which women played an important part, maintained that earthly occupations were a hindrance to communion with God, and that all human instincts and affections were stamped out in persons who were “lost,” as they said, “in God,” this being the “higher Christian life,” to use a modern expression.

To be “dead to nature,” was the state to which the soul should aspire; and having attained this exalted condition, it could then look down upon the sad state of soul in which those were found, who had families to love and care for, or who worked hard to earn their daily bread.

The “brethren,” or “sisters,” who had reached the top of this spiritual pinnacle, were no longer bound by any ordinance, and had attained to a state in which they no longer sinned.

The natural consequence of this delusion may be foreseen. The short road to proving that we never sin, is to declare that there is no sin in anything we do. And consequently these brethren and sisters became speedily remarkable, for their very loose notions of morality. In them, pride, anger, revenge, fraud, malice, and immorality in general, were no longer sins, they were acting under the direction of God, and it was only a poor unenlightened “beginner,” as they would say, or one in a low state of soul, who could so misunderstand their course, as to find any specks or stains in any part of it.

“We proceed from God,” they said, “and by holy contemplation we are re-united to God, and therefore cannot do wrong, for we are one with God.” It is true that the accounts of this sect are chiefly derived from Roman Catholic sources, and their errors may have been exaggerated. But as such errors have proved themselves to be a natural growth in the heart of man, by springing up again and again since those days, we may believe that there were those in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who held them. There is nothing new under the sun.

Tauler was often suspected of holding the same errors, and it cannot be denied that amongst the dark sayings which we find in his sermons there are some which might be so understood. It has been shown in the extracts, given from his sermons, that he regarded forms of prayer, and saint-worship, and ceremonies, as amongst those things that would “drop off” as a man was taught of God, and it would seem that he trusted rather to this result, than to arguments which were to prove that such things were unscriptural. And therefore, if he met with persons who prayed to the saints, he would probably endeavour to lead them on to a clearer knowledge of God, without at

once telling them that such prayers were displeasing to Him. It was easy for a Roman Catholic to mistake this for the teaching of the “Brethren of the free Spirit,” that a man attained by contemplation to a state wherein he was raised above all outward ordinances.

Tauler also used an expression commonly used by the “Brethren of the free Spirit,” and by many others since, that of a believer’s “being united to God.” He seems to have meant by this no more than that a believer, being made partaker of the Divine nature, and practically yielding himself up, body, soul, and spirit, to God, and loving God with a single heart, will have his will conformed so completely to the will of God, that he is lost, so to speak, in God, and that it will be his true *experience*, “I live no longer, but Christ liveth in me.”

The expression, “union with God,” is, however, unscriptural, and there are many in our days who would do well to consider this. For there are many who admit that the Church is united to Christ, and who yet imagine that the Church existed long before the Word was made flesh. They do not see that it is to Christ as the Divine Man that the Church is united, and this in consequence of His death, resurrection, and ascension. And that it is by the baptism of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, when Jesus was glorified, and not before, that this union was wrought.

It is not strange that many errors, and many truths expressed in incorrect words, are to be found in the Master’s teaching, and it is not to him that we should go for clear statements of doctrine on every point. But the Lord has at all times nourished and cherished His people, however ignorant. And wherever He has found a heart athirst for Him, to that longing heart has He given to drink of the water of life freely.

And thus from the remnants of popery, and shreds of philosophy, and from the fragments of many human delusions, we can pick out the jewels which shine with the “light of the Stone most precious,” and which are portions of God’s eternal Truth.

It is also to be constantly borne in mind that to reject the light, and choose the darkness, is a very different thing from coming out of the darkness into the marvellous light. A man may do this more or less completely, according to the circumstances in which he is placed. But none can know how much of the land of light remains as yet unexplored, for it was into gross darkness that the professing Church went back, and it is only by slow degrees that any have won their way back into the pure unclouded light of the earliest days, the days, as it has been observed, not of the “fathers,” but of the forefathers, the Apostles of the Lord. Let us therefore press forward ourselves, daily learning more of that which the Church possessed and lost.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE MASTER'S FRIENDS

THE Master's chief friend we already know. But as time went on, many who were taught by him, formed with him a little company, who spake often one to another, and comforted themselves together, and edified one another. The friend of whom we know the most, was a banker of Strasburg, who was a little more than thirty years old, when Nicholas paid his first visit to Dr. Tauler.

He belonged to one of the chief families of the city. He had been twice married, but had no children. He was much beloved in his native city, for he was a kind, tender-hearted, cheerful man, fearing God, and acting uprightly towards all men. He was by nature fond of retirement and quiet, and he had been grieved and troubled by the divisions, and heresies, and ungodliness, of professing Christians. His conscience, too, left him no peace, for he blamed himself more than others for the sad state of the Church, and he lived in constant fear of displeasing God. He therefore betook himself to fasting and penances, and thought to put to death all his natural feelings.

He was not yet forty years old when he agreed with Gertrude, his wife, that they should both devote themselves to God, and give up all worldly employments and pleasures.

But soon Rulman Merswin, for this was his name, became so weak and ill from his constant penances, that Dr. Tauler, for whom he had the greatest respect, persuaded him to chastise himself no longer, but to leave it to God to give him all the chastening he needed.

Rulman promised to abstain from his penances for a certain time. But as soon as the time was up, he began a fresh course of scourging, starving, and torture. He said he wished to kill nature, and so be at peace.

It was natural that as his body grew weak, his mind grew weak also, and he began to see visions, and dream dreams, which were no proof of spiritual enlightenment, but quite the contrary. For four years this strange sad endeavour to tame the flesh, brought sorrow and despair to his soul. Then there came a change, for again does Nicholas, the mysterious "friend of God," appear on the scene, his name still kept a profound secret, but known to us as the "layman" through whom Dr. Tauler had been led to Christ. From this time Rulman Merswin retired altogether from the world. This must have been about the year 1347. That Dr. Tauler is mentioned at that time as giving him counsel and instruction, may serve also to explain that Rulman now gave himself up entirely to the service of God. But his thoughts as to the service of God, appear to have been derived more from the teaching of "the friend of God," than from that of Dr. Tauler, who was strangely free from much of the error and superstition which still clung to his beloved Nicholas. To Nicholas, Rulman submitted himself with a submission so complete, that it justifies the name given to this strange man by one of his historians — "The invisible Pope of an invisible Church." Rulman Merswin dared not openly to have any communications with "the friend of God from the Oberland;" it was but rumoured that he had a "secret friend," whose name was never mentioned, with whom he took counsel about all things great and small. And his other friend was the Master.

Dr. Tauler had also two faithful friends, who, like himself, never openly left the Church of Rome. One was a monk, called Thomas of Strasburg who had studied theology at Paris, and had become General prior of his order.

The other had been a Dominican, but had afterwards joined the Carthusian monks, and in the year of the Master's conversion, he had been chosen prior of a Carthusian convent, which had just been built by three of the citizens of Strasburg in the neighbourhood of the city. His name was Ludolf of Saxony.

Both of these "friends of God" wrote books, in which, mixed up with much error, the truths are found which they had in common with the Master. Amongst these writings, were a letter which they and Dr. Tauler jointly wrote, and sent round to all the clergy. It was to counsel them to take no heed to the Pope's interdict, but to visit the sick and dying without any regard to the curse which lay upon them — to comfort them by directing them to the "death and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had offered up Himself as a perfect sacrifice for them, and for the sin of the whole world, and had perfectly satisfied God; who had opened Heaven, and who now intercedes in the presence of God for us. And Heaven, which was opened by Him, cannot be shut by the Pope against any poor sinner." They said further, that the clergy should have more respect to the Word of Christ and His apostles, than to the Pope's ban, "which proceeded only from envy and worldly ambition."

They explained further in another letter, that as all the powers that be, are ordained of God, it is impossible that any one to whom He has committed authority, should rightly use it to hinder the preaching of His Word. For the Word proceeds from God, and to forbid the preaching of it would be the same thing as God condemning His own work. Nor could it be proved by Holy Scripture, they said, that a man is to be regarded as a heretic, because he refuses to kiss the Pope's foot, or because in despite of the Pope, he owns as his emperor, a prince duly elected by the lawful electors.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE VENGEANCE OF ROME

WE cannot find out what effect this epistle had upon the clergy to whom it was sent. But the Master and His friends practised that which they had preached, and visited and comforted the sick and dying. And after a while it was reported at Rome, that whereas formerly men and women had died in despair, knowing that the Pope's ban was upon them, there were now many who passed away peacefully and joyfully, in spite of it, without confession or absolution.

The secret of this was found in the letters of the three friends, a copy of which was sent to the Pope. These letters were declared by the Pope to be heretical, and he specially noted the passages mentioned above, and also the fact that the persons who ought to have died in despair, were by means of these heresies comforted and made glad.

The Pope therefore commanded the Bishop of Strasburg to seize and burn all the writings of the three friends. No man, priest or layman, should read them under penalty of a special curse and excommunication. The Bishop complied at once with the Pope's decree. The books and letters were seized and burnt. The three friends were banished from the city.

The Master was deeply grieved. He had now been preaching six years since his conversion. The people of Strasburg had learnt to value the blessed tidings, and so to love and trust the dear Master, that they consulted him about all their affairs, great and small, and he had always been ready to listen, and sympathise, and advise, and comfort them. In this time of pestilence and famine, and deprived of their former teachers by the interdict, they hung upon the words of their faithful preacher, and he had seen many of them pass from death to life, and from this sad world to Paradise.

It was therefore no small trial by which the Master's faith was tested. "The tower with all its bells" had fallen upon him at last. But the Lord stood by him and strengthened him, and though it was the Pope himself he was now to resist, he stood firm, and chose disgrace and exile, for the sake of Him who is, he said, "our beloved Bishop." "Our Bishop is He who shed for us His own precious Blood — who obtained an eternal redemption for us by the Blood which He shed, and has for us entered in to the Holy Place, the temple not made with hands. Shall we not stand ever ready to shed our blood for Him?" Therefore the Master became an outcast, upon whom the ban of the Church had fallen. "It is a less thing," he said, "that the world should be crucified to us, than that we should be crucified to the world. I may say the world has become to me but dung and dross, but that I should become dung and dross to the world, is another matter." For Christ, it was sweet to him.

The Master and Thomas took up their abode in the Carthusian convent, of which Ludolf was the prior, and there they wrote afresh as they had written before, and added more thereto.

Just at this time, in 1348, the "Parson Emperor," Charles IV, came to Strasburg to receive the homage of the city as Emperor of Rome. Bishop Berthold had persuaded the chief citizens of Strasburg to acknowledge the Emperor for the sake of peace. Therefore, though they despised him in their hearts, they received him with imperial honours. The Bishop having himself done homage, received in return the imperial fee. The interdict was to be removed, by command of the Pope.

In the bull relating to this agreement, the Pope declared the Emperor Lewis a heretic, and required of all the towns who had acknowledged him, that they should declare their repentance for so great a sin.

The Pope's legate, the Bishop of Bamberg arrived at Strasburg with the bull, and called together the citizens in the open space before the Cathedral. Upon the steps of the Cathedral he stood up, and read the bull to all assembled. He then asked the town council and the citizens in general, whether they desired to be released from the interdict, and to receive the Pope's absolution.

The chief magistrate, Peter Schwarber, answered for all, "Yes."

The absolution was pronounced. Then the Bishop of Strasburg turned to Peter Schwarber and said, "Sir, you once compelled me to do homage to the Emperor Lewis, the heretic, and now that he is dead, you yourself call him a heretic."

The magistrate replied, "My gracious Lord Bishop, I never considered the Emperor Lewis a heretic."

"But you have just said you did," insisted Bishop Berthold.

Peter Schwarber answered, "The Bishop of Bamberg asked us if we wished to receive absolution. It was to that question I said 'Yes.' Had he asked whether I assented to all the articles of the bull, I should have given him a very different answer."

However, in spite of the absolution, the interdict remained in force for some years.

Whilst the Emperor Charles was at Strasburg, in this month of December 1348, he heard much said about Dr. Tauler, his friends, and his strange notions. He therefore sent for the whole party, that he might hear what they had to say in their own defence.

Dr. Tauler read to the Emperor a full confession of his faith. He kept back nothing, for he did not fear the displeasure of the Emperor, any more than he had feared the curse of the Pope. He explained to the Emperor for what reasons he had been banished, and set before him the truths he had taught, and which he and his two friends were resolved still to teach as they had opportunity.

The chronicle reports that the words of the Master had such an effect upon the Emperor, that he said he was also of their mind, and that he would not permit anything to be done to harm or hinder them.

The Bishops, however, who were present, declared that this teaching was heretical, and they commanded the three friends to "desist from acting so insolently in defiance of the Church and the interdict." They also commanded them to make a public declaration that their writings were heretical — to retract all that they had written, and to write nothing more of the sort.

The chronicle proceeds to say that, instead of retracting anything they had said, they persisted the more in their heresies, and wrote more books than before.

The Emperor, however much he may have been of their mind, joined with the Bishops, for the sake of peace, he said, in forbidding the three faithful witnesses to write or preach.

And shortly after, the Master left the convent and went to live at Cologne, having "spread much good teaching through Alsace," as says the chronicle.

Deeply was he mourned by the people, who loved him and revered him, and his name remained a household word in his beloved Strasburg.

Cologne was also a city dear to his heart, and there he was free to preach and teach. It was in the church of the convent of S. Gertrude that he chiefly preached, where the nuns greatly needed his exhortations. They had for a long while back given themselves up to idleness and pleasure, so that even the old nuns were remarkable for their costly dresses, and their love for worldly

amusements. The younger ones naturally followed their example. And yet young and old had been in the habit of regarding themselves as holier than their neighbours, because they lived within the four walls of their convent. Many a wholesome word did they hear from the Master, and it is to be hoped that some of them, at least, were awakened and saved.

The Beghards, too, of Cologne, were a grief to Dr. Tauler. They had been led away by the mild philosophy of those times, and though they had been persecuted, and many of them burnt, from time to time, their errors continued to spread in and around Cologne. Romish Bishops had not discovered that the Bible is a better preventive and cure in these cases than fire and torture.

The Master grieved over their delusions, but he resorted to preaching rather than persecution. They had fallen into an ancient error which had been revived and taught from time to time, by various bewildered persons. They believed that the whole material universe is God, and that God therefore is but a name to apply to all that we can know by our senses or our minds.

By some mysterious confusion of thought, they mixed up this idea with Christian doctrines, and regarded themselves as Christians. But the natural consequence of such a belief, was of necessity, indulgence in sin, without fear or shame. For if a man is but a part of that which is God, all he does is the act of God, and there is none either to condemn sin, or to be condemned. It might not after all be as endless a study as we might suppose, to discover all the ways by which Satan misleads the soul. For we find that under countless names, the same unworthy thoughts of God, and the same flattering excuses for sin, appear and reappear from the days of Adam till now.

The thought which has never entered the mind of man, except by the miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, is the thought of redemption by the precious blood of the Son of God.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE FAREWELL

WE cannot find out from any history of Dr. Tauler, the exact time of his abode in Cologne. He must have gone there first about 1350, and was probably there for about ten years. During this time he kept up his communications with Nicholas. In the year 1361 we hear of him again at Strasburg. He was now seventy years old, and was near his end.

His aged sister, who was a nun in the convent of S. Claus, not far from Strasburg, took him under her care, and lodged him in her garden-house, that she might nurse him in his last long illness.

A “worm-eaten” friend, who had become “dead to nature,” was grieved and displeased “that nature was thus cherished in him,” by the companionship of his sister.

“And now,” we find it recorded, “when the Master had thus borne fruit for eighteen years,” (since his conversion), “God would no longer leave His servant in this sorrowful world, and He took him to be with Himself, *without any purgatory*. But He sent him suffering and sickness here below, so that he lay twenty weeks in bed, and had weary days and great pain. And he knew by the grace of the Holy Ghost, that this was his call to leave this world, and to reap the reward of his labours.

“Therefore he sent for the man, his beloved friend, to desire him to come to him, for he knew that the time of his earthly life was very short. And the man obeyed, and came to the Master, who received him right lovingly.

“And the man was glad that he found him still living, and said ‘Dear sir, how fares it with you?’

“Then said the Master, ‘I believe the time is very near when God will take me from this world, therefore, dear son, it is a great comfort to me to have you with me at the last. And I pray you, take the books that are lying there: in them you will find written all the conversations which you have had with me from time to time, and the answers I gave you. And you will find therein something of my life, and of that which God has wrought by me, His poor unworthy servant. Dear son, if it seem good to you, and if God give you grace to do so, write a little book of these things.’

“Then said the man, ‘Dear sir, I have written five of your sermons, and if it seem well to you, I will add them to the little book, and the book shall be written in your name.’

“Then the Master said, ‘Dear son, I adjure you as solemnly as it is possible for me to adjure you, by the love of God, that you do not write anything on my behalf, and that you do not name my name. For you know of a truth, that the life, and the words, and the works which God wrought through me, an unworthy and sinful man, are not mine, but His. They are His now, and they will be His for ever. Therefore, dear son, if you will write something for the profit of our fellow-Christians, write it so that neither your name nor mine be mentioned therein. You can say, ‘*The Master,*’ and ‘*The Man.*’ Also take heed that you do not show the book to any in this city, lest they should perceive that it was of me that you wrote, but take it to your own country, and let no man see it till after my death.’

“And there passed after this eleven days, during which time the Master had much converse with the man.” I grieve to say no record remains of these last conversations. “And then the hour came when the Master should die. And the people of the city who had loved him, mourned for him greatly,

and because the man had been so dear to him, and had loved him so faithfully, they would have kept him with them, and honoured him with many honours. But when he saw this, he fled from the city, and went back to his own land.”

Tauler was buried in the convent to which he had formerly belonged, and some sixty years ago, the stone which covered his grave, was placed upright in the Cathedral of Strasburg, that all the citizens might be reminded of him who taught and comforted their forefathers five hundred years before.

And eight years after the death of the Master, a “friend of God “ from the Oberland, sent to a Beghard house at Strasburg a little book, in which were written the things here related, and he wrote therewith, “I would gladly have sent you the old book, but as it is written in a foreign tongue, you would not have been able to understand it. I have therefore spent four days and four nights in copying it in your own language.”

It would seem therefore that Nicholas, who had been forbidden to show the book to any one at Strasburg till some time after the Master’s death, had written it first in another language, probably to render it of use to some of the friends of God in the distant places where he laboured from time to time.

He seems to have been often in Italy, and was well versed in Italian —probably also in French. Afterwards the little book was copied, and recopied, and read widely in Germany for centuries that followed.

And the Master’s sermons were also copied many times and sent abroad, and many read them, so that 200 years later we find that a Romish doctor, Melchior Cano, thought it needful to warn the faithful against these dangerous writings, which were, he said, those of a heretic. And about the year 1576 the General of the Jesuits published the following edict: “Also certain spiritual books, which are not in accordance with our views, namely, those of Tauler, Ruysbrock, Henry Suso, and others of the sort, are not to be allowed to those of our faith. None of such books shall be anywhere preserved in our colleges, unless by the will of the Provincial Father.”

And further in 1590, Tauler’s sermons were placed by Pope Sixtus V in the list of forbidden books, and have also been forbidden in later times to the “faithful” of the Church of Rome.

But Martin Luther said he had found more pure teaching in the writings of Dr. Tauler, than in those of all the schoolmen put together. “If,” he wrote in a letter to his friend Spalatin, “you desire to make acquaintance with sound teaching of the good old sort in the German tongue, get John Tauler’s sermons, for neither in Latin, nor in our own language, have I ever seen any teaching more solid, or more in harmony with the Gospel.” And for many a long year in the city of Strasburg, was Tauler remembered by a name he would have been glad to own, “The Doctor who was enlightened by the grace of God,” or sometimes, “The Master of the Holy Scriptures.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CLOUD

AFTER all this history has been told, there remains for us the question, what is it that we have learnt in these latter days of fuller light, beyond that which the beloved “friends of God,” in those old days, believed and enjoyed?

Perhaps few there are, who have learnt more than they learnt. And yet it would be unthankful to deny that God has shown us things which they desired to see and did not see, although those things were plainly written in the Word of God. Their eyes were holden, as ours have so often been, as ours still are, with regard to many a blessed truth which in time, may be, we shall discover in that treasury of grace.

Perhaps the chief want that we may remark in the teaching of the Master was this: he does not seem clearly to have seen that the favour of God to us, and His delight in us, are not to be measured by the blessed work of the Spirit in us, but by that which Christ Himself is to the Father, who beholds *Him* and is satisfied. It is upon Christ that the eyes of God are set, and it is in *Him* that we are well-pleasing — how perfectly well-pleasing to the Father’s heart! Not a shade or stain, not a spot or wrinkle, in that Perfect One who stands before God. His righteousness ours, as our sin was counted once to Him.

The Master saw this last most blessed truth, but he does not seem to have been able fully to withdraw his eyes from his own state, and look up to Christ as the answer to the inquiry of his heart, “Is God well pleased with *me*?”

He knew, and believed the *love* that God had to him, but the *delight* of God in him he did not so fully know, for he measured it more or less by the work of the Spirit in his soul.

Let us not condemn him for this. For in this he was not believing an error, but he was looking only at a part, not at the whole, of the Word of God. It would be more to the purpose to condemn ourselves.

For whilst that great and blessed truth, which the Master saw so dimly, has been made clear to us — whilst we rejoice in knowing that we stand before God in Christ, and in Him only, we are perhaps apt to forget the other part of the truth of God, which the Master saw and taught.

We see clearly that “herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.” But more often we fail to remember, “If ye keep My commandments ye shall abide in My love,” and “He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.” That is to say, that our sense and enjoyment of the love of God, our communion and rest of heart in Him, are truly measured by the love, and obedience, and devotedness to Him, wrought in us by the Holy Ghost.

“If a man love Me, he will keep My words and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

The Master understood and *felt* these words as perhaps few of us do in these days of greater light and colder love.

But when the sense of his own imperfection lay heavy on his heart, it would have been well for him could he have looked entirely away from himself, and up to Christ, thus to learn that though

the cloud had come between his soul and God, the unchangeable love of God to His Blessed Son, the eternal and perfect delight of God in Him, were also his unchangeable inheritance, and that it was only the enjoyment and the rest of communion with him, that were at times withdrawn, because this rest and gladness are dependent on obedience and faithfulness.

Thus the Master was at times cast down, and as he said, the sweetness and the gladness departed from him; and he then said to himself, "If God will have me thus to suffer loss and desolation, His will be done."

But whilst we would be glad to find that he learnt more clearly his acceptance in the Beloved of God, let us also confess with shame and sorrow, how often we have allowed this blessed confidence to make us careless in our walk and ways, and less grieved and humbled than the Master was, when we have so forgotten the words of Christ, that He has ceased to make His abode with us.

Is it not a sad and humbling fact, that very frequently, amongst those who speak most of their perfect and changeless acceptance in Christ, pride and vanity, deceit and covetousness, strife and division, are bringing dishonour to the name of God?

Let us, therefore, grieve for the Master, that whilst he was down here, he saw not all that we see — but let us grieve more for ourselves, that in spite of the light granted us, we love not as he loved, nor walk as humbly with our God, as did his "Friends" in the early dawn of the day.

From their words and labours a great harvest sprang up two hundred years later, and the stream from which they drank became a mighty river, which overflowed the earth. But where is now their love?

"As the bridegroom to his chosen,
As the king unto his realm,
As the keep unto the castle,
As the pilot to the helm,
So Lord, art Thou to me.

As the fountain in the garden,
As the candle in the dark,
As the treasure in the coffer,
As the manna in the ark,
So Lord, art Thou to me.

As the music at the banquet,
As the stamp unto the seal,
As the medicine to the fainting,
As the wine-cup at the meal,
So Lord, art Thou to me.

As the ruby in the setting
As the honey in the comb,
As the light within the lantern,
As the father in the home,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.

As the sunshine to the heavens,

As the image to the glass,
As the fruit unto the fig-tree,
As the dew unto the grass,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.

As the lily of the valley,
White, and pure, and sweet;
As the lowly violet trodden
Under wandering feet —
As the rose amidst the briars
Fresh and fair is found,
Heedless of the tangled thicket,
And the thorns around —
As the sun-flower ever turning
To the mighty sun,
With the faithfulness of fealty
Following only on —
So make me, Lord, to Thee.”
—JOHN TAULER

CHAPTER XXXVIII

NICHOLAS OF BASLE

IT will be well, after giving this short account of the dear “Master,” to relate as far as it is possible to do so, the mysterious history of “the Man.” This history must be read not only as a very imperfect sketch — for the facts are difficult to ascertain, but also bearing in mind, that whilst historians who have carefully examined the few documents which throw light on the subject, are fully persuaded that “the Man” and Nicholas of Basle are the same person, others have been found who doubt it.

The weight of evidence, however, appears to me to rest with those who regard “the Man” as Nicholas of Basle.

The details that follow are taken chiefly from the writings of “the Man” himself, who calls himself only “the friend of God from the Oberland.” I relate them as they are put together by Dr. Carl Schmidt, the historian, who has carefully and conscientiously examined the story with every help from authentic sources.

About the 1308, he says, there was a son born to a rich merchant named Nicholas of the Golden Ring, who lived in the city of Basle, and owned property in year and near town. The boy was called Nicholas.

The house of Nicholas of the Golden Ring was next door to a Beguine house called the “Black Bear.” Margaret, the sister of little Nicholas, was a “Beguine Sister,” and is mentioned by a friend of Dr. Tauler’s, Henry of Nordlingen, as “an especial friend of God.” There appears to have been a meeting of “Brethren” in this Beguine house, and it seems probable that the family of “the Golden Ring” were at least strongly inclined to the belief and practice of the “Brethren.”

When little Nicholas was thirteen years old, it came to pass that his father took him at Easter time to a church, where he heard “much preaching about the sufferings and the death of the Lord.” This for the time so filled his heart, that in his blindness and ignorance he went secretly to buy himself a crucifix, which he kept hidden in his room. Every night he knelt before it, and remained upon his knees meditating upon the pain and shame which the Lord suffered. And he prayed earnestly that through the death of the Lord he might be brought to know His will, and to do it. He asked the Lord to guide him, and to show him what manner of life he should lead, and whether he should be a priest or a layman. And he besought the Lord that He would make him obedient to His will, whether it were sweet or bitter to the flesh. We find also that at this time he either had a Bible, or had an opportunity of reading one.

This fact, and also the circumstance that he bought the crucifix secretly, and kept it hidden, confirm the probability that the family of the Golden Ring were amongst those who were disposed to conform to the teaching of the “Brethren.”

In later days, when Nicholas was given up to a life of pleasure, no doubt his Bible was forgotten, but the thought that for him the Lord had died, followed him at all times and in all places, and every night he knelt, as when he was a boy, before his little crucifix, and felt a blind sad longing after Him whom as yet he knew not.

When Nicholas was fifteen years old, his father took him to travel about in foreign lands, that he might learn such things as would fit him for being a merchant.

The boy Nicholas had a dear friend at Basle, the son of a knight, who was exactly of his own age. And just at the time when he went on his travels with his father, his friend was also taken by

his father, the knight, to travel about to tournaments, and warlike jousts, that he might be well accomplished in all knightly learning.

When the two boys returned to Basle, they became again fast friends, notwithstanding that one was of a noble family, and the other the son of a merchant.

Four years later, the father of Nicholas died, and the business fell into his hands. This obliged him to make a journey of some months. When he returned, he found that his mother also was dead, and he was the possessor of a large fortune.

His friend, the young knight, persuaded him, therefore, to give up his business, and live with him “in knightly wise” a life of pleasure.

Nicholas needed but small persuasion. He rode with his friend to tournaments and jousts, they visited together at courts and castles, and were made much of by fair and noble ladies, with whom they walked “by fountains and in gardens,” and whom they entertained with songs and travellers’ tales. Wherever they went they were welcomed and feasted, and before long they had both pledged themselves to fair and noble maidens, whom they loved passionately, and who loved them in return.

The young knight had but a short betrothal. He married his bride, and took her home to his castle. But Nicholas was not so happy in his courtship, for the family of his bride were not content that she should marry the son of a merchant; and though the young knight earnestly implored them to consent, year after year went by, and the marriage was still deferred. At last four years had past. Nicholas was by that time twenty-four years old. He had become impatient. He determined to join his friend the knight, who was going on a far journey over the sea. But his Margaret entreated him not to leave the neighbourhood, therefore he consented to remain, and waited two years longer.

At the end of that time, the mother of the maiden gave her consent to their public betrothal, on condition that Nicholas should settle upon his wife the sum of 6,000 florins.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A NIGHT TO BE REMEMBERED

THE day of the betrothal was fixed, and all was made ready for the feast which was to be given on the occasion. Many friends were invited. The eve of the day, so long looked for, had at last come.

What follows shall be told in the words of Nicholas himself.

“I had come to think myself,” he says, “one of the best and strongest of men who could be found living upon the earth. But it came to pass that night, that I went into my chamber according to my custom, and sat down before the crucifix, around which I had set some lighted candles. There was I all alone till the early morning, and I thought how vain and false was all the world could give me, and I thought of the bitter end of all the things of the world. And I said thus to myself, Oh thou poor unhappy man, how senseless hast thou been, that thou hast loved and chosen the things of time, rather than the things of eternity! Thou and all the men around thee, how foolish and senseless are ye all, for though God has given you richly your senses and your understanding, yet have you been dazzled with the glory and the pleasure that last but for a little while, and that gain for you at last an eternity in hell; whereas you might have gained a reward, and honours and joy that are eternal, in the presence of God and His angels!

“And when I had said this, I thought further, Alas, poor man, what doest thou? Leave other men unjudged, and judge thyself, for of that is there Deed enough.

“And when this thought came to me, there fell upon me a great fear and sorrow, that I had sinned against my Lord and my God, that I had wasted all the senses that He gave me, in seeking the pleasures of this world, and had not turned to Him with my innermost heart.

“And kneeling before Him on my knees I said, ‘O merciful God, I implore Thee now to have mercy upon me a poor sinner, and to come to my help, for I must needs with this evil heart of mine, take leave for ever of this false and deceitful world, and of all the creatures in it; and especially must I give up the one who is right dear to me, and to whom I have lost my heart. O blessed Lord, I have thought till now that I was one of the best of men who walk upon the earth. Beloved Lord, Thou who wert holy and sinless, Thou best suffered a bitter death for me, a wretched sinner, and shall not I, who deserve to die, choose to suffer even to death for Thee, rather than depart from Thee? And I entreat Thee now, that Thou wilt look upon me in Thy fathomless mercy, and that Thou wilt be to me as my betrothed and my beloved. For, O Lord, my heart tells me that a man cannot exist without love, and it must be either the love of God, or the love of the creatures, and Lord, I know in my heart, that the love of God and of the creatures cannot stand together. And now, Lord, that I have owned this before Thee, behold I will choose the better part, and I will give up her who is my betrothed according to the flesh, and I will give up the whole world, and all the creatures therein, and cleave to Thee, O Lord, firmly and for ever, to Thee, Lord, only.’

“And when I had said this, I felt as though my whole nature gave way, for it was a terrible and solemn time of warfare against my own will and desire, so that the blood flowed from my mouth and nose, and I thought within myself the bitter hour of death was come. But I said to myself, ‘O nature, if it cannot be otherwise, even so it must be; if thou must die, thou must die.’

“And again I entreated the Lord and said, ‘O beloved Lord, Thou art now the betrothed of my heart, strengthen me, I pray Thee, in Thine endless mercy.’

“And then I stretched forth both my hands, and I said, ‘Beloved Lord, this right hand shall stand for Thee, the righteous and the loving God, and this left hand shall stand for my evil self, which has gone to the left hand in the way that leads to hell.’

“Then did I place my left hand in my right hand, and said, ‘Thus have I vowed and given myself up to God, to be His alone and for ever, having no love besides, for He shall be my everlasting love.’

“And further I said, ‘O beloved Lord, he who is betrothed desires always to serve and please his beloved. But, Lord, Thou knowest I have learnt nothing of Thy ways, and I have never walked in them, therefore I beseech Thee in Thy great mercy that Thou wilt give me understanding that I may know how to pray, and how to order all my ways according to Thy blessed will, for, Lord, I give myself up to Thee, that thou mayest do with me what Thou wilt, and not what I will, be it sweet to me or bitter.’

“And then as I thus offered up my will to God, and my whole nature sank within me because of the great and bitter pain, at that moment the loving mercy of God shone down upon me, as a fair and lovely light that filled the chamber, and I forgot myself and all creatures besides, and was lost in joy and wonder, such as I can never tell, nor can the heart conceive it.

“And thus would I fain have rested for ever in this joy and blessedness, for the time was all too short for me. And when I came to myself, it was as if my heart would leap from my body for joy unspeakable.

“And I said, ‘O my God, my Beloved, what must Thou be to those who for long years have served Thee, if thus Thou art to me, a wretched sinner, who now for the first time have turned from this world to Thee! Oh, how do I hate myself, that I have wandered on for so many years afar from Thee in the dark valley of this miserable world!’

“And at that moment there spake to me a voice, the sweetest and the gladdest that ears have ever heard, and thus it spake. ‘Thou beloved of my soul, know thou that I who speak to thee am the Lord of lords, and the Lord of all things that have ever been, or that ever shall be, and thou hast well done that thou hast given up time for eternity, for few there are who do so in these evil days, therefore will I take thee for My betrothed, and I will be thy Lord and Master, and look thou to thyself that thou be obedient to Me, thy Betrothed, and to Me only, and that thou do nothing more of thine own will and after thine own heart. Wilt thou do thus?’ said the sweet still voice.

“And I answered with my own voice and said, ‘Oh how gladly will I obey Thee, my God and my Lord! but I am only now come out for the first time from this evil world, and I am ignorant, and I know not what to do. Therefore teach me Thy sweet and blessed will, O Lord, that I may do it, now and for evermore.’”

It is well for us to read this true story of a soul awakened by the grace and power of the God whom we know more clearly, in the light of these latter days. We can see in all that passed that night in the room of Nicholas, how entirely unknown to him were the truths that we are taught. He had no thought as yet of the power and the value of the work done by the Saviour on the cross for him. But he knew that for him the Lord had died, and though he did not know the value of that work, his heart had felt and owned the love that brought the Saviour to the cross of shame, and it was already true of him, blind as he was to much of the blessed Gospel, that he loved the Lord, because He had first loved him.

But he had yet to grope his way through the darkness that might be felt, the thick darkness of evil teaching and unbelief that covered the professing Church, and that was deepest and darkest where the name was claimed of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

As yet the one thought of Nicholas was to do to the uttermost all that seemed to him the will of his Beloved. He had not learnt that in things Divine, it is the reverse of that saying which is true in our relation to men, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." More blessed, and far less easy, is it to receive than to give, when first the convicted sinner is brought into the presence of God. "If thou knewest the gift of God!" might well be said to that poor man, so earnestly longing to give, so little aware of the great gift held out to him, and which he was to receive at last.

At last! but it was not yet. We must not be surprised to hear how the rest of that night he began in the earnestness of his ignorance, to scourge his body, thus to chastise himself because he had loved the world so long, and had sinned so grievously. And in the excitement of his mind it seemed to him, as he looked at the crucifix in the flickering light of the candles, that the figure upon the cross bent forward towards him, and as though again and again a voice spoke to him and said, "Rise up, and take thy cross, and follow Me."

The morning came, and with it the bride, and the bridal guests.

Then Nicholas came in, pale and solemn, and he told them his marriage was at an end, for he was espoused to another, and must be His, and His alone, for ever.

In wonder and in anger, the bridal party broke up, and the poor young bride was taken weeping to her home. He had determined to see her no more. But a few days after, her confessor invited him to a house, to which he had taken the maiden, and they were left together. It was a terrible moment for Nicholas, for he was quite unprepared for the meeting. The young maiden wept bitterly and said, "What have I done to thee, my beloved, that thou hast thus forsaken me?" Nicholas wept also, but he explained to her that the Lord had called him to be His alone, and to take up his cross and follow Him. And the maiden saw that he had chosen the better part, and she told him that she too would give up the world, and devote herself to the service of the Lord. And she gave him all her jewels, that he might sell them for the work of God, and they said farewell to one another, and Nicholas saw her no more.

This sacrifice was but a part of the cross which Nicholas, in his will-worship, had taken up. He became a laughing-stock to knights and citizens, he was called a fool and a heretic. But nothing moved him, though he felt deeply the shame and disgrace, and the scorn of his former friends.

To escape their remarks, he let his house at "the best end" of the town, and took a house with a quiet garden in the poorer quarter, where he was surrounded only by the dwellings of the poor. He was very soon known to his neighbours as a kind and loving man, and they loved him in return. He would have given away all his money, but the Lord, he said, forbade him to do so, and told him to keep it as His steward, and use it for Him.

CHAPTER XL

FOUR SAD YEARS

AT this time, his friend the knight returned from his long wanderings beyond the sea, and inquired at once for his old companion. When he heard all that had happened, he determined to bring Nicholas to a better mind, and to renew the match in which he was so much interested.

He came one day to the quiet house in the back streets, and brought with him a merry party of friends, who were curious to see the transformation in the gay young citizen. Nicholas entreated his friend to see him alone, and he then related to him the history of the eventful night which had changed the course of his life. The knight told him he was a madman, and left him with words of bitter mockery.

Thenceforth he broke off all communications with him, and Nicholas lived a still and solitary life, meditating upon the things of God.

It was at this time that he began, as he had told the Master, to read the Lives of the Saints. He also provided himself with a hair shirt, into which he fixed a number of sharp nails. Having scourged himself till the blood ran down, he put on his shirt, and drove the nails into the bleeding flesh, and having worn the shirt for some days, he would tear it off, so as to re-open the wounds, into which he rubbed salt, and then again scourged himself, and again wore his shirt with the iron nails.

It is not wonderful that living in his lonely house, worn out with fastings and torments, he began, like Rulman Merswin, to see visions, and dream dreams. The descriptions of this time are strange and sad, and we cannot be surprised that his friend the knight had become fully persuaded that he was beside himself.

But to what lengths will not a reproachful and benighted conscience lead a man without Bible knowledge, and without a teacher! We are reminded of the history of John Bunyan in later days, who also for want of Gospel light, wandered far and wide from the City of Destruction, before he came to the wicket gate, which, had he known it, stood close at hand, at the very gates of the City from which he fled.

For the whole of one of the four years, which Nicholas calls the "time of his conversion," did he thus wander in the dark, and he heard no more the still sweet voice, but consoled himself from time to time with strange dreams and delusions, and then again all was dark and hopeless to him.

And towards the end of this year, he says, "I prayed and said, 'O my God and my Lord, I know not how it is with me! I find in these visions and dreams, nothing that will give peace to my soul. O beloved Lord, might it be that Thou Thyself wouldest satisfy the cravings of my heart, for that alone would comfort me, and it would be a comfort immeasurable!' But the Lord answered me not.

"Then again did I begin my penances and torments, till the day came which was the same day of the year as that when first the Lord had spoken to me.

"And then it was with me even as it was on that first day that I had known Him, and my heart was filled with the same desire after Him. And then did the Lord fulfil to me my desire, but it was not by a vision or a form, but by that which is beyond all images or forms, or understanding, for it was that which is far above all thoughts or words. And the time of this joy was all too short, and

the hour passed by, and I found that I was alone in my little chamber, and again there spake to me that voice, the gladdest and the sweetest, which had spoken to me at the first, and thus spake the voice to me:

“‘Tell Me, My friend and My betrothed, how hast thou lived through this year?’

“Then said I, ‘O beloved Lord, it seems to me that I live not and have not lived as I ought to live.’

“Then spake the sweet voice again, and said, ‘Thou speakest truly.’ And further did the voice speak to him in his heart, and told him that he had had indeed light given him to see his sin, and to long after God, but that herein he had lacked humility, such as was found in Mary when she gave her will to God, and said, ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord,’ and such as was in John when he said, ‘The latchet of His shoes I am not worthy to unloose.’

“‘Now behold,’ did the voice say further, ‘see what thou hast done. Thou hast desired to have great visions of God, and He has not granted them to thee. But I will tell thee how thou hast seen Him. Thou hast seen Him even as if thou wert in the deep dungeon of a tower, where high up in the tower there was a window, and the sun shone in through the window, and a little beam of light fell down into the dungeon and gave a little cheer of gladness to thy heart. Even thus has God dealt with thee. He has given thee a little glimpse of Himself, though He was as yet hidden from thee. And yet this little glimpse was sweet to thee, and no wonder, for like delighteth in like, and thy soul was made in the image of God, and can never be satisfied with aught that is less than God. But to the enjoyment of this love can no man come till he has forsaken himself and is as a man who is dead and gone. And so must it be with thee, that thou must cast thyself down before the will of God, and leave *Him* to work *His* works in thee, in time and in eternity, according to His own desire. Wilt thou do this?’ said the sweet still voice.

“Then,” continues Nicholas, “did I speak to Him in my own voice, and told Him I had done that which was evil, and I besought Him in His endless mercy to take from me the pride and the self-will, and to make me say from my heart, as He had said to His Father long ago, ‘Not My will, but Thine be done.’

“And when I had said this, the sweet voice brake forth, and spake again, and said, ‘If now thou wilt be obedient to Me, thou shalt be led in the true and the right way, the way in which all loving souls are led into the presence of the Father in Heaven.’

“Then spake I with my own voice and said, ‘O my God and my Lord, gladly will I obey Thee, as far as it can be with such as I am, even unto death. And now, Lord, do with me a poor sinner, in time and in eternity, as Thou wilt, and not as I will.’

“Then spake the sweet voice and said, that it is the obedience of Abraham that thou must learn.” And the Lord told him further to burn the relics he had hoarded up, and to cease from his penances, and to let the Lord give him such inward suffering and exercise as He thought good, “and thus,” He said, “thou wilt of necessity forget to do the outward works that thou hast done hitherto. And now will I say no more, and it will be long before I speak to thee thus again.”

“Then,” said Nicholas, “I rose up at once, and I took my beloved pears, and my piece of cloth, and my golden ring” (these were the relics he had prized), “and I went secretly and laid them on the fire, and burnt them one and all. And when I had done this, I went back to my little chamber, and would have thought about good and holy things, but all at once my sins were brought before me, instead of these holy thoughts, and I saw as it were all the sins of all my life, just as if I were now to suffer the judgment of God for them all. And I then knew that in me there was nothing but

sin, and that all that I could deserve was eternal hell. And in this bitter anguish I remained for one whole year, and no comfort came to me, either for body or soul, and were it not that the hidden strength of God sustained me, it would have been all over with me, for I became sick unto death, and I thought my hour was come.”

And thus the second year ended.

And the third year was Nicholas assailed with great and manifold temptations, which lasted for a year also. And in the fourth year the temptations were changed, But were yet greater and more grievous, and he suffered greatly also from pain and sickness, and could find no comfort in God.

It is as though we were reading again the journey of Christian through the valley of the shadow of death. And to Nicholas, as to Christian, did Apollyon appear in a shape of terror to assault and wound him. And the dark pitfalls were around him, and the evil ones mocked him, and railed at him, as he went on his way. And at the end of this year, it seemed to him that he came suddenly out of this dark valley, and the temptations and the terror left him. And his joy was so great at this deliverance, that he feared it was but another temptation of the evil one.

“Then,” he says, “I went at once to my chamber, and I fell on my knees and said, ‘O my beloved Lord, behold my foolish heart, that is so rejoiced at being freed from suffering. I beseech Thee, beloved Lord, do not regard my weak and evil nature which thus rejoices, I only entreat of Thee that the suffering may be taken away if it is Thy will; and if it is Thy will, and for the honour of Thy Father, that it should not be taken away, I will gladly suffer all that Thou wilt lay upon me, and will esteem it an honour to suffer all that is for Thine honour. And I will make no account of the desires of my evil foolish nature, but desire only that Thy beloved will should be done in me, whether bitter or sweet to me. And be it as it will to my own nature, if it is Thy will, do not, O Lord, hearken to my own desires, but keep me, if Thou wilt, in grievous suffering, should it be needful for Thine honour, even till the day of judgment, and make me to be obedient, and to own that I have well deserved it.’

“And as I spake these words, there shone around me as it were, a fair and blessed light, the light that is love; and from the glory of that light, a radiance filled my soul, so that whether I were in the body or out of the body I could not tell, for my eyes were opened to see the wonder and the beauty that are far above the mind of man, and I cannot speak thereof, for there are no words to tell it.

“For the wondrous glory that I saw and felt, was far beyond all the thoughts of all men in all time on earth below, and my heart and soul were filled with this supernatural light and peace of which I may not tell, for I was lost in wonder and in gladness.

“And as I was marvelling thereat, and rejoicing greatly, I heard as it were the gladdest and the sweetest voice, which came not from myself, but yet it came to me as one who spake within me, but it was not my thoughts that it spake. And thus spake this inner and sweet voice to me:

“‘Thou beloved and betrothed of My heart, now at last art thou verily My betrothed, and henceforth shalt thou ever be, and thou shalt know that as I have dealt with thee, so have I dealt with all My beloved friends, leading them by the way which thou hast gone these four years past. And yet only now art thou at last in the true way, the way of love, receiving from Me the forgiveness of all thy sins; and knowing that there is no purgatory to come. For when thy soul shall pass from the earthly house, it will be to dwell with Me, where the martyrs have gone before, in the eternal joy which is thine for ever. And for this joy shalt thou wait in peace and gladness, and shalt be content to wait as long as it needs must be, till God shall call thee hence. And so long as thou art in the earthly body, thou shalt not torment thyself with hard penances and chastisements, but shalt

simply obey the commandments of Christ. And thou shalt find enough to suffer in this present evil world, if thou hast learnt to see that thy fellow-men are wandering as sheep amongst the wolves. And this shall move thy heart to depths of pity, and this shall henceforth be thy cross and thy suffering, and thou shalt be well exercised henceforth therewith. And now I have said enough; go on thy way simply, as a childlike simple man, living in all Christian godliness, so that no man who beholds thee may see aught in thee but that thou art a brave and faithful man of God. And now, the peace of God be with thee; thou hast now been enlightened with the light of God, to know the way in which thou shalt go, and as thou wilt need it no more, thou wilt hear no more the sweet voice that speaketh, and the wonder and the glory shalt thou see no more in the days of thy life below.’

“And with these words the sweet voice was silent, and there was an end, and I came to myself again, and I found that I was in my little chamber all alone.”

CHAPTER XLI

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

LET us consider awhile this strange and simple story. It is a story of the love and tenderness of Him who has compassion on the ignorant, and on them who are out of the way, regarding not how much light they have, but how true is the longing of the heart for Him. With clearer light, and fuller teaching, the heart of Nicholas would long before have found peace, and comfort, and assurance in Christ, and he would have gone on his way rejoicing. For he would have understood that the work done on the cross for him, had brought him not only out of death and condemnation, but had brought him near to God, so near, “that he could not nearer be” — had made him well-pleasing in the eyes of God, in Christ the Beloved.

But though of Nicholas it could hardly be said that, he *knew* this, it is humbling to us to see that he *felt* it, as few feel it, who could put it into words.

He was not like some who talk of the love of God, meaning thereby that He passes over sin as if it were as light a matter as men consider it. He was well aware that only through the death of the Lord could salvation come to him. But his first thought was not one of gladness that he was thus saved, but of deep sorrow and shame that such love and such bitter suffering were so lightly regarded amongst men, and most of all, that he himself, though he knew these things by the hearing of the ear, had lived as though they had never been.

As with the sinful woman at the feet of the Lord, the assurance of His love led her first to weep, and to kiss His feet, before she could pour out the oil of joy, which was to tell His praise to all around. And thus with Nicholas, who was lost rather in the sense of his sin, than in the marvel and wonder of the blessedness which Christ had gained for him by His cross and passion.

He *felt* the things which now we *see*; and whilst in all such cases there is the danger of measuring them by our feelings, there is, on the other hand, the danger of our receiving them too easily, and too lightly.

Nicholas, as we know, had never forgotten the sermon he had heard as he sat by his father’s side in the old church at Basle, and it was because that sermon was still lying as a hidden treasure in the depths of his heart, that on the eve of his betrothal he had knelt, as he ever did, before his crucifix; and remembered, blind and ignorant as he still was, that for him the Lord had died.

And now that the voice of Him who hung upon the cross had spoken to Him, not from the crucifix, but from the glory, he knew that he had forgiveness of his sins, and that he was saved eternally. But he knew it, as he truly describes it, from the voice of the Lord to his heart.

He now began again to read the Bible so constantly, and with such earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit, that he says the light broke in upon him as a flood, and that in the short space of thirty weeks he had learnt to understand the Scriptures, and to speak of the truths he learnt, “as a man who had studied all his days in the schools.”

It seems clear from all we can learn of him, that he really possessed a rare knowledge of Scripture, but often clouded by his tendency to delight in visions, and in the workings of imagination.

He continually refers in his tracts to Scripture passages, and requires that all should be proved by Scripture.

But the teaching of the Spirit, acting upon the heart and conscience is, he says, a further witness, and the Word and the Spirit must go together, for the Scripture can only be understood by the enlightenment of the Spirit, and the teaching of the Spirit must always be in accordance with the Word.

Still, we find in reading his strange accounts of his own conversion, and of that of others, that like all who have been taught of God, he was liable more or less to confound the working of his own mind with the voice of the Spirit.

And, moreover, as a true work of God is always followed up by a counterpart imitation on the part of the evil one, so can we trace in these histories various delusions which came from a power outside of himself, taking advantage of his craving after communion with God. Probably in the case of all those who have the most direct spiritual intercourse with God, these temptations and wiles of Satan would be most frequently traced.

We must bear in mind, also, that in the days when Nicholas was living, an atmosphere of legends and miracles, and old wives' fables was, as it were, the air breathed by all alike, Catholics and "Brethren." And we can easily assure ourselves, if we look around us, that early teaching, and prejudice, and circumstances, exercise a power from which none of us entirely escape, and to which many are in bondage, even amongst the people of God.

But it is just this fact which the more enhances the wonderful truth, that at all times, and in all places, we find that the same great message of God was taught alike to every heart that turned to Him. The great truths of the blessed Gospel were taught alike by God the Holy Ghost, to Paul and to Patrick, to Nicholas and to Dr. Tauler, to John Bunyan and to Dwight Moody.

And the "music of the Lord" which sounded forth from a thousand chords of different tone, was, and ever will be, Christ alone.

When his penances and tortures were amongst the forgotten things that were left behind, Nicholas could teach that these inflictions and this will-worship were a sign that the heart had never as yet bowed to the will of the Lord. But when He is known and loved and obeyed, the sufferings sent by Him will be sweet and pleasant, as a sign that His grace is fashioning the soul, to conform it to the image of His Son.

As time went on Nicholas gained a wide and most extraordinary influence over Catholics and "Brethren." At the time when the priests were silenced by the interdict, and the hungry sheep who had no shepherd were looking all around for help and comfort, Nicholas, and such as he, were sought after and revered as the special messengers of God.

To Nicholas went many an anxious soul, confessing sin not lightly, as in a confessional, but in the anguish of their hearts. And it must be admitted, that to great numbers he became a pope, and in some respects more than a pope. For his disciples consulted him about all matters great and small, and he claimed from them an obedience which was dangerous to them, and to himself.

Nicholas was not wanting in those weaknesses and shortcomings which we know so well in the experience of our own hearts. The strange part of his history is that, as far as it was possible, he led a life of absolute seclusion, and was yet known and revered far and wide, even in distant lands. Every now and then he appeared himself, to speak to those for whose souls he was anxious. But more often he sent a writing by a messenger charged to tell no man where he was, and to call him by no name but that of "the Friend of God from the Oberland."

It was, as we know, twelve years after his conversion that he paid his memorable visit to Dr. Tauler. A year or two later, he paid a similar visit to his old friend, the knight, of whom he heard that he was living a life of sin, much to the grief of his deserted wife.

The knight received him angrily. He called him a sorcerer and a heretic. But at last, at the earnest entreaty of Nicholas, he allowed him to speak to him alone in his garden. After many conversations the knight was touched and melted. Nicholas spoke to him of the sufferings of Christ, and of the love of God, and also of "righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come." And at last the knight confessed his sin, and gave his heart to Christ.

He and his wife then besought Nicholas that he would write down rules for their future course. Nicholas refused to do this, but he desired the knight to write down the conversations he had had with him in the garden. He then advised the knight and the lady to cast aside all worldly pomp and show, but to wear at the same time suitable and well appointed clothing, plain and simple, to bring up their children in the faith and fear of God, and to spend their large fortune in helping the poor and needy.

From this time the knight was known as the defender of the oppressed, and the friend and peacemaker among all his neighbours.

CHAPTER XLII

THE SECT EVERYWHERE SPOKEN AGAINST

IT is very difficult to separate truth from legend in the stories of other conversions related by Nicholas. He appears sometimes to write in symbolical language, as Bunyan describes the experiences of Christian, but it is evident also that he readily believed in supernatural appearances and transactions, and one can but sift out, as well as may be, the manifest working of God in all these cases.

We find that Nicholas had devoted followers amongst clergy and laymen, along the Rhine as far as Holland, in Swabia, in Bavaria, and in Switzerland. In the year 1350 he went on a mission to Hungary, to visit two of his converts. Amongst men and women of all classes, in convents and in Beguine houses, his name became a household word — that is to say, the only name by which he was known, “the Friend of God from the Oberland.”

This name, “the Friend of God,” when applied to others, seems henceforward to have had a more limited sense than formerly. It became an understood thing that a “friend of God,” was one who owned the mission, and followed the teaching, of Nicholas of Basle, and in consequence lived in secret communion with God, and apart from the world.

Thus does Tauler refer to these hidden saints, saying all those are blamed by the world, who walk not in their ways, but in the secret path of communion. “And as to separation,” he said, “there must be separation, but it must be in separating from this present evil world, and that, dear children, is no sect, unless it be that ancient sect ‘that everywhere is spoken against.’”

In Basle these friends of God became very numerous. A noble lady, called Frickin, who joined herself to them, said the blessedness of this fellowship was so great, that she felt as if she had come out from purgatory into Paradise. Many priests and monks were counted in the number of this unsectarian sect; the worthy day labourer mentioned by Tauler being an example of one in another class.

Rulman Merswin, as we have seen, became a devoted disciple of Nicholas, who visited him in secret, and sent him one by one the tracts from which we learn the history of his life. Sometimes he sent him tracts written by others, and copied out by him. And finally these tracts were almost entirely re-copied by another Nicholas, who was a scribe in the community founded later on by Rulman Merswin.

This scribe, Nicholas von Laufen, who appears to have been by no means amongst the most enlightened of men, was in the habit of adding or inserting passages, especially rhapsodies relating to the Virgin Mary, which confuse and deface the stories related by Nicholas of Basle. We must disentangle these various threads as best we may, only being thankful to know that this bewildering habit of Nicholas von Laufen is a matter of history, and not a convenient theory invented to explain the contradictions and inconsistencies in the writings of Nicholas of Basle.

At the same time it seems evident that Nicholas of Basle did not think of prayer to the Virgin Mary as a sin, when he met with those who were in the habit of praying to her. Yet he never directs any to do so, and in his own case, he appears on all occasions to have turned simply to the Lord.

During the great pestilence of the black death, which raged for three years, ending in 1350, he sent to his friends an address, warning them of the various sins which brought upon them this judgment.

He tells them that on Christmas Eve he was lying awake, feeling very ill, and that he got up and prayed that the Lord would cheer him with the joy of Christmastide. And in reply the Lord brought before him the great sins of Christendom, and the sorrow and anguish he felt, so added to the illness that was upon him, that he was carried to bed, where he remained till S. John's day, when his strength returned, and he got up and prayed, saying: "My Lord Jesus Christ, God of all mercy, I marvel that Thou hast smitten me with this great grief at the time of the festival of Thy holy childhood."

"And then," he says, "it was shown to me by the light of God shining into my understanding, that it was not seemly that a man who had yielded himself to God, and who loved God, should be taken up with such child's play, at a time so solemn. And therefore I could only pray that the Lord would have mercy upon Christendom, remembering the sorrow and affliction which He had endured for three and thirty years, and remembering the precious Blood which He had shed, and His bitter death, and all those afflictions which were left to be filled up by all His saints, who were to follow in His steps."

And having spoken of the sins which grieved the Lord, he ends his letter by earnest counsel to those who called themselves Christians.

"I counsel you," he says, "in true godly love, and in brotherly faithfulness, that you turn right round from this evil world, to behold the sufferings and the death of our dear Lord Jesus Christ. For in these our days His death and His sorrow are everywhere forgotten amongst us. And yet He is our Head, and Christian men are called to be His members. And He has called us to take up the cross and follow Him, whereas we have turned aside to our own ways, and have wandered far therein.

"But for those who break with this evil world, and turn to God, how blessed is the secret converse of their souls with Him, their Lord and their God! And when they come to the hour of death, and the lips can speak no more, yet can they in spirit speak in heavenly speech to Him.

"Ah, beloved Christian men, stand gladly up, and flee from this deceitful, unprofitable world! I tell you in honest truth, I too was once a man of the world, and well do I know the passing, empty joy the world can give. And I also know somewhat of God's blessed grace, how He, here in this present time, dwells with His friends in His secret place.

"And therefore I can speak truly when I say that in one short hour I have found more comfort and more joy in God, than a man could find if he had all the comfort and joy of all the world, and knew that he could have it in full measure until the judgment day. And further, I speak truly, when I say that all the joy of the world would be but as a drop of water compared with the great and boundless sea.

"Further," continues Nicholas, "I advise you gladly to hear preaching, and to read good books, whereby you may be well instructed. Some of your teachers will tell you that German books are hurtful and dangerous. In one way that is true — in another way it is false. But such books as are *not contrary to Holy Scripture*, are useful to simple laymen, and very good to read, and you should not allow your teachers to forbid you such books as these, be they teachers ever so great and learned, but seeking the honour of this world rather than God.

“But when you find teachers who are not seeking themselves, be obedient to them, for the counsel they give you comes from the Holy Ghost. And if Christendom, such as it now is, is ever to be brought again into Divine order, it must be by taking counsel of the Holy Ghost. And such counsel is never contrary to Holy Scripture, for the Holy Scripture and the Holy Ghost accord one with the other.

“But the teachers who are untaught in the knowledge of God, have led us on into a miry slough, and cannot tell us how we are to get out of it. And therefore whoever it be who should come to me and ask where he should go for counsel, I would advise him in all godly faithfulness to seek for the counsel that comes from the Holy Ghost, whether it come through a priest, or through a layman. But such men, who can give counsel that comes from the Holy Ghost, are scarcely to be found in these our days, but though they are few, they are yet here and there amongst us. Howbeit, though such men are rich in wisdom, they are mostly hidden and unknown. One such man in any land, would be a safeguard and a tower of strength to all that land, if men would learn of him, and follow his counsel. But this needs the faith that men have not.”

CHAPTER XLIII

THE MOUNTAIN HOME

AS time went on, Nicholas felt yet more deeply and painfully, the sin and misery of the fallen Church. He determined to withdraw to some secret and solitary place, there to pray for Christendom, and from thence to go forth from time to time, as God should send him, to preach repentance, and to call sinners out of the world to God.

The history of his life now becomes more difficult to trace, for his mysterious dwelling-place was only known to four friends, and to two servants, who joined themselves to him, placing themselves entirely under his directions; and to some true and worthy men who went out as his messengers, with letters to the friends of God in distant places.

It seems clear that the retreat of Nicholas was high up on some mountain in the Bernese Oberland. Some think, and with some probability, that it was on Mount Pilatus, near the shores of the lake of Lucerne.

During his many travels, Nicholas had found here and there like-minded men, and his four friends appear to have shared his belief, his joys and sorrows, in sympathy that is rarely found.

The first was a man who had lived for eighteen years in the practice of penances and mortifications, till the Lord had set him free, and filled him with a joy which passed all the thoughts of men.

The second was a young knight, one of those who had come in the company of his old friend, to mock at him, and revile him, when he had given up his Margaret, and had retired to the house in the back streets.

This young knight had married a wife to whom he was deeply attached, and had in the course of four years, two children. But he fell into a state of gloom and sadness, for the world could not satisfy him, and he was troubled at the thought of his sins. He desired to give himself up to the Lord, forsaking wife, children, and all that he had.

He went to consult his priests and teachers, but could find peace nowhere. He then told his wife that he felt that he must leave her. He reminded her of various saints, especially of S. Oswald and S. Elizabeth, who had left wife and husband and children, and he told her that she also ought to give herself up to the Lord. For it would be better to lose one another for a few short years, and to have eternal joy together in Heaven with God.

His wife, however, assured him that he was a madman, but yet, as he had taken her for better or for worse, he ought to remain with her, and be a good husband to her, and a good father to his children.

The poor young knight knew not where to go for counsel, and at last remembered his old friend of former days, whom he had once regarded as a madman, as his wife now regarded him.

To Nicholas he betook himself, and told his mournful tale. Nicholas said to him that it would be right for him to go home, and live peaceably with his wife, for that as long as she lived, he had no right to leave her. For some years this went on. The young knight had to suffer much from the reproaches of his wife, and her friends and acquaintance, who gave him many hard names, and pitied her for having a husband who was a "right-down fool."

We can only wish that the knight had had to bear these persecutions in a better cause, but he too was like a man in a dark dungeon, upon whom one little ray of light had fallen from above, and a benighted conscience will lead us into many strange and evil ways.

After a time his wife died, sincerely repenting of her unkindness. She left her children in charge of her relations. The knight now betook himself again to Nicholas, who told him to claim his children, to live on good terms with his wife's relations, to live quietly, and yet to have all things in his household and dress, suitable to his condition, neither allowing show and vanity, nor unseemly disorder.

It happened, however, very shortly afterwards, that first one child, and then the other, died from accidents. The knight was now alone in the world, and he entreated Nicholas to let him live with him, at first at Basle, and afterwards in his mysterious home upon the mountain.

The third friend had been a lawyer, and the prebend also of a cathedral. On joining Nicholas, he was ordained as a priest, as was also the young knight.

The fourth friend, who joined the party somewhat later, was a rich and learned Jew, called Abraham. This man had been troubled in his mind for a long time, because it seemed to him very evident that the great prophecies about the reign of the Messiah had never been fulfilled. The Messiah, he said to himself, has never come, though so many ages have passed by. And it troubled him also, that the chosen people of God, to whom the promises were made, were scattered and persecuted, and their land was trodden down by the Gentiles.

At times the thought came to him, "Can it be that the Christians after all are right, when they say that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and the Saviour who was promised?" And again he said to himself, "It cannot be so, for if He were, how could His followers live in such forgetfulness of Him, leading lives of sin, and hating one another?"

He prayed to God that He would enlighten him, and show him where to find the answer to his question, "What is truth?"

Again, as in all these stories, dreams and visions were sent to him, which need not be related. We will limit ourselves to the credible part of the story, which is that he went to lodge with a Christian shoemaker, called Werner — that Nicholas, in consequence of a dream that he had, went to seek him out, and had many conversations with him.

Finally, the Jew believed and was baptized, and received the name of John.

With these four friends Nicholas determined to retire to his mountain, though at first the whole party lived together at Basle. They were each of them men possessed of considerable wealth, which they determined to keep in their own hands, spending it to relieve the poor, and to pay the expenses of their missionary journeys.

Nicholas, though he was a layman, and two of his friends were priests, took the direction in all respects, and all obeyed him most implicitly. Besides these four friends who lived with him, he had others who were in constant communication with him, in Hungary, Italy, Lorraine, Switzerland, and Bohemia.

The mission to which these Friends of God believed themselves to be called, was the reformation of the Church — not so much with regard to doctrine and to forms, but rather, it was laid upon them to rouse the dead consciences of professing Christians, that faith might be to each one a reality, and that souls might pass from death to life.

It would seem that it was not till about the year 1374 that Nicholas retired to his mountain. From this secret dwelling he sent constant messengers to the Friends of God in most of the countries

of Western Europe. These messengers had private signs and passwords, by which they might know one another when they met in distant places. They returned from their various missions, to bring Nicholas reports of the work of God in the countries through which they had travelled. He used the information he thus obtained about individual persons, firstly, for the purpose of writing letters of warning or counsel, only saying that “the Lord had made known to him” this or that matter, which had called forth his letter; and secondly, in order that their affairs might be made the subject of prayer in the mountain home.

He almost always refused to receive visits, as he wished his dwelling-place to remain a profound secret. Nor did he confide his own affairs to any one, except an unknown friend. “When God takes this friend from me,” he said, “I must find another, but only one.”

The story of the journey of the five friends to their mountain home is also mixed up with legendary tales. They say that they were guided to the place where the Lord would have them build their house, by following a dog, having asked the Lord thus to make known to them the exact spot which He had chosen. They therefore followed the dog over hedges and ditches, over crags and bogs.

Once the dog stood still near a large town (perhaps Lucerne), which dismayed them greatly, for they “did not love towns,” and had only lived so long in Basle in obedience to the Lord.

However, the dog started afresh, and at last stopped again in a lonely place on a high mountain, where they were rejoiced to see a clear and beautiful stream flowing down to the valley below.

They could not begin to build their house without leave from the Duke of Austria, in whose territory they were, and as he was gone to the wars, this delayed them for a whole year. They then began their operations, intending to build a dwelling-house and a chapel. Each friend was to have a comfortable bedroom of his own, and there were to be spare rooms for any foreign Friends of God who might be allowed on rare occasions to spend a time of seclusion with them, for the purposes of readings and prayer.

The two servants, Conrad the cook, and Rupert the messenger and man-of-all-work, were also amongst the Friends of God. Although Conrad had undertaken the kitchen department, it is not out of place to call Rupert the man-of-all-work, for Conrad is described by Nicholas as going into trances, and having visions, even at the moment when dinner was in a state of preparation. “One morning,” he says, “when the brethren were praying in the chapel, it came to pass that Conrad went into a trance as he sat before the kitchen fire, where the pot was boiling, with the great spoon in his hand. And there he sat, and knew nought of all that was going on. And when we saw that he was not likely to come to himself, and that he neither spoke nor moved, we called in a poor little boy to be with him in the kitchen.

“And as he still sat there, and gave no answer when the boy spoke to him, the boy thought he was dead, and came crying into the chapel whither we had gone back, and said, ‘Come quickly! my master the cook is sitting in the kitchen before the fire, quite dead!’ Then we all went quickly into the kitchen, and found him still sitting there, with the great spoon in his hand. Then we tried to get the spoon out of his hand, but we could not do so. So we took him sitting just as he was, and set him down outside the kitchen, because he was too near the hot fire, and we left him as long as it should please God that he should continue thus. And one of our brethren finished the cooking out of good will.

“So much for our beloved cook, whose dishes we eat with more pleasure than those cooked by any one else, and when he cannot cook, we cook for ourselves.”

Rupert, on the other hand, seems to have been always wide awake, for, says Nicholas, “it is he who looks after the whole house, and everything that we have. And from time to time we have pleasant little talks with him, and sometimes we say, ‘Dear Rupert, how comes it that you are not such a holy man as our cook?’

“And then he says, ‘And if I were, who would look after all your affairs, I should like to know?’

“Then we speak further to him and say, ‘According to God’s word, the cook has chosen the better part,’ to which he answers promptly, ‘The Lord can do what He will, and had Martha done what Mary her sister did, there would have been no dinner, unless He had worked a miracle, as He did with the five loaves.’

“Such talks have we with Rupert, and he answers to all we say in such godly wise, that I cannot but trust that he is, in his way, one of the dear friends of God, for he shows all godly faithfulness to us as if to himself, and godly love more than to himself.”

CHAPTER XLIV

THE HOUSE OF THE GREEN MEADOW

THE five friends did not live together after the manner of monks, for they had no rules, and said they required none, for they had placed themselves under the direction of God. They met in the chapel, but not at fixed hours, for prayers and worship. They fasted, or abstained from fasting, on the fast days of the calendar, leaving it to the Lord to direct them in this, as in all matters. They therefore observed no holy days.

Their time was filled up with walks in the woods around, for meditation, or for conversation with one another. They were also constantly occupied with hearing and answering the communications brought to them by the messengers. Occasionally they took journeys themselves to visit the Friends of God.

About the year 1365 Rulman Merswin had bought a small island in the Rhine, called the Grunen Worth, or the Green Meadow. He built on this island, out of the ruins of an ancient cloister, a large house, which soon became well known as the resort of the Friends of God. He had first intended to build a convent, but Nicholas told him there were more convents already than pious people to live in them, and it was therefore decided between the two friends that it should be a house set apart "for the help of the needy."

Later, they decided further that it should be a "house of refuge for honourable and well-inclined men, either priests or laymen, knights or servants, who desired by the leading of God to retire from the world, and amend their lives."

In the first written mention of this house, by Rulman Merswin (1377), he calls it a Gotteshaus, or House of God. This was the usual name of the Beghard houses amongst the "Brethren." No church was attached to this house, only a small chapel; for Nicholas said he was no friend of "stone-vaulted churches," and he warned his friend against the building of "great minsters, with costly vaulted roofs."

The inmates of this house were to live at their own cost, being provided only with lodging, light, and fuel. The whole house was placed under the direction of Nicholas, who sent secret despatches to his friend, Rulman Merswin, and occasionally came himself to visit the house, but not the inhabitants, with the exception of the founder, who at first went there occasionally to inspect it, and later on retired there for the remainder of his days. The utmost that the other inhabitants ever saw of Nicholas or his messengers, was their shadow from time to time in the passage. Even the name of the "Friend of God from the Oberland," was unknown to them, though they were well aware they were all placed implicitly under his direction.

In the year 1371, for reasons which have not been ascertained, Rulman made over the house to the religious order of the Knights of S. John. This order had been originally founded in the eleventh century, for the protection and relief of pilgrims at Jerusalem, and a hospital had been opened there under their charge, for sick pilgrims or crusaders. As the Saracens regained their power, and the Christian kingdom of Jerusalem came to an end, the knights were scattered, though having their headquarters at first in Cyprus, then Rhodes, and afterwards in Malta.

The knights of the Green Meadow were no less under the secret direction of Nicholas, than the former inhabitants had been. There appears to have been all along an understanding between this order of knights and the Beghard "Brethren." Probably because both were so, generally employed in the care of the sick. And in days of the Emperor Lewis, the Knights of S. John had taken up a decided stand in defence of his cause.

There was therefore much in common between them and the "Brethren." Most likely the House of the Green Meadow had been usually regarded as a Beghard "House of God." Such houses were most commonly placed under the direction of a Waldensian apostle, or as he would be otherwise called, a "Friend of God." And the complete submission of all the inmates of the house to Nicholas, was therefore a feature in common with Beghard houses.

In the year 1369 the Emperor Charles IV sent out from Lucca a decree of terrible severity against the Beghards, authorising the inquisitors to proceed to extraordinary measures against them. The Beghard and Beguine houses were seized, and the inmates driven forth, or in many cases burnt as heretics. The houses were made over very generally to the third order of the Franciscan monks, or to some of the religious orders of knighthood.

It seems probable that Rulman Merswin foresaw some such seizure of his "House of God," and that he therefore made it over to the Knights of S. John, who were of all the orders, the most nearly allied to the Beghards. It is from this time that the names Beghard and Beguine have a different signification, meaning no longer "Brethren," but members of a Roman Catholic order. But the original and true Beghards and Beguines were persecuted with relentless fury, as were the Waldensian "Brethren" in general, for a long time afterwards. Multitudes were burnt during the years that followed the decree of the Emperor Charles. At Steier alone 100 men and women perished in the flames in the year 1391, and a list of other towns where large numbers were burnt, would be a very long one. The Knights of S. John and the Teutonic knights did not altogether escape.

And it is amongst these knights that we can trace the unknown author of a book published nearly 150 years later by Martin Luther, who regarded it as a precious discovery. It is spoken of in the original preface as the work of "a Friend of God, of the order of German knights." In sending it forth, Luther wrote: "Next to the Bible and S. Augustine's books, I have never met with any book out of which I have learnt more of God, Christ, man, and all things. For truly neither in Latin nor in German, have I met with theology which was more sound, or more in accordance with the Gospel." He gave to this book the name of "German Theology."

The knights, however, who were chosen by Rulman Merswin to inhabit his "House of God," were neither enlightened, nor apparently remarkable for piety. On the contrary, he says, that being grieved by their worldly ways, he received them there in the hope of amending their lives. It would seem that the letters written by Nicholas were carefully worded in such a manner as not to shock their Romanist prejudices. Though his name remained unknown, his letters were received with the deepest reverence. Probably, had his name been known, his letters would have been less esteemed.

The knight commander, who was at the head of the house, determined to build and adorn a gorgeous choir for the chapel. But a message came to him from the unknown "Friend of God," telling him that this building had been undertaken without the counsel of the Holy Ghost, and proceeded from secret pride and vanity, and a desire to outdo other religious orders.

"In three and thirty years," wrote Nicholas, "I have remarked in many lands, how severely God has punished such outbursts of pride. In many towns have I seen how He has avenged His cause, when such blind undertakings have been set on foot. I have seen great and costly cathedrals

overthrown by earthquakes, whilst simple wooden churches remained standing. Therefore, in the love of God, I beseech you to content yourself with a wooden building, suited to these dark days.”

CHAPTER XLV

NICHOLAS AT ROME

IN the year 1377 the fallen state of the Church seems to have weighed more heavily than ever before on the mind of Nicholas. Eight years before he had written, "If Christendom remains as it is, in a very few years the wisest will not know which way to turn, unless God should bestow upon them supernatural light."

In the year 1376 the Pope, Gregory XI, who, like his predecessors, had held his court at Avignon, returned to Rome. The following year, Nicholas, and his friend the former lawyer, determined to go to headquarters, and represent to the Pope the sin and apostasy of the Church.

But the journey was long and expensive, and the corn and wine which the five friends had to sell, fetched a very low price in the midst of the plentiful harvests of the Swiss valleys. It would cost them no less than sixty crowns to go to Rome and back.

But John, the converted Jew, came to their help. He knew that his brother Moses, and his sister Susanna, were almost persuaded to be Christians. To them he sent for money, which they readily gave him. But it was now winter, and Nicholas, who was more than sixty years old, was ill, and little able to bear the journey. They therefore deferred their mission till Easter, which was that year at the end of March.

When they arrived in Rome, Nicholas inquired for a former friend, a Roman gentleman, of whom he had not heard for many years. He found that his friend was still alive, and glad to see him. He welcomed the whole party, that is to say, Nicholas, his friend, and servants, and found room also for the horses and the carriages.

"I wonder," he said to Nicholas, "that in your old days you have taken such a long journey to come to court. You must needs have some very weighty matter on hand."

Nicholas replied, "It is as you say. We are come to see the Holy Father on a very solemn errand."

The Roman said "I am well able to introduce you to him, for I am very intimate with him, and he often asks me to dinner."

Three days later the Pope granted them an interview. The ex-lawyer spoke to him in Latin, Nicholas in Italian.

They said, "Holy Father, the great and grievous sins of Christendom have risen to such a pitch, in all classes of men, that God is greatly displeased. You must consider what is to be done in such evil case." "I can do nothing," replied the Pope shortly.

Then Nicholas told him that his own sins were great and grievous, and that God had made known to him how evil was the life he led, and, he added, "Know of a truth, that if you do not turn from your evil ways, and judge yourself before God, He will judge you, and you will die before the year is out."

The Pope was much enraged at this unwonted address, but Nicholas replied calmly, "We are quite willing to be put to death, if the tokens which I am prepared to give you, are not sufficient to prove that we are sent by God."

"What tokens, I should like to know?" demanded the Pope angrily.

Nicholas told him that which the Lord had made known to him. And the Pope sat for a while speechless.

Then he rose from his seat, and embraced them, and spoke kindly to them, and said, "Could you but give such tokens to the Emperor, it were well for Christendom."

He now wished to detain them at Rome, and to lodge them in a princely manner, that they might be always at hand to counsel him.

But they said, "Holy Father, permit us to go home. We will always be obedient to your request, should you send for us again, however often. But we desire no earthly goods, only the honour of God, and the eternal salvation of Christian men."

On further conversation the Pope found that their house on the mountain was not yet finished, and he offered them a large sum of money, to complete the building which they refused, but they accepted a written order addressed to the clergy in the neighbourhood, commending them to their good offices. This they probably thought would save them from hindrance and opposition on the part of the clergy.

They returned on horseback, for their friend, the Roman citizen, provided them with good hacks, instead of the cumbrous carts and the unwieldy horses with which they had arrived.

But the Pope, who, like Herod, had listened gladly, like Herod also, continued to live in sin, and he died just within the year, April 8, 1378.

The letter which he had given them had the desired effect of gaining them the good will of the clergy and council of Lucerne. But to go down to Egypt for help, or to accept help from Egypt, leads always to the same discovery that the Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses flesh and not spirit. We find that during the remainder of the year 1377 they were, as Nicholas describes it, "in sore straits, and knew not what would be the end of it." He said events might happen which would oblige them, all five, to leave their secret home, and go forth to the "five ends of Christendom," but that they must wait the call of the Lord, and abide His time.

"From the glory and the gladness,
From His secret place;
From the rapture of His presence,
From the radiance of His face;
Christ, the Son of God, hath sent me
Through the midnight lands;
Mine the mighty ordination
Of the pierced hands.

Mine the message grand and glorious,
Strange unsealed surprise;
That the goal is God's beloved,
Christ in Paradise.
Hear me, weary men and women,
Sinners dead in sin,
I am come from heaven to tell you
Of the love within;

Not alone of God's great pathway
Leading up to heaven;

Not alone how you may enter,
Stainless and forgiven;
Not alone of rest and gladness,
Tears and sighing fled;
Not alone of life eternal
Breathed into the dead.

But I tell you I have seen Him,
God's beloved Son;
From His lips have learnt the mystery,
He and His are one;
There, as knit into the body.
Every joint and limb,
We, His ransomed, His beloved,
We are one with Him;

All in marvellous completeness,
Added to the Lord,
There to be His crown of glory,
His supreme reward.
Wondrous prize of our high calling!
Speed we on to this,
Past the cities of the angels,
Farther into bliss;

On into the depths eternal
Of the love and song,
Where, in God the Father's glory,
Christ has waited long,
There to find that none beside Him
God's delight can be;
NOT BESIDE HIM, NAY, BUT IN HIM,
O BELOVED, ARE WE."

CHAPTER XLVI

THE CHARIOT OF FIRE

FURTHER tidings from the mountain are very difficult to sift from the strange, wild, and senseless legends which were preserved in the House of the Green Meadow, and called by Nicholas of Laufen the "Writings of the Friend of God from the Oberland."

That these strange tales were sent by some secret friend to Rulman Merswin appears to be certain. But whether he had several of these friends, and amongst them those who shared his love of dreams and visions, we cannot tell. "None of these writings," says Dr. Keller, "have come to us directly from the hand of the author, and bearing his name. On the contrary, we possess them only through a threefold medium, namely, through 'the Friend of God,' Merswin, and the copyist. Now it is proved in several cases, that individual writings, which are attributed by those from whom we derive them, to the authorship of the 'Friend of God,' are decidedly not from his pen; and further it is proved, that other writings which were given forth as his, have been flagrantly interpolated and altered by Merswin, and perhaps also by the copyist.

"The difficult question therefore arises, which are the books, or portions of books, really written by the 'Friend of God;' and on the other hand, which are the writings to which the editors attached his name, perhaps with a view of gaining a greater respect for their own personal opinions.

"A further question arises; certain as it is that the 'Friend of God' was a more or less voluminous author, it is equally certain that some at least of the writings attributed to him were ancient relics of the literature of the old evangelical communities, which he either copied or touched up. And these again, before they passed out of the hands of Merswin, were again touched up; and finally the copyist added his own elaborations to all that went before.

"And again, we have the yet further difficulty to encounter, that under the pressure of those dangerous times, when the author, the receiver, and the copyist were alike writing for the uninitiated (outside of the circle of the friends of God), they considered it necessary to disguise as much as possible the true origin and character of these writings, and to produce them at last in an unsuspecting form.

"This motive had its due weight with the Friend of God, with Merswin, and with Nicholas von Laufen, and neither of them allowed a writing to pass from his hand, without effacing from it as far as possible all conspicuous marks of heresy. In the only one of these writings which appears to be an autograph, the author says emphatically, 'Know, that if you knew who I am, I would not write to you,' which is as much as to say, 'Know, that if you knew who I am, you would not be willing to receive anything written by me.'

"Considering all these circumstances, I do not so much wonder at finding in these writings several expressions which accord with orthodox Catholic belief, as I wonder at the circumstance, that in spite of such mutilations, the Waldensian character of the authorship is so plainly manifest." This part of the history must remain, to a certain extent, a mystery.

But we must bear in mind the above-mentioned facts that the name of Nicholas was attached to none of these writings, and that it was Nicholas von Laufen who collected and copied them, calling them all alike the tracts of "the Friend of God from the Oberland."

It seems to be certain that Nicholas made occasional journeys to Metz, Strasburg, and other places, during the time that the five friends were awaiting the call of God to go forth on their separate missions. At one time he proposed to Rulman Merswin to prepare him a little room in the Green Meadow, but apart from the House of God, where he might live alone, and only receive visits from the knights on stated days. This, however, seems never to have come to pass.

Rulman Merswin died in the House of the Green Meadow in the summer of 1382. Before his death, the knights entreated him to tell them the name of the messenger, who had been in the habit of bringing him letters from his secret friend. They wished by this means to carry on communication with Nicholas, when their founder was dead. But Merswin told them that the messenger, who was none other than the worthy Rupert, had died a short time since.

Some "Friends of God" from Strasburg, then set forth on a journey of discovery, determined to find out the secret home on the mountain. But they came home, having failed, they said, to find it. But Merswin, when he heard the exact route they had taken, said that they had spent a night under the same roof with the five friends, without having found them out.

When Merswin was dead, the knights sent a knight and a young citizen to make one more attempt to find the mysterious dwelling. For many weeks they roamed about the Oberland, but could find no trace of the mountain home. They could not have known that some, at least, of the inhabitants of Lucerne (if that were indeed the neighbouring town) were acquainted with the spot.

Seven years later, in the summer of 1389, it was rumoured at Strasburg that the Prior of Engelberg, John von Bolsenheim, was "well acquainted with the five friends of God, that he often visited them, and read mass in their church."

Nicholas von Laufen was now despatched on this third expedition, to Engelberg, but found that the Prior knew nothing about them. He promised, however, to make every research, and should he discover their dwelling he would send word immediately to the Green Meadow. But no message from him was ever sent. In 1390 Henry von Wolfach, the knight commander of the House of the Green Meadow, set out himself to another part of the Oberland. But his journey, like the former ones, was fruitless. The five friends were heard of no more. But they were remembered by the knights, as Nicholas had been remembered by Tauler, with the greatest reverence and gratitude.

In Rulman Merswin's room was found a sealed chest, containing his own writings, copies in his own hand of writings which professed to be those of his friend from the Oberland, and one paper which appeared to be an original, of the same secret friend. These papers were all placed amongst the archives of the House of the Green Meadow, under the charge of Nicholas von Laufen. How he copied and embellished them has been previously related.

We must bear in mind that the name of "the Friend of God" was unknown to the knights, and therefore they may never have been aware of the glorious end which fulfilled to Nicholas the promise of the sweet still voice, "When thy soul shall pass from the earthly house, it shall be to dwell with Me, where the martyrs have gone before."

Towards the end of the century, a heretic, called Nicholas of Basle, was seized with two friends, at Vienna, and delivered up to the Inquisition. The two friends were called James and John. (James appears to have been the former lawyer, John, no doubt, was the Jew.)

Nicholas, now an old man of nearly ninety years, was required to renounce his friends, and declare them heretics. But he said he would only be separated from them by death, and that such a separation would only be for a moment, for that they should thenceforth be for ever with the Lord.

The three “Friends of God” were then sentenced to be burnt alive, on the ground of their being Beghards and heretics.

“There lived,” says the chronicler, “a short time ago, a man named Nicholas, a simple layman. This person went about first as a Beghard in the district of the Rhine near Basle, and lower down, and was strongly suspected by many of those who persecuted heretics, of being one of the heretics afore-mentioned. For he was very subtle, and knew how to conceal errors under language the most specious. For this reason he had already escaped the hands of the inquisitors, and that for a long while. In consequence he brought together a certain number of disciples, so as to form a sect around him. For he was by profession and manner of life, one of the damnable Beghards, and had many visions and revelations, after the aforesaid damnable manner, the which visions he believed to be infallible. He boldly affirmed that he knew Christ to be really in him, and himself in Christ, and said other things also, all of which he publicly confessed on being examined after his capture at Vienna, in the diocese of Passau. But when he chose rather to be burnt than to dismiss at the command of the Church, two men named James and John, who were suspected of heresy and admitted themselves to be his particular disciples, and when, moreover, he was found to have erred in many respects from the true faith, and to be incapable of persuasion, he was justly given over to the secular authority, and reduced to ashes.” Thus did the three friends bear their last witness for the Saviour they loved. And again did Nicholas hear the beloved Voice, “the gladdest and the sweetest that ears have ever heard,” and again did there shine around him “the fair, and blessed light, the light that is love;” and into that light and glory he entered, to go out no more for ever.

One more gleam of light is thrown upon the teaching of Nicholas by the sentence passed against a “Friend of God,” Martin of Mayence, who was burnt at Cologne, July 19, 1393. Martin was chiefly accused of having submitted himself wholly in all things to Nicholas of Basle. In consequence he had not observed the stated days and hours of prayer and worship commanded by the Church. He had regarded himself as freed from obedience to the Church, overlooking the distinction between priests and laymen, regarding all Christians as priests. He had maintained that outward works had no merit before God. He had preached that the Lord Jesus suffered more in bearing the judgment of God, than in enduring the pain of the cross. He had regarded the Lord’s Prayer as a form not to be repeated. He had spoken of some “heretics,” who had been recently burnt at Heidelberg, as “Friends of God.”

And far and wide, from north to south, from east, to west, arose, during the years that followed, the flames that were kindled to rid the world of the Waldenses and the “Friends of God.” “With systematic and relentless energy,” writes one of the latest German historians, “did the detectives of heretical crimes devote themselves in the fourteenth century to the task of persecution, directed against the Waldensian heretics.

“And speedily from Lombardy to the Baltic, from the Raab to the Rhine, the burning piles flared aloft,” and told the tale how widespread was the testimony of the hated and despised “Brethren.”

In the year 1395, the inquisitor, Peter Pilichdorf, declared with triumphant scorn that he had at last mastered the heretics! But Jerome of Prague, and John Huss, and John Wyclif were the answer to his boast — and a hundred years after the scornful words had passed his lips, the boy was sent to school at Magdeburg, who was to learn later on “in the school of which the Holy Ghost is the schoolmaster,” and to call all Europe to listen to the same truths which the Lord had taught to John Tauler and to Nicholas of Basle.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS OF 1352

YET it was not that the Friends of God were reformers in the same sense as those who followed them two hundred years later.

It was not the error and ignorance of the professing Church which lay heavily upon their hearts, for they themselves were ignorant as yet, but it was that their Lord was loved so little, and that so few were found who dwelt in His secret place, and learnt the lesson, as the Master had said, "of the Father's heart."

And as the first fall of the Church began with those who had left their first love, so did the times of refreshing follow the return rather to love than to light. For that to which the "Friends of God" pressed forward, was not so much clearer truth, but nearer fellowship with God.

And we may also say they did not so much look forward to heaven hereafter, as to an ever-deepening knowledge of the love which to them was heaven.

We all know well, for who does not? the Pilgrim's Progress, which tells of the journey from the City of Destruction, to the Celestial City beyond the river of death. But the Pilgrim's Progress of the Friends of God was a journey not so much from condemnation to safety, and to heaven, as a journey from the city of alienation from God, to the blessed love of the Father's House, where the welcome and the kiss are followed by the music and the feast.

A journey from the icy regions of profession — it may be orthodox profession — to the sweetness and the glory of the hidden sanctuary, where the Face of God is seen.

The "book of the nine rocks," written by Rulman Merswin, dark, superstitious, and ignorant, as in many respects he was, may well be called the Pilgrim's Progress of the fourteenth century, and of the two centuries that followed.

Without describing this book in detail, it may be said to be the process of the soul from the dead form of Christianity, to the communion of the heart with God.

To a man of God was shown the great wide world, covered everywhere with an outspread net. And nine rocks were there, rising one above another, out of the great net, and men were seen who climbed upon the rocks, and were many in number on the lowest rock, and less in number upon each rock that rose higher.

But down below, beneath the net, were Christian men of every name and order. Christians — for they professed the faith of Christ, but dead, lost souls who knew Him not, and who had clean forgotten Him.

There, under the net, were popes and cardinals, bishops and abbots, priests and monks, emperors and kings and nobles. There were knights and citizens, and artisans and peasants, and many a worldly woman, nuns and queens, and nursing sisters — all alike in the snare of Satan, and most of them content to be there.

And when the man saw these things, he fell down before the Lord, and prayed that if it were His will, he might give his heart, and soul, and body, for the dead and fallen Church, if so they might be brought to remember Him who had given Himself for them, "who had shed His precious

Blood, and suffered a death of shame, and yet was remembered no more,” by those who were called by His Name.

And the Lord showed him how some of these people had found their way out of the net, and had climbed upon the rocks, and He told him that those on the lowest rock were those who desired to serve two masters, and were neither hot nor cold.

And the man perceived that on this rock was a young damsel, of fourteen years old, who was leading downwards by a cord, a train of older people. First a clergyman, and next a respectable and honourable man and woman, and lastly two other women. And they were going down, nearer and nearer at each step, to the net below.

And when the man asked who they were, the Lord told him that the respectable man and woman were a worthy couple who had long lived a God-fearing life. And the damsel was their eldest child, who had found opportunities of watching the pleasures and enjoyments of the people who lived under the net, and therefore had set her heart upon going amongst them. And she told her father and mother that she wished to do like other damsels of her own age, and enjoy this world as they did.

Now the father and mother had brought her up from her childhood in the fear of God, and therefore they had kept her apart from this evil world; and now they knew not what to do, so they went to their confessor, and told him what their daughter desired, and asked his counsel.

And he was a man who was anxious not to lose the friendship of wealthy people, and he said, “Such things are now quite the custom, and many Christian people allow such and such things.” And he gave them to understand that the pride of life was a harmless thing, not considering that on account of pride, the devil had fallen into the condemnation of God.

“And this,” it was said to the man, “is the reason that you see the young damsel leading the confessor first, and then father and mother, and then two friends who take pattern by her example, all down the path that leads beneath the net.” And beneath the net they went, and the man saw them no more.

And the man saw that the enemy had great power over the people who dwelt upon the lowest rock, for they were foolish, and thought they could at the same time please God, and their own fallen nature.

“They are honourable and respectable people,” it was said to the man; “they have no desire to commit great sins, and they wish to escape hell. And they think God is well-pleased with them, and they are well pleased with themselves. Therefore they have no desire to live nearer to God, and they are not afraid to die, because they keep themselves from deadly sins. And they do not like people who tell them that their life is a very miserable one, for they are quite satisfied that they are good people, and safe, though they are living close to the edge of the great net. And the enemy has a great hook with which he catches these people very easily. The hook is called Nature.” It is to be remarked that in this, and in the passages that follow, the hook is to be regarded as the means by which Satan draws back souls into this present evil world, “the world beneath the net.” It does not therefore touch the question of saved souls being finally lost. It is rather the fall of the soul from communion with God, brought about by various means, and in the case of the lower rocks, the fall from mere profession into open ungodliness. This is in keeping with all the teaching of the Friends of God, to whom present intercourse with God was heaven; and a thought more constantly present to their minds, than the thought which in our times is the prevailing one amongst professing Christians, that of “going to Heaven when we die.” To the Friends of God, Heaven was Himself,

whilst to the ordinary Christian now, it is a place, where he will meet departed friends, and have no more troubles. Let us now return to our story.

And the man saw that some of these people climbed to the second rock. And these were religious people who gave up some of the things of the world, but thought it not wise or prudent to give up more. And because they were so wise and discriminating they were easily caught by the hook which the enemy had prepared for them, which was called Spiritual Pride.

And on the third rock were some who had climbed up from the second. And these were earnest people, who desired fervently to go to heaven, and to escape hell. And therefore they did many penances, and kept apart from the world, and denied themselves in many things. But the enemy had a hook whereby he caught many of them. And this hook was called Will-worship.

And the man saw that some of the people from the third rock climbed upon the fourth rock, but most of them fell back quickly, and disappeared under the net. And he saw a man also, down below, who came running up to the mountain, and with one leap he cleared the three first rocks, and alighted on the fourth. And it was told him that this man was suddenly convinced of sin, whilst he was under the net, and his repentance and remorse were so great, he would willingly have given his heart's blood to be freed from his sins, and he did great penances till he had well-nigh killed himself, and instead of stopping short when he had done so, pressed forward and was found amongst the people on the fourth rock. Now these people were they who had taken the flesh in hand, and who kept down their evil nature with strength and resolution. But the enemy had a hook which he cast at them, and a very great hook it was. It was called Self-sufficiency, for these people are determined to take their own course, and to listen to none who would teach them a better way than theirs. God sends many messages to these people, to see if they will give up their own will, but to these messages they turn a deaf ear, for they think they know better than all others how to order their course. And in spite of their resolution and their self-control, they are speedily overtaken with anger and evil tempers, for they have not yielded themselves up to God, but are doing the best they can for themselves.

And on the fifth rock were there people who were far more pleasant to behold, for they were kind and loving, and they desired not to follow their own will, but the will of God. But the enemy had a great hook whereby he dragged down many from amongst them. And this hook was called Instability.

And up above, on the sixth rock, there were people beautiful and lovely. And they had given up their wills to God, and they were true and steadfast, and desired to be faithful unto death to Him whom they loved. But the enemy had a hook also prepared for them. It was the desire to be a select few, in special communion with God.

And on the seventh rock were people far more beautiful to see than any below them. And they were shining people, for the grace of God was in their hearts, and the light of His grace shone forth from each one of them. And they walked with Him, and His will was their delight, whether sweet or bitter, whether He sent them forth upon labours of love, or whether He called them apart for intercourse with Him.

But the enemy had a great hook, whereby he caught many of them, and dragged them downwards. And this hook was a joy and delight of the natural heart in the comfort and the sweetness of the Lord.

And when the man had gone up to the eighth rock, he was filled with joy and wonder, for the people were yet more beautiful and glad and radiant, for they thought not of their own enjoyment,

but sought only the honour of the Lord, and they scarcely knew whether they had, or had not, the things of time, for they wept as though they wept not, and rejoiced as though they rejoiced not. And the man was glad, and thought that none could have greater blessedness than these shining and joyful people.

But it was told him that for these blessed people the enemy had in readiness two great hooks, which he cast into them in evil moments. For as they had, as those below had not, the gladness of some wondrous moments when they saw the Face of God, they were thereby in danger of being exalted above measure, so that even the highest things could thus put self upon a high place in their hearts. And therefore the first hook was called Self. And the second hook was a delight which was a natural delight, in the wonder and the mystery of the ways of God. For God had shown them great and marvellous things, and they were apt, without knowing it, to be led away by the wonder, and to have imaginations that were not of God. And this second hook was therefore the delight of nature in great and marvellous things.

And at last the man was led up to the ninth rock, which reached into the heart of heaven. For this rock was of a great and terrible height, and it seemed to the man that all the other rocks piled one upon another would not be as high as this one rock alone.

And the people on this rock were few — and they looked like people whose natural life was gone, and they had another life that made them more beautiful and more shining than all below. For God had shed abroad such fulness of love in their hearts, that it could not but shine forth from them, though they knew it not, and never desired to know. “And though these men are few,” it was told the man, “it is because of them that Christendom remains. For if they were not there, the judgment of God must come upon that which is called by His name, and Satan would reign and rule, and spread his net over all the earth.”

“And these blessed people,” it was said to him, “have given themselves up to God by faith, desiring only to walk in faith in the steps of Christ. They seek not comfort, and they have become fools for Christ’s sake, and they deem themselves unworthy of the great gifts which God bestows.

“Yet they fear neither hell, nor purgatory, nor the enemy, nor death, nor life. For all fear is taken away from them, save only the fear lest they should not follow closely in the footsteps of the Lord. They do not seek themselves, for they have lost themselves, and lost all things, save only God. For the world is crucified to them, and they also to the world, and they have taken up the cross to follow Him who bore the cross before. To the world they are unknown, but the world is well known to them. They are the true worshippers, who worship the Father in spirit and in truth.”

Then said the man, “I fear to write of these people, for those who read of them would be offended. And we may not cast pearls before the swine, that would trample on them.”

But it was answered to the man, “I know that what thou shalt write about the ninth rock shall be more profitable to Christendom than all that shall be written in the book besides. And know that one of these men is more dear to God, and of more service to Christendom, than a thousand men who are serving Him out of their own hearts.”

And the man saw that these people were shining with a wondrous joy and gladness, and it was said to him that it was no marvel, for that could a man have all the understanding of men and angels, he could never comprehend the smallest joy that God gives eternally to His beloved friends.

And the man was grieved that there were so few of these blessed people, for he desired that there might be many to pray for the fallen Church.

And it was said to him, "It will be known some day how few there are. For the judgments of God must come at last, as once they came before, when eight people only were spared to be the fresh beginning of another world."

And then was it granted to the man that he should see that which these joyful people had seen — and a door was as it were opened before him, and he was so filled with light and gladness, that he was as it were taken out of himself, and how long it was that he was thus lost in joy, he knew not.

And when he came to himself his gladness was so immeasurable, and unspeakable, and overwhelming, that it was as an exceeding weight upon him, and he spake to himself and said, "Where hast thou been? and what great wonder and glory is it that thou hast seen?" And he sat a long while and thought of it. And the more he thought, the less did he know what it was.

He thought he would write about it, as he was commanded to do, but he could not speak or write the smallest word.

Then he bethought him of forms or pictures whereby he might retain the image of it. But he could find none, for it was far beyond all pictures that the mind could imagine.

Then he bethought him that he would meditate upon it, till by reason and understanding he might comprehend it. But it passed all understanding.

Then he would fain have shaped it into thoughts, but the more he thought, the less he could conceive it, because it was beyond all thought, and all that ever had entered his heart before.

And he could only turn himself to the Lord, and ask that he might be able to contain this unspeakable joy, so that he might not break forth in unseemly delight.

And it was said to him, "Know, that the very smallest joy that is in God, is far beyond all the joys of all the world, could they all be gathered into one moment of gladness. Therefore marvel not that thou canst neither speak of it, nor understand it, nor grasp it, for had a man all the understanding of all men who have ever walked upon the earth, he could not lay hold with his mind upon the least of that which God has showed thee. For He has shown thee Himself as the Bridegroom of thy soul, and thou hast been brought into the high school where the schoolmaster is the Holy Ghost."

And the man answered and said, "O my Beloved, so unspeakable and so marvellous is the love wherewith Thou hast loved me, that I would gladly suffer all things for Thy sake and my soul thirsts for any pain or sorrow, for the most shameful death that could befall me, if it might be for Thine honour. For now do I feel in my heart how Thou hast suffered for me, and so precious to me is Thy death, that I could wish to suffer even hell itself, if so be that other men might know that which Thou hast made known to me."

Then did the Lord tell the man to look down from the high peak, to the world that lay far below, and he saw a man who was walking to and fro beneath the net, but who was shining as an angel. And there was also a man who was dark and black like the enemy, who walked to and fro beneath the net.

And it was told the man that the dark one who was walking there, was one who had once had companionship with the shining people upon the ninth rock, and had been pleased with their discourse, and had found delight in hearing of these great and wondrous things, for he desired to be somewhat, and to shine with a light of his own.

And this man was more hurtful than any other who walked upon the earth, and was more to be dreaded than an evil fiend. And it was grievous to the man who heard these things, for when he

looked down he saw that there were many such beneath the net, and it was told him that they were those who taught a way that seemed to be a glad and pleasant way, but it was the way of death, for it was made to please the nature of fallen men.

And the man asked, who then was the shining one who walked beneath the net and shed a light around?

And it was told him, "This man is one who has looked upon the Face of God, and has companied with these blessed people. And because of the love and pity that the Lord has shed abroad in his heart, has he gone down swiftly beneath the net, that by the help of God he may seek poor sinners, so that they may be converted and saved.

"For this man can see the wide far country of Christendom, lying beneath the net in sin and misery, and he knows the great judgments of God that must close up these evil days, and he would gladly lay down his life, if so be that any should be turned from their sins to God."

And the man asked if there were many of these shining ones in Christendom, and if they were afraid when they went down beneath the net.

And it was told him that it were not well that he should know how few there were. And that as to fear, the shining ones were oftentimes afraid, but only of one thing, namely, that they should do too little for their Lord and God, and follow Him less nearly than their hearts desired.

"As to the rest," it was said to him, "they fear neither purgatory, nor hell, nor devils, nor men, nor death, nor life, for all fear has passed away from such as they, save the childlike fear which is a sweet fear, and which they will carry with them till they go home to God." And the man asked if they had any sorrow. And it was told him, "Yea, they have to suffer, and they do not desire it to be otherwise, for they are walking in the steps of Christ. And they sorrow greatly for the Church that is fallen, and have a love and pity deep and strong.

"And it grieves them to the heart when they see the men who are led captive by the enemy, and are cleaving to themselves, and to the world; and this cross they bear, as Christ their Head has borne it, so long as they are here below."

And the man said, "O my Beloved, are these men sure that they have eternal life?"

And it was answered him, "They are no more in themselves, but have passed out of themselves, and are in God. And what thinkest thou that God will do with His friends? Should He give them over to the enemy? Far be it from Him. When these men die, behold, they take but one step from earth to heaven."

And after these things the man bethought himself, and he said: "O my Beloved, what is the reason that all order is lost in holy Christendom?"

And it was told him that it was because men had turned away from God, and from the friends of God. And that when a man had come speaking that which the Holy Ghost had taught him, he was mocked and despised, and men considered him a fool.

Then the man prayed earnestly and said: "O my Lord, my One Beloved, the altogether lovely One, have mercy upon the Church that has fallen from Thee. Oh that I might give my heart to be broken into a thousand pieces, if that might be for good to Christendom!"

But the Lord said that it had always been, and yet must be, that He had those who dwelt in His hidden place, and were the friends to whom He told His secret things, but that most men would believe neither His word nor His friends. For men loved rather to hear flattering words, than the truth of the Holy Scriptures. And therefore there was nothing to which any man could turn in these

evil days, but simply to the cross of Christ, to Jesus only. For God is ready to give, wherever He finds a heart that is ready to receive.

Then did the man beseech the Lord again, and yet again, that He would have mercy on the Church, and raise it up from the dust, and restore it as of old. But the Lord said, that the day must come at last when His friends should have prayed their last prayer for fallen Christendom, and that when that day came, the Son of God must avenge the dishonour done to His Father, and to His holy name, by that which had been called the Church.

And the man was silent. But after a while he asked yet one question more, and said, “O my heart’s Beloved, tell me if these men who have dwelt upon this rock, and have looked upon Thy Face, have here in this life below a perfect joy?”

And it was answered him, “I tell thee that their joy is so great, no speech can declare it. Yet is this joy to the joy that they will have in the eternal Home, as time is to eternity.”

CHAPTER XLVIII

MORE LIGHT AND LESS LOVE

SUCH was the Pilgrim's Progress of the "Friends of God" — a book which seems to have been written and re-written in yet earlier days than those of Rulman Merswin, but sent forth afresh by him, with additions and alterations of his own, under the direction of Nicholas of Basle.

To us it comes with an awakening voice, as well as with a call for thankfulness, that in our times the way of God has been made known more perfectly. For it is as though Rulman and the other Friends of God beheld the glorious tree of the Lord's planting, with its blossoms, and its fruit, and its fragrance, but did not see, as we have seen, how deep were its roots in the grace of the Lord, and that it is in Him, not in ourselves, that we have the joy and gladness, and the place of the Beloved, in the heart of the Father.

Yet they knew and owned that through His death alone this blessing came to them. And they saw also that it was by grace only that a man could be on the rock where the Face of God was seen. What was it that was wanting in their faith and knowledge?

May we not say as before, that in the first place, they allowed one great truth to take the place of another, which therefore they overlooked and lost? They knew and believed that the joy and blessedness of conscious communion with God, is dependent on the practical abiding in Christ, keeping His commandments, and reckoning self as dead. But they did not appear to be aware that this abiding in Him, this obedience, and this power of walking as those who are alive from the dead, are dependent upon the faith which looks continually at Him, and Him only.

Therefore they were constantly hindering themselves, by the very earnestness of their desire to *conform themselves* to the image of Christ, for they looked at themselves, to see if they were like Him, rather than at Him; whereas it is by beholding Him we are changed into His image. They were like any amongst the Israelites who pressed forward, filled with faith in God's promises, to take possession of the goodly land, but who had not seen, as Joshua had seen, the captain of the Lord's Host going before them to victory.

And secondly, we can remark in looking back to their anxiety, beautiful and touching as it was, to do the will of God rather than their own, that the continual and watchful care with which they tried their ways, left their hearts less free to delight in Christ Himself, and to behold His glory apart from His relation to themselves.

Therefore we find that the delight of God in His Son, that fellowship with the Father, which it is given to us to enjoy, was but little known to them. A "Friend of God" could say with deepest love and adoration, "He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*;" but the delight in Him as He is in Himself, seems seldom to have been theirs.

And the love wherewith the Father loves Him, which is through grace shed abroad in our hearts, was to them more or less lost sight of, because the love wherewith the saved soul loves Him was to them more real, because it was more a matter of experience. And experience, with them, was the measure of blessing.

To us it is shown that the measure must not be looked for in ourselves at all, but in the delight of God in His beloved Son. And that we are but called upon to believe, and realise, the great gift

of the unsearchable riches which we *possess* in Christ — His life ours, His glory ours, the love wherewith the Father loves Him, ours also.

The “Friends of God” desired to *attain* to the state of being dead to sin and alive to God, and they did not know that being dead already, and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord, they were freed from sin, and already brought, except as regards the mortal body, into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

They did not know that these things are facts revealed to us, not attainments to be reached by our prayers and efforts.

But on the other hand, is there not still a message for us, in the midst of our light and knowledge, in the words of these beloved saints, who were groping with so marvellous an earnestness after that which we know that we possess, and which we, alas, so lightly esteem?

We are told much and often, of all the spiritual blessings in heavenly places laid up for us in Christ. But do we very commonly *enjoy* them as truly as did the “Friends of God,” who felt and experienced in their inmost hearts, that which we know as truths, and perhaps feel the less, because it is as truths that we have learnt these things, and not as the blessed answer of the heart of God to the longing desire of His ignorant children? The Lord Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, had no other blessedness to give to His saints in the old times, than that which He gives to us — for the blessedness is Himself. And if we know better than they did, *how* such blessedness can be ours, let us own in abasement before Him that the joy and gladness, the devotedness and the love, should be all the deeper in these our days. And let us ask ourselves if it is so, and if the sight of the fallen Church so grieves and humbles us, as it grieved and humbled Rulman Merswin.

For ten who know how to point out the faults in this or that section of the great professing Church, is there one who humbles himself before God on account of it, or who mourns over it with the sorrow which belongs to love?

And if our eyes have been opened to see that the true and living Church consists not of this denomination or that, but of all everywhere who have a living faith in the Blood of Christ, do we in consequence own all such as His, and sorrow deeply to see the people of the Lord scattered on the mountains, and lost in miry sloughs, led astray by evil teaching, and beclouded by the darkness of centuries of ignorance and unbelief?

And do we mourn deeply and truly over our own share in the fall and ruin of the professing Church of God, over our lukewarmness, our prayerlessness, our ignorance, our self-indulgence, our weak faith, and love that has waxed cold?

Or do we, on the other hand, either spurn and despise the erring and the ignorant, or regard as of small importance errors in belief, and carelessness in practice, for the sake of being on good and easy terms with all alike?

Rather let us grieve with Rulman Merswin to see so few upon the rock that rises into the height of heaven, and desire for ourselves, and for all the people of God, the constant sense of that Presence wherein is the fulness of joy, the place of honour at His right hand where are pleasures for evermore.

CHAPTER XLIX

ANOTHER FRIEND OF GOD

“O Lord, the most Fair, the most tender,
My heart is adrift and alone;
My heart is weary and thirsty,
Athirst for a joy unknown.
From a child I followed it, chased it,
By wilderness, wold, and hill;
I never have reached it or seen it,
Yet must I follow it still.

In those olden years did I seek it,
In the sweet, fair things around;
But the more I sought and I thirsted,
The less, O my Lord, I found.
When nearest it seemed to my grasping
It fled like a wandering thought;
I never have known what it is, Lord,
Too well know I what it is not.

‘It is I, it is I, the Eternal,
Who chose thee Mine own to be —
Who chose thee before the ages,
Who chose thee eternally.
I stood in the way before thee,
In the ways thou wouldest have gone;
For this is the mark of My chosen,
That they shall be Mine alone.’” — HENRY SUSO

AMONGST the “Friends of God” known to Dr. Tauler, was one who wrote a book, called “The Book of Eternal Wisdom,” which the Master read and valued, and which has come down to our times.

The writer of this book was Henry Suso, whose real name was De Berg. His father was a man of an old and wealthy family, near the town of Constance. His mother was a pious woman, who lived in dread of her husband, for he cared only for the things of the world, and treated her with harshness and severity. She was a devout Catholic, but appears to have been amongst those who had learnt to know the Lord, and to Him had she given her heart truly and simply, though in much ignorance and darkness. She went to mass, but her heart was with the Lord Himself, and she remembered His death each time with loving tears, little understanding how contrary to His Word was the service in which she took part. Her son Henry was a boy of a loving and a tender heart, and by nature a minstrel and a poet. He has been called the “Minnesinger of the Friends of God” — a minnesinger being the German name which answered to the troubadours of Provence, or the

bards of Wales. He had a tender sympathy, we are told, “not with men alone, but with every little beast and bird, and all the small creatures God had made,” and it grieved him if ever he saw any that suffered or were in need. And on the other hand he had a rare and rapturous delight in the sights and sounds of the beautiful earth around him; in fountains and in flowers, and in the gladness of spring time, and in the crimson morning light upon the great range of the high Alps, and in the swift rushing of the Rhine, and the deep blue shadows on the lake of Constance near his father’s home. And he loved the stars of heaven, and the song of birds. And he had a love of knightly deeds, and of all that was great and noble. And most of all he loved his mother, and liked to be called by the name of her family, Suso, rather than by that of his father.

From his mother he learnt to love the services and the music of the Church. And when he was still a child, he devoted himself to the “Queen of Heaven,” the Virgin Mary, and in the month of May, which was the month of Mary, “he had a custom, when the fair summer came, and the flowers appeared on the earth, to keep himself from plucking them or touching them, till the day came that was the feast of Mary, and he then would make a wreath with many a loving thought, and carry it into the chapel of the Virgin, and put the wreath upon her image, and kneel down humbly before it.”

And as yet his heart, so alive to human love, and to beauty, and to the religion of man, was dead to God, and dark and miserable.

For a time he was sent to a school at Cologne, and thus separated from the mother he loved so well. He had been there but a short time, when in a dream his mother appeared to him, and with great joy she spoke to him, and said, “My child, love God, and trust in Him wholly, He will never leave thee nor forsake thee. See, I have departed from this world, and I am not dead, I shall live eternally with the eternal God.” Then did she kiss him on his mouth with a motherly kiss, and blessed him heartily, and passed away out of his sight. He began to weep, and he called after her and said, “Oh my faithful holy mother, remember me when thou art with God!” And thus he awoke weeping bitterly, and it was told him soon after that his mother was dead.

His home was now no longer a home to him, for his father cared only for war and chivalry, and therefore at the age of thirteen, he was taken into the Dominican convent at Constance, and was educated in order to be a monk.

For five years he “wore a semblance of holiness, yet was his mind but ill at ease. And it seemed to him that if only God would keep him from great sins that might bring him into ill repute, it mattered not how many little sins he allowed in himself. But God preserved him from finding anything to satisfy him in the pleasures that he sought, for as soon as he had found that which he desired, it ceased to please him, and he believed that if he had some other thing, his restless heart would be at peace, but the rest came not.

“And at times he bethought him that he would fight against all temptations, and give his heart to God. But the evil one spoke to his heart and said, ‘Count the cost; it is easy to begin, but it is hard to hold on.’ And a friend who was but a spokesman of the enemy said to him, ‘It is quite right you should amend your ways, but not in such desperate fashion; be moderate in all things, and eat and drink and live like other men, only keep from sin. Be as good as you like in your own heart, but keep to the middle course in your conduct, so that no one may be offended. If the heart is good, all is good, and you may lead a merry life with others, and be a good man all the time. Other people mean to go to heaven as well as you, but they see no need of being so strict.’ But it seemed to him as though his friend were like one who counselled him to catch an eel by taking hold of its tail, and

he said in his heart, 'He who desires to have God, and the world also, desires an impossible thing.' And therefore he determined within himself that he would set himself earnestly to the task of denying himself, and breaking off all worldly ways, and forbidding himself all worldly company.

"But now and then, when he felt sad and wearied, his nature was too strong for him, and he went back to his old companions to have a cheerful time. But it always came to pass that he went home more sad and wearied than before, for their talk was wearisome to him, and his ways were intolerable to them. And at times they would say to him, 'What in the world has come to you?' or, 'Why do you not do as other people?' And a third would say, 'All the people who want to be so good, are sure to come to a bad end at last.' And then he felt dumb and said to himself, 'There is no way out of it but flight. If I had not heard all this evil talk, it would have done me no harm.' And the worst was, he had none to whom he could tell his grief, for none understood the desire of his heart, and he was all alone."

CHAPTER L

“THE GLORY OF THAT LIGHT”

“Now have I seen Thee and found Thee,
For Thou hast found Thy sheep;
I fled, but Thy love would follow —
I strayed, but Thy grace would keep.
Thou best granted my heart’s desire —
Most blest of the blessed is he
Who findeth no rest and no sweetness,
Till he rests, O Lord, in Thee.

O Lord, Thou seest, Thou knowest,
That to none my heart can tell
The joy, and the love, and the sorrow,
That my own heart knows so well.
But to Thee, O my God, I can tell it —
To Thee, and to Thee, Lord, alone;
For Thy heart my heart hath a language,
For other hearts it hath none.

In the wide world, speechless and lonely,
For me is no heart but Thine;
Lord, since I must love Thee only,
Oh reveal Thy heart to mine.
‘Wouldst thou know My glory, beloved?
Know Me, the great I AM?
First must thine eyes behold Me,
The slain and the stricken Lamb.

‘My visage so marred more than any,
My form than the sons of men;
Yet to the heart I have won Me,
I am the fairest then.
Thou knowest the sun by his glory —
Thou knowest the rose by her breath —
Thou knowest the fire by its glowing —
Thou knowest My love by death.

‘Wouldst thou know in My great creation
Where the rays of My glory meet?
Where to My awful righteousness
The kiss of My peace is sweet?

Where shine forth the wisdom and wonder
Of God's everlasting plan?
Behold on the cross of dishonour
A cursed and a dying man." — HENRY SUSO

"AND it came to pass that one day when he was eighteen years old, he went alone into the chapel, when all the monks were at dinner in the refectory. And he stood there utterly dark and miserable, for he was weary of all things, and he knew not where to go for help or comfort.

"And it was to him at that moment, as though a Presence were with him, and a sudden light and glory filled his soul, and he saw and heard in his innermost heart that which no tongue can tell, and no heart of man can conceive. And his soul was filled with longing, and yet was satisfied, and thirsted no more, and all the things that he had desired were now as nothing to him, and all his desire for them had passed away. Whether it were day or night he knew not, for he had tasted of the sweetness of the eternal life, and he knew that He who was present with him, was the Lord.

"And thus he remained lost in joy and rest, and he said to himself, 'If this is not heaven, I know not what heaven can be, for all that could be suffered here below were small and even as nothing, to him to whom eternal gladness such as this is, shall be given.'

"And when he came to himself, he seemed to himself as a man who had come from another world. And he fell down, and he sighed in his heart a fathomless sigh, and he said, 'O my God, where have I been? where am I now? O Thou blessed of my heart, this hour shall never pass away from me for ever and for ever.' And he went on his way, and no man saw or knew that he was another man. But his heart and soul were filled with the heavenly wonder, and with the glory that he had seen, and he was as a box which has been filled with a sweet perfume, and the odour is left behind, when the perfume is poured out. And from that moment of heaven, his heart henceforward longed with a deep desire after God."

It was the custom in the convent, that during meals one of the monks read aloud, sometimes portions of the Bible, sometimes other books. But shortly after the day of which Henry Suso has told us, it came to pass that when the monk stood up to read, these were the words which he read, and to Henry Suso they were new and marvellous.

"Hear ye, children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things that thou canst desire, are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth, by understanding hath He established the heavens. My son, let them not depart from thine eyes, keep sound wisdom and discretion. So shall they be life to thy soul, and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in the way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble. When thou liest down thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet."

"And," says the story, "when he heard these beautiful sayings read aloud in his ears, at once he thought in the longing of his heart, 'Oh what a love is that! Might I but have such an one to be mine, oh well it were with me.' But as yet he knew not who and what was it, of whom the words were written. And he thought, 'Can I love that which I do not know, and which I have never seen? But gladly would I have such an one to be my beloved, and I would be her servant.' And he prayed

saying, 'O God, might I but see the One I desire, and might I hear her voice if only once, and hear her speak to me! O Lord, who is the beloved one of whom Thou hast spoken such glorious things? Is it God, or is it man or woman? or is it a knowledge, or a cunning art? Lord, tell me what it is.'

"And as he strove to see in his mind that which should answer to the holy words of the Scripture, his eyes were opened, and he saw as it were One high in heaven, in the glory of the holy place, One who shone as the morning star, and was bright as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And His crown was eternity, and His robe was salvation, and His speech was sweetness, and His presence was a delight, that satisfied all the heart. He was far and near, and exalted and abased; He was present and He was hidden; He called the soul to His companionship, yet none could comprehend Him. He reached aloft above the highest heaven, He humbled Himself to the depths of the fathomless abyss; He was on all sides, from end to end of all things, and all things were ordered sweetly by the skilfulness of His love.

"And he who had given himself to a blessed Virgin, had found in her place a glorious Lord."

Yes, even so, for he knew that the One whom his soul had seen was not Mary, but Christ.

"And thus," he says, "did the Eternal Wisdom bend over him in tender love, and greeted him with a blessed welcome, and spake to him, and said: 'My son, give Me thine heart!' And he fell down before His feet, and humbly thanked Him from the depths of his soul. All this was given to him then, *and there was nothing more to give.*"

From this time did Henry Suso call himself by one name alone. "The servant of the Eternal Wisdom." "And after these things," he says, "he would often times speak to his heart and say, 'O heart of mine, whence come love and gladness, and tenderness and beauty, and delight and sweetness? Have they not flowed down to thee from the great depths of God alone? Awake then, awake, O heart and soul and strength, and cast thyself into the depths of all blessed and glorious things! For now my heart is free to go forth in gladness, unfettered, and to find all the burning thirst of love forever quenched in Thee!'

"And it was even thus to him, that all that is good was his, given to him in the gift of the water of life, that flowed into his soul from God.

"And thus henceforward, whensoever he heard the singing of hymns and psalms, or the sweet sound of harps and lutes, or when he heard men speaking of human love and tenderness, then swiftly did he enter into the secret place of his Beloved above all beloveds, where are the hidden springs whence all that is truly love floweth forth to men.

"And it was to him as to a little child, whom the mother takes under the arms, and makes it to stand upon her knees, and the child leans forward with head and arms outstretched, to delight himself in the love of his mother, and lovely and pleasant is his gladness, which he cannot speak, but it moves his limbs, and is beautiful in his face.

"And he would speak to the Lord and say, 'O my Lord, he who is wedded to a Queen thinks it a joy and honour. But I am espoused to Thee, the Giver of all Grace! In Thee have I riches unfathomable, in Thee have I power to do all things. And could all the earth be mine, what more could it add to that which Thou hast given to me!'"

"And," says one who speaks of him, "his countenance became so glad, and his eyes so filled with God, that it was as if his heart were ever singing, 'Above all joy, beyond all beauty, is He who is the gladness and the fair Presence in my heart, for with Him joy ever follows me, and all things are mine in Him, and He is mine.'"

And now when May came, “the month of Mary,” it was no longer with him as in the former days. For to him the month of May was now the month which told him of “the fairer things of the spiritual Maytime,” and not to Mary, but to the Eternal Wisdom, would he speak and sing, saying, “All hail to Thee, Thou heavenly May, Thou the Eternal Wisdom, Thou in whom are the blossom and the fruit of everlasting joy! O Lord, I love Thee for the red roses of Thy bitter suffering, I adore Thee for the little violets of Thy lowliness, and the lilies of Thy purity, and for all the flowers of many colours, and of glowing brightness, the flowers of the heaths and downs, of the woods and meadows, the blossoms of the fields and trees, which the fair May-time bringeth forth, and which were in days of old, and ever shall be! I kiss Thy feet, beloved Lord, for all things speak of Thee. And for all the gladsome songs of little birds, which ever have been sung upon the branches of the May, my heart praiseth Thee, O Lord, and for all the sweetness and the beauty of all the Mays of all the years, I sing to Thee, O Lord, in my heart and soul, and I pray Thee that Thou, the blessed May, wilt grant me to praise Thee in the short years of this present life, and that I may rejoice in the fulness of Thy joy for evermore.”

CHAPTER LI

THE DARK SHADOW

WE have seen one side of this marvellous picture — the side upon which shone forth the grace and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have been told in these simple words of the great treasure poured into the earthen vessel.

And now we must look awhile at the other side, at the heart that loved so truly, but was yet so veiled by the effect of the evil teaching of 1200 years. We must hear the story of the earthen vessel itself, in the years that followed.

And it must be here remarked, that the same difficulty presents itself in relating this story, as in the story of Nicholas of Basle. It was Henry Suso himself who told the history of his life, but unhappily it was not he who wrote it, but a nun to whom he related it from time to time, his “spiritual daughter,” Elizabeth Staglin. Unknown to Henry Suso, this nun wrote down from memory all he told her. She seems to have regarded everything which he said and did, at all periods of his life, as almost equally good and praiseworthy. She tells the tale of his childish devotion to the Virgin, as if that were already a sign of spiritual life. She writes down disconnected tales with no regard to chronology. She therefore relates strange acts of superstition which betray the darkness and ignorance of those beclouded days, jumbling them in hopeless confusion with acts of true faith and devotedness. She also delights, as did all in those days, and no doubt women more especially, in dreams, and visions, and marvellous tales, told her by other women who dreamt at times of Henry Suso, and told her also by himself.

For like Rulman and Nicholas, he gained for himself, as Dr. Tauler said, “weak brains and disordered fancies,” in the years that followed his blessed knowledge of the Lord and Saviour; and dreams and visions, strange and wild and senseless, were the consequence. It seems to have been in those days so entirely a matter of course, that the flesh was to be kept in subjection by tortures and penances, that every man or woman who desired to take up the cross and follow Christ, began naturally to torment themselves, without pausing for a moment to inquire, “What saith the Lord?”

In the case of Henry Suso, it was certainly not in order to escape the punishment of sin, or to “gain heaven,” that he began a course of tortures which has seldom, if ever, been surpassed. After carefully reading his life, and the book really written by himself, “The Book of the Eternal Wisdom” (and therefore a truer picture of his mind than the partly fabulous book of Elizabeth Staglin), we learn that there were two reasons which led him to spend twenty-two years in constant pain and torment. In the first place, he desired to “keep under his body and bring it into subjection,” and no better way had ever been taught him, than that which Dr. Tauler describes as breaking through a stone wall with one’s head. “They break their heads,” he had said, “and leave the wall standing.”

In the second place, it seemed to Henry Suso that a life of suffering and pain and self-torture was more seemly for those who were following in the steps of Christ, than a life of ease and comfort. And thus, again to quote Dr. Tauler, did he proceed “to mix up bitter cups of myrrh for himself,” instead of waiting for any bitter cup the Lord might be pleased to give him. Nor did he realise that he who follows the Lord fully, will find that “the fellowship of His sufferings” is a needful result of so doing, and that to be hated of all men and to become as the offscouring of all things, is harder

to bear, than self-inflicted torments for which men were admired, and honoured, and at last canonised and worshipped.

It was very soon after this first blessed knowledge of the Eternal Wisdom, that one day, when he had been thinking of the love of the Lord to him, he felt a desire to have some outward mark of his love to the Lord. "And," he said, "oh could I but think of some sign of love, that should be an everlasting token of the love between me and Thee! and a sign that I am Thine, and that Thou art the One only Beloved of my heart, never to be forgotten by me." And then, taking an iron pen, he uncovered his breast, and cut into the flesh in large letters, the name of JESUS. And having this, he knelt down and prayed, saying, "O Lord, the one Beloved of my heart and soul, look upon the great desire of my heart. O Lord, I cannot write Thy name within my heart, therefore O Lord, I pray Thee that Thou wilt do the work I cannot do and imprint Thyself in the depths of my heart, so that I may be truly marked by Thy holy name, and that Thou Thyself mayest be present in my heart for evermore." The name which he had graven on his heart remained there till his death, but he kept it secret, and showed it to none but to one friend long afterwards.

This was but the beginning of his many strange inventions, yet scarcely more strange, though far more painful, than the many inventions which men and women seek out for themselves in these our days, and in this our land of Bibles. There was at least a reality, and a simple love for the Lord, in the childish desire to have the name of Jesus graven on his heart. And may it not be that to the heart of the Lord that act of ignorant devotion was sweet as the loving service of a child — far more so than are the golden and jewelled crosses that give the finishing touch to some costly costume in concert-rooms and gay assemblies; than the crosses upon the decorated prayer-books of those who seek out the churches where their eyes and ears may find an hour's enjoyment, and where the Eternal Wisdom "calls and is refused — she lifteth up her hand and no man regardeth."

To Henry Suso the Lord was a real Presence, and His death and sufferings were a reality of which he knew not all the power, but to which he turned for rest and comfort, and with adoration and love. "It was all as present to him," he says, "as if in bodily nearness he stood by His side, and followed Him whithersoever He went. And at times he would think, 'When King David was driven from his kingdom, there were true knights who followed him, and delighted to serve him, and so would I be to my rejected Lord.' And he would take out the book, wherein was written the portion which saith: 'Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?' and he would read through to the end, all that chapter which speaks of the Lord led forth as a lamb to the slaughter, and then would he entreat Him that neither life nor death, nor joy nor sorrow, might ever separate the servant from his beloved Master."

How well would it have been had he known that to him who believes, the death of the Lord is the death of the old man, and that it is in the power of His resurrection that we have victory and triumph! But he knew not these things, and he was grieved and troubled to find that the old nature yet remained, and that the flesh was strong, and "it was bitter and grievous to him, to find *himself* continually as a heavy burden, of which he knew not the way to rid himself." And in his earnestness and ignorance, he provided himself with a hair shirt and iron chain, which he wore till the blood ran down from the wounds it made. And he wore a belt studded with sharp nails, the points of which he drove into his flesh. And in this belt he slept all night, or tried to sleep. And when he was bitten and stung by insects in the hot weather, he would not drive them away, but let them settle upon him and sting him, tying up his hands to a collar he had made, lest he should use them for his relief. And later he made himself leathern gloves with brazen points, so that if in his sleep he should

perchance move his hands, the points might wound his flesh. And on his back he wore a wooden cross, with thirty iron nails driven through it, which he wore for eight full years, and once when he had blunted the points with a grindstone, he repented of it, and sharpened them again with a file. And daily did he scourge himself with leather straps, into which he had fixed iron points, with hooks like fish-hooks. And into his wounds he rubbed vinegar and salt, altering his penances for different days in the calendar of the Church.

For his bed he had an old door which had been cast away, upon which he slept without any blankets, but covered only by an old mat made of rushes. For a pillow he had a sack stuffed with pea-shells, and he wore the same garments night and day, and under him was the cross with pointed nails. And as his mat was too short to cover his feet, they were frozen on the cold winter nights, and covered with chilblains. And he had many sores from the wounds he gave himself. But he did it all willingly, for he said, "I must partake of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ," little knowing that such were not the sufferings of Him who for righteousness' sake bore the hatred of men, and for sin the judgment of God, — the first, the sufferings of which His own are made partakers; the last, the suffering which He endured alone, that it might never be known to them, the awful, unfathomable depth of the curse of God. But Henry Suso imagined, as many others have done, that all suffering was a gain — if not to atone for sin, at least to mend and improve the sinner.

After a while he gave up the old door, and slept only on his wooden chair, and he went into no room where fires were lighted, for five-and-twenty years, nor did he take a bath. And he ate but once a day, and fasted often, and on fast-days he ate neither eggs nor fish. And he ceased almost entirely to drink, allowing himself only a small cupful of water every day, and wine but once a year, at Easter-time. And at times he would spend the night standing barefoot before the altar on the cold pavement, and would rest afterwards only in his chair. And his thirst was oftentimes so great, that he scarcely dared to look at the bucket drawn up from the convent well, and he would say, "Alas! the wide lake of Constance is close at hand, and the broad Rhine runs past the convent walls! and yet a drink of water can never be for me!"

Let none think lightly of the evil teaching which in all ages, in one shape or another, comes between the soul and God. We can see the folly and the sin — in the case of Henry Suso, the sin of ignorance, which clouded over the blessed teaching of the Spirit, and kept him constantly employed in self-torment and in will-worship, when he might have been telling forth the love of Him who had died to make him free from the law of sin and death, and to bring him into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

But we are more apt to be blind to the evil teaching in our own generation, than to that of former ages, and to satisfy ourselves with the fact that we can see where others err and fall. Let not those cast stones at Henry Suso who leave the flesh to master them without let or hindrance.

Some may be found in these present days, who are ready to blame his fastings and his long years of thirst, whilst they themselves are celebrating their "holy days" by feasting and drinking — by dainty food whereby they mark the seasons when they profess to remember the Lord. How is the time observed amongst us, in remembrance of that solemn moment when He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men? The hair shirts are found no more; but are there none who wear "Lenten costumes," and Easter adornments, whilst living in a land of open Bibles, and "higher education"?

Nor let those denounce him, who "having begun in the Spirit, seeks to be made perfect by the flesh," in returning to the yoke of bondage, and looking to the law given by Moses for the power

of holiness, rather than to the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ. Satan beset him also during this time with many and great temptations, such as he never had had before. He filled him with doubts and questions as to the nature of the Lord Jesus; and he would say to him: "How dost thou know that thou wilt not be eternally lost? For if thou art not one of the Lord's people, who are kept by Him, it matters not what thou believest or doest, thou must certainly perish for ever." And he became sad and miserable, and he would say to himself, "Was ever a man so wicked as thou art?" and so for a while he walked in darkness, and had no light, for he knew not how to escape from the snare which Satan had laid for his feet.

At this time there was a great preacher, called Master Eckart, who had once lived at Strasburg, before the days when Master Tauler had received his first visit from Nicholas of Basle. Since that time, he had preached at several German towns, and had made many disciples. He had been also condemned for heresy by the Archbishop of Cologne, and by the Bishop of Strasburg. As far as we can learn from his sermons which have been preserved, he was more deserving of the name of heretic than many who ended their lives at the stake.

But the charges brought against him were not, as it would appear, founded upon the errors which he held, but rather upon the fact that he had much in common with the Beghards, or "Brethren," or "Friends of God." "It is true," says Dr. Keller, "that Master Eckart was closely connected with the so-called 'Waldenses,' and with their apostles." It seems probable that he had learnt much from the "Brethren," and being a man who delighted in philosophy and human intellect, he worked out by degrees a belief of his own, made up of the teaching of "Brethren," of heathen philosophy, and of Roman Christianity. But no doubt he strayed farther and farther from the truth of God, as men are apt to do, if once they begin to philosophize and exercise their reason upon that which is above reason, and there may have been a time when the teaching of the "Brethren" had a larger place in his sermons, than Plato or the heathens of old.

In any case we find that Henry Suso went to hear him preach, and to tell him of his troubles, and his doubts and fears were cleared away, and he rejoiced from that time to count himself amongst the despised and persecuted "Friends of God." No doubt the mystical philosophy of Master Eckart passed over the head of the simple childlike monk, and he retained the thoughts so often told in Eckart's sermons, of the love of God, and the nothingness of man.

And in the company of the "Friends of God" he found comfort and joy. And he learnt to look beyond the boundaries of the Church that had so misled him, for all men knew that Master Eckart was under the ban of the Church; and later on he was condemned by the Pope himself. Therefore did Henry Suso think lightly of the condemnation of the Church, and did not suffer it to put a barrier between him and any man in whom he found the love of Christ.

CHAPTER LII

THE KNIGHT OF GOD

As the song of him who singeth,
Playing on a harp of gold,
So to me was Christ's evangel
In the days of old.

Thus across the lake of Constance
Went I forth to preach His Word,
And beside me sat the squire
Of a noble lord.

None in all the ship so knightly,
None so bravely dight as he —
“Tell me,” I besought, “thine errand
Yonder o'er the sea.”

“I go forth,” he said, “to gather
Many a knight and noble bold,
They shall tilt at joust and tourney,
Whilst fair eyes behold.

And the bravest and the noblest
He shall win a glorious prize,
Smiles to boot and courtly favour,
In the ladies' eyes.”

“Tell me, what shall be the guerdon?”
“Lo, the fairest in the land
Sets a gold ring on his finger,
With her lily hand.”

“Tell me, how the knight may win it?”
“Scars and bruises must he boast,
For the knight shall be the winner
Who endureth most.”

“Tell me, if when first assaulted,
He in knightly guise shall stand,
Shall he win the golden guerdon
From his lady's hand?”

“Nay, right on, till all is over,
Must a worthy knight hold on;

Bear the brunt, and stand a conqueror,
When the fight is done.”

“And if he be wounded sorely,
May he weep, and may he mourn?”
“Nay, in place of winning honour,
He would win but scorn.”

Then my spirit sank within me,
And within my heart I spake,
“O my Lord, thus fight the knightly
For their honour’s sake.

Small the prize, and stern the battle,
Worthless gain, and weary fight —
Lord, a ring of stones most precious
Hast Thou for Thy knight!

Oh to be the knight of Jesus!
Scorning pain, and shame, and loss;
There the crown, the joy, the glory,
Here, O Lord, Thy cross.”

Then I wept for bitter longing
Thus the knight of God to be;
And the Lord, who saw me weeping,
Gave the cross to me.

Bitter pain, and shame, and sorrow,
Came upon me as a flood —
I forgot it was the tourney
Of the knights of God.

And again I wept, beseeching,
“Take away the cross from me!”
Till a light broke like the morning
Over the wild sea.

Then there spake the voice beloved,
Still and sweet my heart within;
“Is it thus, O knight of Jesus,
Thou the prize wilt win?”

“O my Lord, the fight is weary —
Weary, and my heart is sore.”
“And,” He answered, “fair the guerdon,
And forever more.”

“I have shamed Thee, craven-hearted,

I have been Thy recreant knight —
Own me yet, O Lord, albeit
Weeping whilst I fight.”

“Nay,” He said, “yet wilt thou shame Me?
Wilt thou shame thy knightly guise?
I would have My angels wonder
At Thy gladsome eyes.

Need'st thou *pity*, knight of Jesus?
Pity for thy glorious hest?
On! let God, and men and angels,
See that thou art blest.”

BUT the Lord did not leave His servant to wander on in the way of his own inventions.

“God taught him,” he says at last, “that he would not have these things of his own devisings, and He commanded him to cease from his tortures, and to leave it to God to teach him a more excellent way.” Thereupon he cast his leathern gloves, and his shirt, and his belt, and all his instruments of torture, into the water that flowed past the convent walls. And he sat still awhile, and began to think within his heart, how pure is the truth that is taught by Christ Himself.

And he spake to himself and said, “Look within, dear friend, and there thou wilt find *thyself*, and thine own will. And observe, that with all thine outside penances and torments, which proceeded from thine own mind, thou art as unwilling as ever to bear the contradiction to thy will that comes from other men. Thou art like a frightened hare, that lies hidden in a bush, and shakes and trembles at every leaf that stirs; thou art living in constant fear all day and every day, of things that might betide. Thou turnest pale if thou seest one of those who hate thee. If thou hast to submit to another, thou wilt go out of his way. If thou shouldst come forward, thou hidest thyself; if thou art praised, it gives thee joy; if thou art reproached, it gives thee pain. It may indeed be too true that thou needest a higher school than that in which thou hast hither been.” And then did he look up to God and say, “Alas, Lord! how plainly hast Thou set before me the unwelcome truth! Alas, alas! when shall I ever come to the end of my evil self!”

There followed after this a time of temptation from the evil one, and from his own natural heart. For when he was forbidden by the Lord to lead the life of torment which had nearly worn out his strength, his heart was glad, and he said, “Now may I have an easy life, and comfort and enjoyment. I may now drink wine and water, and suffer no more from thirst. I may lie without my gloves and belt upon my sack of straw, and sleep sweetly all night long. I have laboured long, and wearied soul and body. I thought I should never rest again till my time was come to depart and to be with Christ. And now may I rest and be satisfied.”

But the Lord spake to him as it were in a parable, and showed him in his mind the shoes and armour that knights are wont to wear. And He said to him: “Thou hast been but a servant heretofore, and now shalt thou be a knight.” And he answered the Lord and said, “Why must I be a knight? for I seek for rest and ease. But if I must be a knight of God, it were better to gain my knighthood by fight and fray, and the honour and the glory would be greater.” But the Lord said to him: “Fear not, for as to the fight and fray, thou shalt have enough and to spare. Thou thoughtest that because thy torments are over, thou art now to take thine ease. But God has not withdrawn thy neck from

the yoke. He has but laid upon thee another yoke, and it may be thou wilt find it a heavier one to the flesh. For the Lord will try thee with sickness and trouble, and temptation, and search and prove thy heart and ways in His own wisdom, and according to His own will.”

And he asked the Lord how many sorrows he yet must bear. And the Lord said, “Look up to Heaven above thee. If thou canst count the stars, that are unnumbered, so mayest thou count the sorrows that are yet to come. And as the stars seem small, and yet are very great, so shall thy sorrows seem small to the men who know not the ways of God, and yet to thee they shall be great, and hard to endure.”

And he prayed to the Lord to spare him these troubles that were yet to come. But if it were His will that he should suffer, he besought that the Lord would fulfil all His counsels, and complete His work.

And now began for him a life in which he was to learn far more of the grace and power of the Beloved of his soul. He had been shown how, through all these years of penance, self had been left enthroned in his heart, and that he had been seeking to win for himself the “honour and glory,” which belonged to Christ alone.

He had been looking to himself, to his works and penances, instead of to Christ, for the power and the victory which are given to faith. He had been weighed down and fettered by the armour of Saul, and henceforward he was to be armed with the pebble of the brook, and to go forward in the name of the Lord of Hosts alone.

CHAPTER LIII

GOD'S CUP OF MYRRH

I would bear in my body the dying,
Of Him who has died for me —
Here share, O my Lord, Thy rejection,
Ere I sit on Thy throne with Thee.
I see Thee alone, broken-hearted,
Of comforters findest Thou none;
Yet Thine was the gladness of heaven,
The love and the glory Thine own.

The gall and the vinegar only,
The thirst of Thine agony stills;
Yet Thine were the streams and the fountains,
Of Thine everlasting hills.
In sorrow, in want, in dishonour,
How dear are Thy footsteps to me;
The fountain is sweet to the thirsty,
But sweeter is thirsting with Thee.

Thus to show to the world that rejects Thee —
To show to the angels above,
How blessed Thy yoke and Thy burden,
To him who has tasted Thy love.
The maiden who gathereth roses,
Another, another would find,
So sweet are the tracks of Thy sorrow
To him who would follow behind.

Thus would I press on to the glory,
A knight in the army of God,
Whose march will be onward and forward,
Because of the foes on the road.
Before me the guerdon Thou givest,
My glorious eternal reward,
And with me Thy peace and Thy wisdom,
Because of the Cross of the Lord. — HENRY SUSO

IT was no doubt the case that during his years of penance, he had won much praise and honour from his brother monks. For men will admire the works which come from man, and the monks had been taught that torments, and fastings, and uncleanliness, were marks of holiness well-pleasing to God. But Henry Suso found that times were altered now. His reputation for sanctity disappeared

with his leathern gloves and his belt and cross. He found himself very speedily scorned and despised by those who had been his friends.

It so happened that some thieves broke into a little chapel, in which were hung up waxen legs and arms, as now we see in Roman Catholic countries, being the offerings of lame or disabled people, who believed that they had been cured by the image or the crucifix around which they were hung. The thieves carried off all the wax, and made their escape. But a little child, who had seen Father Henry praying in this chapel the day before, assured the mayor of the town that he was the thief, and all men believed the child.

Very soon other stories were spread abroad concerning him. And not long after, when he made a journey to the Netherlands, he was brought up before a council of priests, who charged him with writing books that were full of evil teaching, and of poisoning the whole country with his heresies.

Then was he visited with sickness, and a violent fever, and it was a comfort to him that “a blessed Friend of God” came to visit him and cheer him.

But when he had recovered, other troubles came upon him, for his sister, who was a nun, betook herself to worldly company, and fell into grievous sin, so that she was cast out of the convent, and she fled, none knowing whither she was gone. But after many a weary journey in search of her, he found her in a cottage in a distant town. He arrived wet to the skin, having fallen into a stream, but he regarded it not, when he saw his sister ill and broken-hearted, and utterly cast down by disgrace and shame. He stayed with her for a while, for he loved her deeply, and he spoke to her of the love of Christ for sinners, and the Lord, he says, found His sheep that was lost, and carried her in His arms, so that she turned to Him, and walked in the ways of holiness, till she departed to be with Christ.

Soon after this another sore trouble came upon Father Henry. He was sent to a town where the yearly fair was going on, in order to do some business for the convent. A lay-brother, who was not quite right in his mind, was given him as a companion, which he did not like, but he dared not complain. On the way to the town a shower came on, and they both became very wet.

When they reached the town it was still early, just before dinner time. The lay-brother went into a hostelry where there was a good fire, and said he would dry his clothes, and that Father Henry should go to the fair, and buy all that was needed.

Scarcely had Father Henry left the house, than the lay-brother sat down at the table, where there was a large and noisy party of merchants and peddlers, who had come to the fair, and were now going to dine, having ordered a large supply of wine. The lay-brother enjoyed their company, and drank freely, so that the wine went to his head, and he staggered out of the hostelry into the fresh air.

But some of the guests followed him, and declared that he had stolen a cheese from the dinner table, and as he vainly endeavoured to prove his innocence, a crowd collected at the door of the hostelry, and the cry arose that the monk was one of the well-poisoners, of whom there was much talk in those days. For the sickness of the black death was spreading through the land, and many said it was because the wells were poisoned by evil men.

“And they shouted at the monk, and seized him, and held him fast. And when he saw he could not escape from them, he turned to them and said: ‘Be still, and let me speak, and I will confess everything.’

“Then they were quiet, and hearkened to him, and he said, ‘Look, all of you, you see well that I am a poor fool and have lost my wits, you need fear nothing from such as I am, but my comrade,

he is a wise man with all his wits about him, and the Order have given him a little bag of poison, with which he is to poison all the wells between here and Alsatia, and he is on his way now to poison the well in this town. Look to it that you catch him before he murders any of you with his poison, for he has just been to throw it into the fountain in the market-place, so that all who come to the fair may drink the water and die. And that was the reason I stayed in the hostelry, and would not go with him, for it grieves me to see him do such evil things. And as a proof that I am telling the truth, you will see that he carries a great bag, as if he had his books therein. But in truth he has in the bag the little bag of poison, and a number of crown pieces, which he and the Order have received from the Jews, on condition they should poison the wells.'

"And when the wild rabble heard all these things, they were furious and shouted, 'Hie after the murderer, that he may not escape us!' And one seized a pike, and another an axe, each man what he could lay hold of, and they ran yelling and shouting, and forced their way into the houses and cottages, where they thought he was hidden, and thrust their pikes and swords into the beds and stacks, so that the whole fair ran together to see what was the matter."

Then came there some strangers, who were honest people, and who knew Father Henry, and when they heard that it was he who was thought to be a murderer, they would have stopped the riot, saying, "He is a godly man, and would do harm to none." But they hearkened not, and as they could not find him, they took his comrade before the mayor, who shut him up in a prison.

Of all this Father Henry was in happy ignorance, for having remembered it was dinner-time, and thinking that by this time his comrade must have dried his clothes, he had gone back to the hostelry in order to dine. When he came into the hostelry, he was told the mournful tale of all that had happened.

Then in grief and terror he ran to the house of the mayor where his comrade was locked up, and entreated the mayor to set him free. But the mayor said the man had raised a riot, and he should send him to safe keeping in a tower, as a punishment for his crime. Then went Father Henry hither and thither, seeking for some to befriend him, but finding no man, he offered the mayor some money of his own, and he consented to let the lay-brother go free.

"Then thought he that his troubles were over, but he found they were yet to begin. For when at last, after all his trouble and expense, he had released his comrade, it was vesper time, and he had yet far to go. And as soon as he came out of the mayor's house, the rabble ran together, and the boys called after him, 'There goes the poisoner!' And they pursued him, one and all, calling 'Murder! Murder!' so that he knew not how to make his way out of the town.

"'Stop him!' they cried, 'he has the bag of poison! he shall not escape us! He shall be killed on the spot! He shall not get off by his pence, as he got away from the mayor!'

"And when he began to run, they ran the faster. And some of them said, 'We will drown him in the Rhine!' but others said, 'No, the poisonous man will poison all the water of the river, it were better to burn him!'

"Then rushed forward a stalwart peasant with a red waistcoat, and he seized a pike, and forced his way through the crowd, till he was ahead of them all, and he shouted: 'Hear me, gentlemen! we can gut this heretic to no more shameful death, than by running him through with this pike of mine! That is the way they kill venomous toads! Let me run my pike through his body, and stick him up on this good fence, so surely, that there he shall remain till his vile corpse is dried by the wind, that all the world may know that he is a wicked murderer, and curse him after his death, as he well deserves!'"

Father Henry heard these words with fear and lamentation, and there were some who would have saved him, and who wept bitterly when they saw that the peasant was close upon him, but they dared not make their way through the furious mob to deliver him out of their hands.

It was now beginning to get dark, and he fled before his enemies, and would have taken refuge in one house and another, but everywhere he was driven forth with bitter words. Some kind-hearted women would have taken him in, but they durst not do so.

And when he saw that death was close upon him, and that there was no help to be looked for from man, he fell on his knees beside a hedge, and lifted his eyes to his Heavenly Father, and said: "O Father of all mercy, wilt Thou not come for my deliverance in this my need! O Father, tender and faithful Father, help me, Thy poor child, in this great extremity, for I know not which death would be most grievous, to be drowned, or to be burnt, or to be run through with a pike, and one death or another must I suffer! Lord, unto thee I commend my spirit, for they are close upon me who will take my life!"

And these words were heard by a priest, who ran forward with strength and goodwill, and saved him out of their hands, and took him home to his house, and lodged him for the night, so that no harm came to him, and in the morning he set him forward on his way to his convent.

CHAPTER LIV

“YE SHALL BE HATED OF ALL MEN”

THE MAT

It was on a winter's morning,
In the days of old —
In his cell sat Father Henry,
Sorrowful and cold.

“O my Lord, I am aweary,”
In his heart he spake,
“For my brethren scorn and hate me
For Thy blessed sake.

If I had but one to love me,
That were joyful cheer —
One small word to make me sunshine
Through the darksome year!

But they mock me and despise me
Till my heart is stung —
Then my words are wild and bitter,
Tameless is my tongue.”

Then the Lord said, “I am with thee,
Trust thyself to Me,
Open thou thy little window,
Mark what thou shalt see.”

Then a piteous look and wistful
Father Henry cast
Out into the dim old cloister,
And the wintry blast.

Was it that a friend was coming,
By some angel led?
No! a great hound, wild and savage,
Round the cloister sped.

Some old mat that lay forgotten,
Seized he on his way —
Tore it, tossed it, dragged it wildly,
Round the cloister grey.

“Lo, the hound is like thy brethren.”
Spake the voice he knew;
“If thou art the mat, beloved,
What hast thou to do?”

Meekly then went Father Henry,
And the mat he bare,
To his little cell to store it
As a jewel rare.

Many a winter and a summer,
Through those cloisters dim,
Did he thenceforth walk rejoicing,
And the Lord with him.

And when bitter words would sting him,
Turned he to his cell,
Took his mat and looked upon it,
Saying, “All is well.

“He who is the least and lowest,
Needs but low to lie;
Lord, I thank Thee, and I praise Thee,
That the mat am I.”

Then he wept for in the stillness
His Beloved spake,
“Thus was *I* the least and lowest,
Gladly, for thy sake.

Lo, My face to shame and spitting,
Did I turn for thee;
If thou art the least and lowest,
Then remember Me.”

HE had now had to suffer as a thief, a heretic, and a murderer. To sleep on a cross studded with thirty nails, and to wear a hair-shirt, were sufferings far more creditable. To be canonised and worshipped might be the end of such tortures. But to be counted as a heretic and a villain, could lead to no such high distinction. His family, and his mother's name, had been disgraced and dishonoured by the sister he loved. And another reproach was yet to fall upon him, which would touch him in a tender point.

In a certain town was a cloister, in which was a stone crucifix, with an image the size of life. One day it was reported that fresh blood was to be seen flowing from this image, under the wound which was carved upon the side. The whole town ran together to see this marvellous sight, and amongst the first who came was Father Henry, who at that time was passing that way. When he saw the blood, he went near, and touched it with his finger. For this impious act he was seized by the crowd, who bid him confess before all the people assembled, that he had been a witness of the

miracle. He said he was willing to confess that he had seen and touched the blood, but as to being a miracle, he must leave it to others to judge.

The anger of the people was very great, and as they could not compel him to say it was a miracle, they declared that he had cut his finger, and smeared the blood upon the image, in order to make money by showing this pretended wonder to the townsfolk.

So great was the wrath of the citizens who heard this tale, that he was compelled to fly from the town by night. But his flight was discovered, and he was pursued by a maddened crowd, from whom in the end he escaped. A price was now set on his head, to be paid to any who would bring him dead or alive, and in consequence, the evil report of his sacrilege spread far and wide, and his name was held up to reproach and contempt.

It may be that if he had still been sleeping upon the old door, and daily thrusting nails into his wounded flesh, such evil rumours would never have gained credit. But his reputation for holiness was gone, and he was scorned and spurned by the monks his fellows and by most men besides.

Many other troubles and sufferings followed, but the Lord did not leave His servant without consolation, in the midst of perils in waters, and perils by robbers, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, and in perils among false brethren. But a time of rest came, during which Father Henry made a journey to a convent of nuns, to visit some of his spiritual children. For the Lord had made him to be the means of the conversion of many sinners, and he watched over them as one that must give account.

“When he came to the convent,” says the story, “his children asked him, ‘How goes it with thee?’ Then answered he and said, ‘I fear that it goes ill with me, for this reason; four weeks have now passed by, in which I have suffered neither in body nor in reputation, which is a strange thing to me. I fear that God has forgotten me.’ And he went to sit down for a while by the window.

“And at that moment there came a brother of the Order, beneath the window, and called to him, and said thus, ‘I have just been at a castle, where the lord of the castle asked after you, and desired to know where you were. And many a hard word did he speak, and he lifted up his hand, and swore a great oath, that wheresoever he might find you, he would run you through with his sword. And this oath has been sworn also by several evil-disposed men, who are his nearest friends, and they have sought you in several cloisters, that they might wreak their vengeance upon you. Therefore take warning, and keep out of the way, if life is dear to you.’

“Then was he in great fear, and said to the brother, ‘I should like to know what I have done to deserve death.’

“Then answered the brother and said, ‘It has been told to the lord of the castle, that you have led away his daughter, and many other people besides, into strange and peculiar ways, which they call being in the Spirit, and they say that such people, who say they are in the Spirit, are altogether the wickedest people who walk upon the earth. And yet more, another wrathful man was there, and he also spoke of you saying, ‘He has robbed me of my wife whom I dearly loved. She walks about with a veil on, and takes no notice of things around her, she says she only desires to look within. All that comes from the monk, and well shall he pay for it!’”

“And when the servant of the Lord heard these things, he said ‘God be praised!’ and he turned him from the window, and said to his children, ‘Good tidings, my daughters, rejoice with me! God has thought upon me, and has not forgotten me.’ And he told them the tale he had heard, how he was to be rewarded with evil, for the good that he had wrought.

“And in those days it befell him also, that when at times he went into the infirmary, to rest his weary body for a little while, or when he sat at table silent as was his wont, he was assailed with mockery and with unseemly words. And at first these things were very grievous to him, and he pitied himself so sorely, that the hot tears would sometimes run down his cheeks, and mingle with his food and drink.

“He would then look up to God, and say with an inward sigh, ‘O God, is it not enough that I suffer in my hours of labour? Can I not eat my little morsel in peace?’

“This befell him often and sorely. And once when he could endure it no longer, he went away from the table, to the place where he could be alone with God. And he spake to the Lord, and told Him how he had at all times felt pity and tenderness for all men who suffered, and how he had been grieved at all times when he heard hard words spoken of others, either before their faces or behind their backs. And how he had always defended those who were falsely accused, or entreated for them if they were guilty, and how he had wept with the mourners, and rejoiced with those who rejoiced. And how it had grieved him to see even a bird or beast, however small, suffer pain or hunger.

“‘And yet, Lord,’ he said, ‘Thou dost permit those whom the beloved Paul has called false brethren, to treat me cruelly, as Thou, Lord, knowest.’

“And when he had thus unburdened his heart to God, a still sweet rest fell upon him, and the Lord shone into his heart and spake, saying, ‘The child-like reasoning which thou hast set forth before Me, cometh from this, that thou hast not rightly observed the words and ways of the rejected Christ. Thou shouldest know that it is not enough in the sight of God that thou hast a kind heart, for this thou hast by nature. The Lord looketh for more from thee than this. He desireth for thee not only that thou shouldest suffer patiently, when men are hard with thee, but that thou shouldest take no rest nor sleep until thou hast gone to thine adversary, to soften his angry heart, if so it may be, with tender words, and ways. For with such lowliness and meekness thou takest from him knife and sword, and he is powerless to harm thee. Behold, this is the old and perfect way which Christ has taught His own, saying, ‘Lo! I send you forth as sheep amongst the wolves.’

“But when the servant of the Lord,” continues the story, “considered this, it seemed to him that this perfect way was far too toilsome, and that even to think of it was hard, and harder yet to follow it, yet he yielded up his heart to the Lord, that he might begin to learn it.

“It happened shortly afterwards, that there was a lay-brother, who spoke to him with insolence, and reproached him before all present. Then did he take it silently and patiently, and desired to think that he had done enough.

“But he was warned in his heart by the Lord, that he must do yet further. And when it was evening, this brother went into the infirmary to have his supper. And the servant of the Lord went to stand outside the door of the infirmary, to wait for the brother to come out. And when he came out, the servant of the Lord fell down before him, and spake humbly to him, saying ‘My dear and good father, give honour to God by looking kindly upon me. If I have grieved you in any matter, forgive me for the Lord’s sake.’

“Then did the brother stand still, and looked at him in amaze, and said with a voice that was nigh to weeping: ‘What marvellous ways are thine! Thou hast never done me any harm, nor hast thou ever harmed any other that I know of. But it is I who grieved thee, and that before all present, with my wicked words. It is for thee to forgive me, and that I entreat of thee.’

“Then was the servant at rest in his heart, and he went away in peace.

“And another day, when he sat at meat in the refectory, there was a brother who turned upon him with bitter words. Then did he turn to the brother and smiled upon him in friendliness, as if he had given him some precious jewel. And the brother was pricked in his heart, and was silent, and smiled at him again. And after dinner, when this brother went into the town, he said, ‘I was put to shame to-day at the dinner table as never before in my life, for when I railed at the servant of the Lord, he bent his head towards me, and smiled sweetly upon me, so that I was crimson with shame. And this shall serve me as a lesson from this day forth.’”

CHAPTER LV

A NEW SONG

To Thee, Lord, my heart unfoldeth,
As the rose to the golden sun —
To Thee, Lord, mine arms are clinging,
The eternal joy begun.
For ever through endless ages,
Thy cross and Thy sorrow shall be
The glory, the song, and the sweetness,
That make heaven heaven to me.

Let one in his innocence glory,
Another in works he has done —
Thy blood is my claim and my title,
Beside it, O Lord, I have none.
The Scorned, the Despised, the Rejected,
Thou hast come to this heart of mine;
In Thy robes of eternal glory,
Thou welcomest me to Thine. — HENRY SUSO

“AND when the servant considered all that the Lord had thus shown him of the hidden wonders of His grace, he spake to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, the sorrows and the troubles through which Thou hast brought me, are to the eyes of man, as sharp thorns that pierce through flesh and bone. Therefore, O blessed Lord, let these sharp thorns bring forth sweet fruit of blessed teaching, that we weary men may learn to suffer more patiently, and to praise Thee all the more because Thou givest us to suffer.’

“And the Lord heard his prayer, and he was taken as it were out of himself, and he learnt how he who suffers, should turn his sorrows into praise to the Beloved who suffered first.”

THE SONG OF PRAISE

O Lord, in my songs I have praised Thee,
For all that was sweet and was fair;
And now a new song would I sing Thee,
A song that is wondrous and rare.
A song of the heart that is broken,
A song of the sighs and the tears,
The sickness, the want, and the sadness
Of the days of our pilgrimage years.
A song of the widows and orphans,
Of the weary and hungry and sad,
High praise of the will Thou hast broken,

The will of the young and the glad.
A song of the outcasts and martyrs,
A song of the scorned and despised,
The lonely, dishonoured, forsaken,
Who knew the rejection of Christ.
Loud sings the great choir of sorrow
The song of the gladness untold,
To Him, on the throne of His glory,
Who wept in the ages of old.
To Thee, O my Father, I offer,
The psalms of Thy children who weep,
The songs of the sowers weary,
The joy of the blessed who reap —
Oh sweet to the members the witness,
They are with the Head ever one;
With Him who trod first in the pathway,
That leads from the cross to the throne.
Thy glory, Lord Jesus, is ours,
And ours Thy rejection and shame —
The knights of the King in His beauty,
Our banner Thy glorious Name.
Weak, weary, our footsteps may falter,
Our praises imperfect may be,
But Thou singest praise in the glory;
The eyes of our God are on Thee.
O Rock that wast smitten for sinners,
Whence floweth the river of God,
The deeper our guilt and our sorrow,
The deeper our praise for Thy blood.
The sorer the thirst of the desert,
The sweeter the waters must be;
The fuller our chorus of praises
That here we have suffered with Thee.

“And the servant sat still, yet a good while, until all these things were to him in the inmost innermost of his soul a solemn reality; then did he stand up joyfully, and he praised God for His grace.

“It also came to pass one joyous Easter day, that the servant felt glad at heart, and he sat according to his custom in his little resting place, which was a small chapel under the staircase of the convent. And he asked God to show him what enjoyment those should have in this present time, who had suffered many things for His sake.

“And God answered him in his heart, and said, ‘All those who suffer according to the will of God, may well rejoice, for their patience has a great reward, even this — though they are pitiable in the eyes of many, yet many shall rejoice eternally, on account of the praise and honour which

shall be brought to God through them. They have died with Me, and with Me they shall arise. I will give them the desire of their heart, for My desires are theirs. I will give them the peace of God, that no angel, nor devil, nor man can take away from them. I will give them to know the sweetness of the kisses of My mouth, and of My close and tender love, and thus shall they know in their hearts that they are one with Me for ever and for ever, and they shall not need to ask Me for My love, for during this little while there shall not be one single moment in which my love shall be withholden from them. But it beginneth now, and continueth for ever, though here in their mortal bodies they could not bear to know how full and deep is that love of Mine.'

"Then was the servant glad at these blessed tidings, and he sprang up, and it was as if his heart sang within him for joy, and he exclaimed aloud, so that the chapel re-echoed with his gladness, and he said:

"He who has suffered, let him go forth and complain! God knoweth that as for me, it is as if I had never had a sorrow all my days on earth below! I do not know what sorrow is. I know well what are joy and blessedness! For all the desires of my heart are given to me, and what need I more!'

"And then did he speak to the Lord and say: 'O eternal Wisdom, teach me more of this hidden mystery, in so far as it can be spoken in human speech, for many are blind and know not this truth, which Thou hast made known to me!'

"Then was it taught further to him in his inmost heart, and thus did the Lord make it yet more clear to him, saying 'Mark those men (alas! there are but few), who live as it were no longer, but whose life is hidden in God, so that of themselves they make no account. Thus can they delight themselves fully and freely in all that which God is doing, apart from the thought of themselves, and to them therefore it is true that heaven and earth are theirs, and all things are theirs, and fulfil their will, because the will of God is their will. And their cup overfloweth with joy even here below, because in all things they have a joy and delight that is steadfast and full.

"For in God there is no sorrow, and no suffering but peace and joy alone. But there is notwithstanding this hindrance to their perfect joy, that sin is yet in them, and to grieve and sorrow for sin must needs be, where the heart is right with God. Therefore, when they sin, for a while their joy departs. But whilst they walk with God, all is peace. For in Him sorrow is not sorrow, and pain is not pain, but all is peace and rest, all that God willeth, to them is sweet and pleasant. This is not to be understood to mean, that they no longer need to pray, for God delighteth in the prayers of His own.

"Nor is it only that to them the will of God is sweet. It is more than this. For to them He gives the fair sunshine of His comfort; and the blessed joy of heaven, even here below. So that they live already as it were in heaven, and thus it is that here upon the earth they have the oil of joy for mourning, and when they depart hence, they enter into life everlasting.'"

CHAPTER LVI

THE TABLET OF WAX

The hart panteth after the waters,
The dying for life that departs —
The Lord in His glory for sinners,
For the love of rebellious hearts.
Call back all the days of the ages,
All snow-flakes come down from above,
All flowers of summers departed,
But think not to measure His love.

Behold Him, O soul, where He told it,
Pale, bleeding, and bearing thy sin;
He knocketh, saith, “Open, beloved,
I pray thee to let Me come in.
Behold I have borne all the judgment,
Thy sins, O beloved, are gone;
Forgotten, forgotten for ever,
God seeketh, but findeth not one.

Behold with what labour I won Thee,
Behold in my hands and my feet,
The tale of my measureless sorrow —
Of love that made sorrow so sweet.
A flax-thread in oceans of fire,
How soon swallowed up would it be!
Yet sooner in oceans of mercy,
The sinner that cometh to me.” — HENRY SUSO

THUS had Henry Suso learnt of God, from the day when he cast into the Rhine his human inventions, and left it to the Lord to do the work he had so vainly sought to do for himself. He had been the bondsman toiling under a heavy yoke of his own devising. He was now the knight of God, free to serve his glorious Master, and glad and joyful that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

And now that his eyes were no longer fixed upon himself, the Lord could use him as His messenger to bring many souls to Him.

His conversations with his “spiritual daughter,” Elizabeth Staglin, appear to have begun about this time. She asked him one day, What is the beginning of a holy life? “We find,” he said, “different experiences in different people. I know a man in Christ, who, when he was first awakened, searched all through his conscience with great diligence, in order that he might remember all his sins, so that he might tell them all, great and small, to his confessor, in the hope that having fully confessed all, he might depart in peace, with all his sins forgiven, like the penitent woman who washed the feet

of the Lord with tears, and to whom the Lord said, 'Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee.' This was the beginning of this man's spiritual life."

Here, it would seem, the conversation was suddenly interrupted, and Henry Suso left Elizabeth to meditate upon his words. She determined promptly to follow the example of this man, and she determined also that the confessor to whom she would tell all her sins, great and small, should be none other than Father Henry. But as she could not, on account of the distance, confess to him by word of mouth, she procured a large tablet of wax, upon which she wrote all the sins she could possibly remember, and sent it to him carefully packed, with the request that he would give her absolution for the whole.

When he had read through the list of sins, he found these words written at the end, "My dear sir, I, sinful woman as I am, fall at your feet, and entreat you, that with your faithful heart you bring me back to the heart of God, so that I may be your spiritual child in time and in eternity."

"At this implicit confidence in him," says the story, "he was deeply touched, and he turned to God and said, 'Merciful God, what shall I, Thy servant, answer to these words? Shall I drive her from me? Lord, I could not do that to a little dog. Lord, if I were to do as she desires, it might doubtless be displeasing to Thee, my Lord; for she is seeking in the servant the abundance of riches which are only to be found in the Master, in Thee, my loving Lord! I fall with her before Thy blessed feet, Thou gracious God, and I implore Thee, that Thou wilt grant her request. O Lord, let her have the answer to her petition, for behold, she crieth after us. What didst Thou, Lord, for that heathen woman? O Heart of Love, the tidings of Thine endless mercy have been told us far and wide, and were her sins yet more and greater, forgiveness is in Thee. Lord, turn Thine eyes of tenderness upon her, speak to her but that single word of consolation,'" Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath saved thee." ""

And the servant sent an answer back by the messenger who brought the tablet, and he said to her that the thing which she had asked of him, was already granted to her, and that she now knew well that it was given to her, not by the servant of whom she had asked it, but by the Father Himself, who had welcomed her to His heart, so that she could go in peace, and show to all men what it was the Lord had done for her. For the Lord had shown him that God had spoken to her heart, and the angels had seen with gladness and rejoicing the grace that was given her. And thus did she go on her way, praising the Lord for His great salvation.

It is to be hoped that she learnt after a while that the true list of her sins could by no means be compressed into the tablet of wax.

CHAPTER LVII

THE PREACHER AND THE ENEMY

“O Father! not my will, but Thine be done!”
Thus with my lips I say;
Yet lags the heart, the while the lips would run —
My heart it sayeth “Nay.”

“Be comforted, O child of My delight,
Though yet thy heart complain;
For I would have thee suffer when I smite,
Or pain would not be pain.

“Were it a chastening if it were not grief?
Yet for a moment tears;
Then glows the spring where fell the yellow leaf,
The spring of endless years.

“For sorrow is the sorrow of an hour,
And is eternal love;
The dusky bud enfolds the glorious flower,
For God’s delight above.”

“O Lord, whose lips are lilies, sweet to me
As psaltery and as psalm,
Thy blessed words of glory that shall be,
Of song and crown and palm.

“Yet sweeter even now to see Thy face,
To find Thee now my rest —
My sorrow comforted in Thine embrace,
And soothed upon Thy breast.

“Lord, there to weep, is better than the joy
Of all the sons of men;
For there I know the love without alloy,
I cannot lose again.”

“O child, My heart’s beloved, sweet to Me,
As psaltery and as psalm,
The voice of him who on the midnight sea
Can praise through storm and calm.

“And who is he who seeks the haven fair,
The everlasting home?”

The lonely and the outcast enter there —
The glad heart will not come.

“To Me the weary cometh, when the way
Is steep, and long, and lone —
To Me the friendless, when the golden day
Behind the hills is gone.”

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Then spake my heart, “As who a garment takes,
When drives the bitter sleet,
Is he who singeth to the heart that breaks” —
How then may grief be sweet?

And lo! in vision fair did I behold
One who a psaltery strung —
Two threads he stretched above the strings of gold,
Across, and all along.

Then with the threads thus crosswise o’er the strings,
Gave he the harp to me.
Thus know I how the broken-hearted sings,
Lamb of God, to Thee! — HENRY SUSO

THE Lord was pleased to use Father Henry to bring many souls from the power of Satan to God, and wherever he went, he sought out the lost and the miserable, and spoke to them of the love of Jesus. “Were you condemned to death,” he would say, “and the sword already lifted to execute the sentence, and one were to come between, and receive the death-stroke in your place, what greater love could there be than such love as this? The first lesson in the school of wisdom, is the lesson taught in the open book of the crucified Jesus. Read that page and ask yourselves, were a man to give all he had, even if he had the whole world to give, could he ever be to Jesus, that which Jesus has been to him?

“And not only is the gift of God so great, the precious gift of His Son; there is far more than the greatness of the gift, to melt and touch our hearts. We know ourselves, that a little gift given in the fulness of tender love, is far more precious to us than many a greater gift would be. But when we think of the gift of God, not only is it so marvellously great, but how marvellous is the tenderness and love with which He has given it to men! Not only did Jesus die for sinners, but it is as if He said: ‘Behold Me, all hearts of men! was ever a heart that loved as Mine has loved? For you My heart was pierced, and thence My love flows forth to you.

“It is I, the Eternal Wisdom, I, the depth unfathomable of mercy, who have brought forth from My hidden treasure-house the endless riches of My grace. It is I, the Eternal Wisdom, who became poor and needy, that I might make you rich. It is I who died a bitter death, that you might pass from death to life. Behold Me on the high gallows of the cross, standing between the dread sentence of God, and the sinners, who were righteously condemned.

“Look at Me and see, behold the Brother and the Bridegroom of Mine own.

“Sinner! I have as much forgotten all thou hast done against Me, as if it had never been done. Come to Me to be washed in My precious Blood, and then lift up thine head, and rejoice in Me. O sinner, come, and take from My hand the token of perfect peace, of complete and full forgiveness. Take from My hand the ring of Mine espousals, and the best robe, and the shoes for thy feet, and the new and blessed name of Hephzibah, the bride betrothed eternally to Me.

“Behold how dearly I have bought thee, forsaken of God for thee. I hung athirst and bleeding on the cross, but My thirst for Thee was greater than the thirst of My lips. And when I had wrought out for thee a full salvation, then did I cry: *It is finished.*

“I was obedient unto death, the death of the cross. To My Father’s hands I commended My spirit, and My soul departed. But I, who did all these things, was all the while thy God.

“And then was the sharp spear driven into My side, and thence flowed the stream of precious blood, and the river of living water. Sinner, wilt thou come to Me?”

And far and near, all along the valley of the Rhine, from Constance to the Netherlands, in towns and villages amongst the wooded hills, this blessed Gospel was preached and the “Friends of God” grew and multiplied, and the Servant of the Eternal Wisdom had many souls for his hire.

But it came to pass that amongst those who flocked to hear him, was one who seemed to him to desire to know the Saviour, and he spoke often to her, and she turned from many evil ways, and he believed that she loved the Lord. Therefore as she was poor, and had lost her character, he helped her from time to time with little gifts.

But after a while he heard that she lived in secret, in all her former sins. And this grieved him much, and he ceased to visit her, or give her money. And thereupon she was filled with anger and malice, and she reported far and wide that Father Henry was himself a man of evil life, and his brother monks believed it, and many others also, and he was despised and disgraced as never before. And his friends turned away from him, for they were ashamed of his company. And one whom he loved more than the rest, told him he would have no more to say to him, and spoke bitter words which cut him to the heart.

Then he besought him lovingly, and said it was an evil thing to trample on him who was down, but if all friends forsook him, there remained for him the heart of Jesus.

But his old companion answered, “It is all over with you, and none will listen now to your preaching, and all men will cast away your books, and read them no more.

Then did Father Henry answer, “I trust to God in Heaven, that my books shall yet be read and loved as they never yet have been.”

And a little while after he sat in his quiet chapel, and he heard in the depths of his soul a voice that spake and said: “Hear a comfortable word that I will read to thee. And this is the word: ‘Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall thy land be anymore termed Desolate, for the Lord delighteth in thee.’”

And it was as if these words were read to him three or four times over. And the Lord spake further to his heart and said, “Thus shall the Eternal God thy Father do to thee.”

And when he thought over these things, it was given him to see that the hand of God was in all that had befallen him and that He uses oftentimes to chasten His beloved for their good, by means of His enemies. And yet another time the Lord spake to his heart, and said, “Remember that Christ the Lord was willing to endure not only the company of His beloved disciple John, and His faithful Peter, but also of the wicked Judas.”

And a swift thought came into his heart, and he said, "Alas, Lord, if I, the poor Friend of God, had but one Judas, perchance I might endure it, but now at this present moment every corner is full of Judases, and if one goes away, four or five more come in his place."

But the Lord answered him and said: "For a man who walks with God, no Judas is a Judas, but a workman by whom the Lord works for the good of His beloved. And when Judas gave the Lord a false and evil kiss, He called him Friend, saying, 'Friend, wherefore art thou come?'"

Thus time went on, and he took comfort in the thought that the matter had not yet been brought before the Bishops and Inquisitors of the Order. But soon he heard that the Bishops and Inquisitors were about to meet in council in the very town where the wicked woman lived, and where all men believed her tale.

Then did his heart fail, and he went to his little chapel, and gave vent to his grief. He could not pray, but he walked to and fro, and now he sat down, and now sprang up in restless dismay, and could say only, "O God, what meanest Thou by this?"

Then did the Lord say, "Where is now that joy in sorrow, which thou hast spoken of so often to other men, and of which thou hast said sweet and blessed words?"

Then did he answer the Lord: "Thou askest me where is my joy in sorrow? And I ask Thee, where is Thy fathomless mercy to Thy Friends? O Lord, I believed in Thy goodness, I believed Thou wert a faithful God to all who put their trust in Thee. But the tenderness of His eyes is turned away from me, and His blessed Face beholds me no more. O Lord, Thou knowest that all my trust and comfort was in Thee, and in none besides on the face of the earth."

And for half the day was he thus rebellious against God. And then, when he had wearied himself with complaining, he sat down, and turned from himself to God, and said: "Thy will be done."

And thereafter the Prelate and the Master of the Order summoned him, and said they had made strict inquiries concerning him, and had found no charge to bring against him. But that a bad woman, whose word was nothing worth, had spoken false calumnies against a worthy man, and that such evil report might be spread of any man, if people were willing to lend an ear to every slanderous tongue.

Then said he often, "O Lord, how true is the word that Thou hast spoken, 'If God be for us, who shall be against us!'" And he praised God fervently for the sorrow that was past, and he said he would not for the whole world have been without that time of humiliation, for therein had he been more driven out of himself, and brought further into the depths of the love of God, than any other sorrow that he had had from his youth up.

CHAPTER LVIII

FROM THE WORLD TO GOD

“I am not.” Oh words unwelcome,
To the lies of men:
“I am not.” Oh words that lead us
Back to God again!

Speech of him who knows the pathway
To that refuge sweet,
Where is covert from the tempest,
Shadow from the heat.

Speech of Heaven, from wise men hidden,
Unto children taught;
Few the words of that great lesson,
Only “I am not.”

Heart of man, another language
Is thy native speech,
Spoken by a thousand races,
All alike in each.

“I am,” — rich, or wise, or holy —
“Thus, and thus am I;”
For “I am,” men live and labour,
For “I am,” they die.

For “I am” men dare and suffer,
Count all loss as gain,
Toil and weariness and bondage,
Sin and grief and pain.

In the blessed Gospel read we
How a rich man bade
Christ the Lord and His disciples
To a feast he made.

Well it was to feed the prophet!
Thus the rich man thought,
But amidst his wealth and bounty,
Lacked he, “I am not.”

Then there came a sinful woman,
Eyes with weeping dim —

“I am not,” her heart was saying —
She had looked on Him.

He beheld her broken-hearted,
Ruined and undone,
Yet enthroned above the angels
Brighter than the sun.

All the while in dust before Him
Did her heart adore,
“I am not, but Thou art only,
Thou art evermore.”

For His heart to hers had spoken,
To His wandering lamb,
In the speech of Love Eternal
He had said “I AM.”

Now she thirsts no more for ever,
All she would is given,
None on earth hath she beside Him,
None beside in heaven.

Oh, how fair that heavenly portion,
That eternal lot;
Christ, and Christ alone, for ever —
Ever, “I am not.” — HENRY SUSO

IT was soon after this, that Father Henry went forth to evangelize amongst the convents in which young girls were brought up, with a view to their becoming nuns. But these convents, which were left open to intercourse with the world, were very frequently places of worldly amusement, and the girls lived a gay life, in which they were encouraged by the nuns.

“And many,” said Father Henry, “wore religious dresses with very worldly hearts underneath them.”

“In one of these cloisters,” he continues, “was a fair young maiden of noble family, who was ensnared in the net of Satan, and for several years had wasted her heart and her time upon gay and costly amusements, and was so dazzled thereby, that she always fled from the servant of the Eternal Wisdom as if she had been a wild deer, because she was afraid that he would tell her to give up her ways of pleasure.

“But she had a sister, who entreated the servant to do all that he could to bring her from her evil ways to the Eternal God. This seemed to him an impossible request, and he said: ‘Methinks the Heaven would sooner come down to the earth, than that she should cease from her ways, unless it be by death.’

“But her sister besought him fervently and said, that she had faith to believe if he would ask this thing of God, it would be granted him.

“Now as she always fled from him, when he went to the convent, he found out that on a certain day which was S. Margaret’s day, she and the other young sisters were to go out into a field to pull

their flax. He therefore followed them without being observed, and went round the field, so that he might suddenly turn upon her unexpectedly.

“And when she saw that he was coming up to her, she insolently turned her back upon him, with a wrathful countenance, and called out loudly, ‘Sir monk, what right have you to force yourself upon me? Go about your business, I strongly advise you, for there is nothing to be had from me. I can tell you, before I would confess to you, I would have my head cut off. And before I would follow your preaching, and give up my pleasures, I would be buried alive.’

“Then did the companion who was standing nearest to her reprove her, and sought to stop her mouth, saying, ‘He only speaks to you for your good.’

“But she tossed her head and said, ‘I say what I mean, I am not going to put on anything, I wish him to know what I think.’

“And the servant was grieved at her bold speech and unseemly behaviour, and he was silent, for he could not speak. And the other sisters, who heard the outcry she made, were grieved also, and rebuked her.

“And the servant turned aside, and left her, but he looked up to God and sighed. And he would have given up his attempt, were it not that an inward persuasion from God wrought in his heart, and he thought, ‘He who would do aught for the Lord, or even for the world, should not give in so soon.’ This was in the afternoon.

“Afterwards, when the evening came, after supper the sisters went all together into the court, to pill the flax that they had gathered, and the young damsel went with them. And as she had to pass the door of the refectory, where the servant sat, he besought one of her playmates to bring her in by some cunning device, and then to leave her suddenly. And with some difficulty she did so.

“And as the damsel sat down upon the window seat, he came to her and said, ‘Dear maiden, thou art set apart for God. How long wilt thou give thy fair self, and thy loving heart, to the devil who would destroy thee? The Lord has made thee fair and noble, and given thee many a gracious gift. And it is a sorrowful thing that one who has the face of an angel, should bestow her heart upon any other than the One who is the Highest and the Holiest. Who has a right to pluck the rose, but He to whom the rose belongeth?’

“‘Nay, beloved maiden, open those clear young eyes, and behold Him who is the Eternal Love, the Love that will be for ever and for ever. And for those who drink the sweet poison of the enemy, forgetting the death that follows, for them in time and in eternity, is misery alone. I promise thee and assure thee, that God will take thee now for His beloved, and will be faithful and true to thee, here on earth, and for ever in Heaven.’

“It was the hour of grace. For the words he spake sank deeply into her heart, and she was melted as he spoke them. And as he ceased to speak, she lifted up her eyes, and sighing deeply, she spake, and said to him:

“‘My father, I give myself up to God and to you. And I bid farewell to my wild and wilful life, and with your help and counsel, I yield myself to the blessed Lord, to be His for ever, and to serve Him all my days.’

“Then said he, ‘This is a joyful hour! Praise be to the loving Lord, who gladly welcomes all who turn and come to Him!’ And further did he speak to her of God, and she spake freely with him.

“And the playmates she had left, gathered together outside the door, for they were displeased at the long converse that she had with him, and they feared that she would forsake their gay company. Therefore they called to her, and told her to put an end to this talk.

“Then she rose up, and went out to them, and spake to them thus, ‘Dear friends, may God bless you! And now farewell. For I can no more be in the company wherein my time is thrown away upon idle things, for I would belong to God, and I would give up all besides.’

“And from that time, she did as she had told them, for she avoided all company that would draw her away from God. And though they did all they could to draw her back to her old life, it was of no avail, and she was true to the Lord all her days, and lived to His glory.

“And it was after these things, that the servant set out on a journey that he might visit his young daughter, and encourage her in the ways of the Lord, and comfort her if so be he should find her in any trouble. And as he was ill at the time, he was wearied by his long journey on foot, through miry places, and up the steep mountain paths.

“And ever and anon, he would lift his eyes to the living God, and would say, ‘Merciful Lord, remember Thy weary footsteps, when Thou walkedst on this earth for the salvation of men, and strengthen me Thy child.’

“And his comrade upon whom he leant, encouraged him and said, ‘God will of a surety grant to you of His grace and goodness, that many a soul shall be strengthened by you.

“And as he went further, and found at last he could walk no more, for he was spent with weariness, his comrade spake again and said, ‘Dear father, God will surely look upon your great weariness, and send you a little horse to ride on, till you reach the place where your friends are living.’

“Then said the servant, ‘Now do I believe, that if we both ask the Lord to do as thou hast said, He will grant our petition.’

“And thereupon the servant looked around him, and at the right hand there came out of a wood a gentle little horse saddled and harnessed, and it came all alone, no man being near it.

“Then did the comrade shout for joy, and say, ‘See, dear father, see, the Lord will not forsake you!’

“He answered, ‘Look, dear son, all round and round this wide held, to see if there is any man to whom the horse belongs.’

“And the comrade sought far and near, and saw nothing moving but the little horse, which trotted towards them. And he said, ‘Father, truly God has sent it for you. Get upon it and ride.’

“And he answered, ‘Behold, my comrade, if the horse stands still, as soon as it comes up to us, I will take it as a sign from God, that He has sent it for our need.’

“Then the little horse trotted up gently, and stood still before them. And he said to it, ‘Welcome, in the name of the Lord!’ And his comrade helped him up on the horse, and he rode thereon till he was well rested. And as they came nigh to a village, he got off the horse, and tied up the bridle, and let the horse go, and it returned by the way it came. Whose it was, and whence it came, he never could learn from that day to this.

CHAPTER LIX

THE GOSPEL OF THE FRIENDS OF GOD

“To me to live is Christ” — and yet the days
Are days of toiling men;
We rise at morn, and tread the beaten ways,
And lay us down again.

How is it that this base, unsightly life,
Can yet be Christ alone?
Our common need, and weariness and strife,
While common days wear on?

Then saw I how before a Master wise
A shapeless stone was set;
He said, “Therein a form of beauty lies,
Though none behold it yet.

“When all beside it shall be hewn away,
That glorious shape shall stand,
In beauty of the everlasting day,
Of the unsullied land.”

Thus is it with the homely life around,
There hidden Christ abides,
Still by the single eye for ever found,
That seeketh none besides.

When hewn and shaped till Self no more is found,
Self, ended at Thy Cross;
The precious freed from all the vile around,
No gain, but blessed loss;

Then Christ alone remains — the former things
For ever passed away;
And unto Him the heart in gladness sings,
All through the weary day. — HENRY SUSO

THIS little story, related in the words of the original, gives a vivid picture of the mission work of an Evangelist amongst the Friends of God. We must not suppose that no more of the Gospel was preached to the lost, than is here related, for in reading through the history and the writings of Henry Suso, we find that the Blood of Christ was the one only hope which he held out to the lost, as the means of forgiveness, perfect and eternal.

It is true that like many in more enlightened days, he did not see that “the worshipper, *once* purged, has no more conscience of sins.” He speaks of the constant and repeated washing which

needs to be applied to one sin after another, but though he did not see that being once washed, no spot of guilt can ever again be found upon the soul that has believed in Jesus, he directed none to any other fountain for sin and for uncleanness, than that precious Blood alone.

“The holy Blood, once flowing down for sin,” he said, “is that which renders pure and clean every soul who turns to Christ, the Blood shed in unspeakable love, for the comfort and salvation of every sinner who comes to Him. As a little child is bathed and cleansed in a warm bath of water, so is the soul washed from every spot and stain, and made pure and free from guilt by the power of the precious Blood.”

We can therefore be assured that during the long talk in the refectory, the damsel was led to that blessed fountain, and that it was not merely an act of her own will, when she yielded herself up to God.

We can trace too in this story, the golden thread which ran through all the teaching of the Friends of God. It was not, *in the first place*, the thought of the danger and guilt of the unsaved soul, which lay as a weight on the heart of Henry Suso. But it was the thought that the Lord was despised, and wronged, by those whose hearts were given to aught that was less than God.

It was the thought that the love of Christ was rejected, and that it was *His* sheep who was straying upon the dark mountains, and that to find the sheep would bring joy and gladness to Christ and to His angels.

Yet all this while had Henry Suso never dared to think that purgatory, and saint worship, and the mass, were but human inventions, and though in the history of his inner life we find that these things can scarcely be said to have a place, he went through the forms and services of Rome, “in obedience to the Church,” and warned no man against them.

Yet we never find that he taught any man that the cleansing by the precious Blood must come to them through priest or sacraments. He told them to go to Him who died for them, and to none other, for peace and life.

“A man,” he preached, “was once broken down beneath the intolerable burden of his sins. And he had prayed, often and much, but his prayers helped him not. And as he sat in his cell in darkness and sorrow, the Lord spake to him and said, ‘look up and see Me, Jesus who was crucified, and thy burden will fall from thy back.’ And so it was, for his sorrow and his darkness fled away in that swift moment of time. For this darkness and sorrow come from this, that men do not know what is the God with whom they have to do.

“Behold! God is a fountain inexhaustible of mercy and of goodness — so that never was there a mother who would stretch out her hand so quickly to draw forth her own child from the fire, as God stretcheth forth His hand to the sinner who repenteth, were it possible that that man had committed every day a thousand times, all the sins of all men put together.

“O beloved Lord! why art Thou so altogether lovely to many a heart amongst us? Why is it that many an one is now rejoicing in Thee? Is it because of their sinless lives? Nay, truly is it not. But it is because they know how great and grievous is their sin, because they know how unworthy they are of Thee, and yet that Thou, O blessed Lord, hast freely given Thyself to them.

“O Lord, in this is Thy greatness and Thy sweetness, that Thou needest and desirest no righteousness of ours. Thou forgivest as freely the debt of one hundred marks, as the debt of one small penny, and one thousand deadly sins as readily as one. Never, Lord, can we thank Thee as we would. For according to Thy holy Word, it is better for us to be forgiven and saved, than if we had never sinned, for we could not then have loved Thee as we love Thee now.”

“It is to God Himself,” he said further, “that we must go. Not by images, or forms of prayer, taught or read, or dictated. It is only with the innermost heart, with the spirit in us, that we can speak to Him who is a Spirit. Spirit to spirit, heart to heart, as the Lord has said of those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. For God understandeth the speech of the heart, and the desire of the soul. The presence of Mary at His feet told more to Him than the complaining prayers of Martha.

“It is not through images that we can reach up to Him, who is far above and beyond all images and forms. When the living presence of Jesus was taken away from His own, it was not that they were to have Him less, but in a lovelier, in a diviner way — He left them as to His bodily presence — as to the supernatural communion of the soul to Him, He left them not. For when He rose up to heaven before their eyes, He took up there with Him, all their hearts, and all their minds, and all their love.

“So is it with us. He is gone up to heaven, into the bosom of the Father, into the Father’s heart of love, and we ascend up there with Him, with all our hearts, and all our love, and rest where He resteth, in the Father’s heart.

“*There* is there no separation, but one life, one existence, as He is one with the Father. And thus it is that being one with Him we can be as clear, bright mirrors that reflect His glory.

“Thus did S. Paul say, ‘Our conversation is in heaven,’ for it is where God is, brought nigh to Him in Christ our Lord. Not that we are to suppose that there is no difference between the nature of Christ, and the nature of men. He has humanity in common with us, but He has a humanity which distinguishes Him from other men, He is truly a man, but He is a man of a higher order. He is in Himself, God and man. Of Him alone can it be said, that His human nature is absolutely pure, having neither sin, nor the consequences of sin. Therefore it is He alone who could be the redeemer of fallen guilty men.”

CHAPTER LX

THE LABOUR ENDED, THE REST BEGUN

To praise Him in the dance! O glorious day!
The pilgrim journey done —
No more press forward on the weary way,
For all is reached and won!

His Hand at last, the Hand once pierced for me,
For ever holdeth mine —
O Lord, no songs, no harps of heaven will be
Sweet as one word of Thine.

Lord, altogether lovely! then at last
High shall the guerdon be;
Thy kiss outweigh the weary ages past,
Of hearts that brake for Thee.

.....

Yet now I know Thee as the hidden Bread,
The living One, who died —
Who sitteth at my table — by my bed —
Who walketh at my side.

I know Thee as the fountain of deep bliss,
Whereof one drop shall make
The joys of all the world as bitterness,
My Lord, for Thy sweet sake.

Lord, Thou hast loved me; and henceforth to me
Earth's noonday is but gloom;
My soul sails forth on the eternal sea,
And leaves the shore of doom.

I pass within the glory even now,
Where shapes and words are not,
For joy that passeth words, O Lord, art Thou,
A bliss that passeth thought.

I enter there, for Thou hast borne away
The burden of my sin —
With conscience clear as heaven's unclouded day
Thy courts I enter in.

Heaven now for me — for ever Christ and heaven —

The endless *Now* begun —
No *promise* — but a gift eternal *given*,
Because the work is done. — HENRY SUSO

IT came to pass as time went on, that after the pestilence and the earthquakes, there were years of famine and scarcity. And those people who had formerly given bread or wine to the convent, had none to give, and the convent became not only very poor, but fell into debt. Then the monks met together to consult as to what they should do. And they agreed to choose Henry Suso to be their prior. No doubt they knew that by reason of his preaching and his books, he was known far and wide, and had many friends amongst rich people.

He was grieved and distressed that he was to be put into a high place, for he knew that, it would be the beginning of great and fresh troubles to him.

The first day he had the bell rung to assemble the Chapter. Elizabeth tells us, “He exhorted them to call upon the beloved S. Dominic, the founder of their Order, because he had promised with God’s assistance always to come to their help.”

This, however, was very unlike the usual practice of Father Henry, and is contradicted by that which followed, though he probably in some way referred to S. Dominic. For when he had exhorted the monks in few words, two of them, who were sitting close together, looked at one another and smiled, and in mocking wise one of them said to him:

“See what a foolish man we have for a prior, for he tells us to take our need to God. Does he think God will open heaven, and send down meat and drink to supply us every day?”

And the other said in reply, “Not only is he a fool, but we are all fools together, for having chosen him to be our prior, although we knew perfectly well beforehand, that he knows nothing about business or earthly matters, and is always gazing up to heaven.”

And the other monks joined in, with many words of derision.

The next morning as he was standing in the choir, the porter called him out to speak to a rich canon, who was a friend of his. The canon said to him, “Dear sir, you are not a man of business. Last night I was warned by God to give you some help as from Him. I bring you, therefore, twenty pounds of pence of Constance for a beginning. Trust God, for He will never forsake you.” Then was he glad, and took the money, and bought therewith wine and corn. And God helped him thus all the while that he was prior, and made him always able to pay for everything, so that no debts remained.

But on the other hand, much trouble came upon him by means of the canon. For being a very rich man, he gave to Father Henry from time to time, and also on his deathbed, a large sum of money to give to the poor. And in consequence, when he had given it away, many complained bitterly that they had not had their due share. And troubles many and great came upon him, for he was slandered and despised. For many believed he had used the money for dishonest purposes, and he was brought before prelates and magistrates, and unjustly condemned for things of which he was innocent.

But the Lord taught him therein many lessons, and he learnt to comfort those who were in tribulation, with the comfort wherewith he himself was comforted of God.

And he was also able to teach wholesome lessons to many, who because they had no real troubles, made troubles for themselves, making as it were mountains out of molehills.

“There was once,” he said, “a deeply afflicted man who passed by a house, wherein he heard a woman lamenting piteously. And he said to himself, ‘Go in, and comfort that poor creature in her trouble.’

“Therefore he went in and said, ‘Dear woman, what is your sorrow that causes you so much lamentation?’

“She answered, ‘I have dropped my needle, and I cannot find it.’

“Then did he turn away and left the house, and he thought, ‘Thou foolish creature, hadst thou but to bear my burden, thou wouldest not weep over a needle.’ Thus many are truly miserable, who have no true afflictions.

“And others are there, who are pierced with a sword through heart and soul, to see that the Lord is so lovely and so sweet, and yet that there are men on every hand, who see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him.

“Oh could we but in all things let go all else, and cast ourselves simply on God, then should we never be troubled as to the things that befall us, for His will would be ours. It was once shown to a man, how he should thus let go all that was his own. He was made to suppose that far away on the deep sea he was all alone, with nothing under him but his cloak, no land in sight, far or near. What would he do? He could neither call for help, nor swim, nor wade. What then? He must trust himself to God. Let us rejoice when God cuts off from us all means and resources, that we may have nothing left but Himself.”

And here his story ends, for Elizabeth Staglin died before her spiritual father, and in his own books he tells us no more of that which befell him.

His two books, “The Book of the Eternal Wisdom,” and “The Book of Truth,” are in the form of dialogues. The first between the Eternal Wisdom, and His servant. The second between a disciple, and the Truth.

Much that is of the Spirit’s teaching do we find in these books, and we feel in reading them that yet more was taught to the heart of the Lord’s servant, than he was able to express in words. He says himself, “One thing must I give you to know. He who listens to a sweet chord touched by the hand of a musician, knows the sweetness of the music, as he cannot know it who hears another man speak of it, and hears it not himself. And even so is the difference between the words spoken in pure grace by the Lord, the words that come from a living heart, and are spoken by a living mouth, if we compare them with the same words when they are written down upon the dead parchment, and have to be rendered in the German tongue.

“Then are they like roses that have been plucked, and that wither apart from the stem. For it is the sweet tone of the spiritual Voice that reaches and touches the heart, and cannot be written down, and the living words fall dead oftentimes upon hearts that are dead and dry. For never was a harp string of so musical a sound, but that when touched by a dry stick it would be silent and dumb. And the joyless heart can as little understand the joyful tongue, as a German could understand an Italian. And therefore let the man who reads the ‘Book of the Eternal Wisdom’ bear ever in mind, that the stream is not the fountain. And let him go himself to the fountain-head there to learn the glory and the beauty and the sweetness, where alone they are to be found, and where is the presence of the ever-flowing grace, which can make the dead heart alive and glad.”

But strangely, as a sudden discord in the sweet music, do we find in “The Book of the Eternal Wisdom,” several pages of “the worthy praise of the pure Queen of Heaven!” Not the Eternal Wisdom, but Mary, “the Mother of all grace!”

Idolatry so degraded, so blasphemous, and so senseless, that it might well serve as the saddest sample of the fall of the apostate Church.

But so different is it in style and language from the writing of Henry Suso, that it might well be known as from another hand, even before we find the explanation.

It is, we are told, inserted from the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux.

When, and by whom, these pages were inserted we cannot know, though the intention of the copyist was that it should pass as having been done by Suso himself. We recall his words previously mentioned, in which he says that even in his lifetime his books had been strangely altered by scribes and copyists, each one adding thereto, or taking from them, as he deemed best.

And when at his death, his books, as he originally wrote them, were left to the safe keeping of the Dominican monks, and only reproduced long afterwards, "having been collected and revised by the worthy reading-master, Brother Felix Faber," we can only wonder that so much remains which could not have been written by any, but a man taught of God.

We are therefore sure of the authorship of that which a dishonest copyist could never have invented, but admitting that there was still a mass of ignorance and superstition left to cloud the mind of Henry Suso, we can readily believe that the improvements made by the monks were by no means scanty.

It may be remembered how, in the case of Nicholas von Laufen, this practice of altering the original to suit Roman Catholic readers, has been clearly proved. And we may remember, too, that it was the known and admitted practice of those times.

It is perhaps well to have in one book, passages to prove how sharp was the contrast between the teaching of a "Friend of God," and a Roman saint — between the canonized Bernard of Clairvaux, and the despised and persecuted Henry of Constance.

It would seem, however, that Henry Suso did not remain very long the prior of the convent at Constance. Later on we hear of him in a convent at Ulm, and there on the 25th of January, 1365, he died, and was buried in the cloisters. Some name a later year as the time of his death, but the earlier date seems the most probable. His age has been differently stated as sixty-four, seventy, and eighty-six.

The practice which has prevailed in other countries besides Judaea, of honouring the righteous after their death, though despising them till they could no longer bear witness for God, was so far followed in the case of Henry Suso, that his grave was regarded with great reverence, when discovered by accident in the year 1613.

On the other hand, a greater honour fell to the lot of Suso when in the year 1576, the general of the Jesuits, Everard Mercurian, published the following edict: "Also to those of our order is forbidden the reading of the books of certain spiritualistic authors, who even less accord with our views, such as Tauler, Ruysbrock, Henry Suso; and none of their writings may be anywhere allowed in our colleges, except by the will of the Provincial Father."

In conclusion, we may observe that the life of Suso, written by Elizabeth Staglin, and no doubt improved upon later by many even more superstitious than she was, can be regarded only as containing true facts, which we must carefully weed from the legends and fables with which it abounds.

That these foolish legends are rather to be attributed to Elizabeth, than to Henry himself, would seem to be probable, when we consider the following passage from one of his sermons:

“One finds many people who have strange fancies and dreams. They see all kinds of beautiful things, and things to come, in their sleep. They see saints, in this way, or departed spirits. I do not say that such things can never be, for an angel appeared to Joseph in his sleep. On the other hand, I would give no encouragement to such things, for they often arise from natural causes. He whose mind is filled with pure and lovely things, will often dream of such, and fools will dream of folly.

“One finds people also, who have all sorts of visions and revelations, and supposing that, for the space of ten years, such things came from God, yet can the evil one find opportunities to mix himself up with them, and deceive and mislead people.

“In all such revelations, the utmost you can do, is to see whether you have the testimony of Holy Scripture as a confirmation thereof. Put away from you, as you value your own salvation, everything which you cannot find to accord with the Scripture, and with the word of the teachers of the Church.”

This last sentence (the teachers of the Church) explains, alas, many an error and folly into which Suso fell, though, on the other hand, as we know, he thankfully accepted the teaching of the “Friends of God,” in spite of the fact that they were condemned by the priests of his Church.

To him it was, to use his own words, a blessed experience and reality, “Lord, never was a magnet so powerful to draw to itself the hard steel, as Thou, the Lord, lifted up on the cross, art powerful to draw me through joy and sorrow from all that is in the world to Thee and to Thy cross; form me and shape into the image of the suffering Jesus here below, that I may enjoy Thee eternally in the high glory whither Thou art gone.”

And now we take leave for a while of the “Friends of God” of those olden days — soon to meet them again, not in imperfect records, and amongst dark superstitions, and many delusions, but in “the high glory” which shone down into their hearts; in the “light that is love;” to join them in blessed song which is led and attuned by Christ, in which there shall be no discordant note, and when at last all true worshippers gathered in one, shall worship the Father together, in the Spirit and in truth.

And let us ask ourselves, “What manner of people ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness,” in love, in devotedness, in unworldliness, who have not only the same Lord and Saviour, but open Bibles, and Gospel teaching on every hand, and the broad day instead of the dim twilight, and the open door set before us which no man can shut, and the glorious hope so long lost to the Church, held forth before our eyes!

For to us has been given the Morning Star.

And to each who read of the wonderful dealings of God with His beloved saints of old, may the prayer of Henry Suso be fulfilled, “Lord, let me speak Thy praise, as long as a breath is left in my lips, and when my speech is gone, let my finger point to Thee, and end up the praises of my earthly life. And when my body is turned to dust, I beseech Thee, O Lord, that for each grain of dust, some praise may rise to Thee through the hard pavement that lies above; may rise through all the heavens, and that Thou mayest be praised through me, till the day when soul and body are reunited, to praise Thee again together, and for ever more.”