



**The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor
John Tauler with Twenty-Five of his Sermons**

by

Susannah Winkworth

About *The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler with
Twenty-Five of his Sermons* by Susannah Winkworth

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Table of Contents

<i>About This Book</i>	p. ii
Title Page	p. 1
“Tauler” by John Greenleaf Whittier	p. 2
Table of Contents	p. 5
Translator’s Preface	p. 9
Preface to the Original Edition	p. 13
The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler	p. 20
First Chapter	p. 20
Second Chapter	p. 20
Third Chapter	p. 23
Fourth Chapter	p. 25
Fifth Chapter	p. 27
Sixth Chapter	p. 29
Seventh Chapter	p. 31
Eighth Chapter	p. 33
Ninth Chapter	p. 35
Tenth Chapter	p. 37
Eleventh Chapter	p. 40
Fourteenth Chapter	p. 41
Introductory Notice Respecting Tauler’s Life and Times	p. 44
Sermons of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler	p. 86
I. Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent	p. 86
II. Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent	p. 89
III. Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent	p. 91
IV. Sermon for Christmas Day	p. 95
V. Sermon for Epiphany	p. 99
VI. Second Sermon for Epiphany	p. 101
VII. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany	p. 104
VIII. Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany	p. 109
IX. Sermon for Septuagesima Sunday	p. 110
X. Sermon for Ash Wednesday	p. 116
XI. Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent	p. 120
XII. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent	p. 125
XIII. Sermon for Palm Sunday	p. 127
XIV. Sermon for Thursday in Easter Week	p. 131

XV. Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter.	p. 133
XVI. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter.	p. 136
XVII. Second Sermon for Fourth Sunday after Easter.	p. 139
XVIII. Sermon for Ascension Day.	p. 141
XIX. Sermon for Whit Sunday.	p. 144
XX. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity.	p. 150
XXI. Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity.	p. 154
XXII. Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.	p. 157
XXIII. Second Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.	p. 159
XXIV. Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity.	p. 162
XXV. Sermon for St. Stephen's Day.	p. 166
XXVI. Sermon for St. Peter's Day.	p. 172
XXVII. Sermon on a Martyr's Day.	p. 174
Indexes.	p. 179
Index of Scripture References.	p. 179
Index of Scripture Commentary.	p. 179
Index of Pages of the Print Edition.	p. 180



THE HISTORY AND LIFE
OF THE
REVEREND
DOCTOR JOHN TAULER
WITH
TWENTY-FIVE OF HIS SERMONS

*Translated from the German, with Additional
Notices of Tauler's Life and Times, by*

SUSANNAH WINKWORTH
Translator of "Theologia Germanica"

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[1905?]



Tauler

By

John Greenleaf Whittier

TAULER, the preacher, walked, one autumn day,
 Without the walls of Strasburg, by the Rhine,
 Pondering the solemn Miracle of Life;
 As one who, wandering in a starless night,
 Feels, momentarily, the jar of unseen waves,
 And hears the thunder of an unknown sea,
 Breaking along an unimagined shore.

And as he walked he prayed. Even the same
 Old prayer with which, for half-a-score of years,
 Morning, and noon, and evening, lip and heart
 Had groaned: "Have pity upon me, Lord!
 Thou seest, while teaching others, I am blind.
 Send me a man who can direct my steps!"

Then, as he mused, he heard along his path
 A sound as of an old man's staff among
 The dry, dead linden-leaves; and, looking up,
 He saw a stranger, weak, and poor, and old.
 "Peace be unto thee, father!" Tauler said,
 "God give thee a good day!" The old man raised
 Slowly his calm blue eyes." I thank thee, son;
 But *all* my days are good, and none are ill."
 Wondering thereat, the preacher spake again,
 "God give thee happy life." The old man smiled,
 "I never am unhappy."



Tauler laid
 His hand upon the stranger's coarse grey sleeve:
 "Tell me, O father, what thy strange words mean.
 Surely man's days are evil, and his life
 Sad as the grave it leads to." "Nay, my son,
 Our times are in God's hands, and all our days
 Are as our needs: for shadow as for sun,
 For cold as heat, for want as wealth, alike
 Our thanks are due, since that is best which is;
 And that which is not, sharing not his life,
 Is evil only as devoid of good.

And for the happiness of which I spake,
I find it in submission to His will,
And calm trust in the Holy Trinity
Of Knowledge, Goodness, and Almighty Power.”

Silently wondering, for a little space,
Stood the great preacher; then he spoke as one
Who suddenly grappling with a haunting thought
Which long has followed, whispering through the dark
Strange terrors, drags it, shrieking, into light:
“What if God’s will consign thee hence to Hell?”

“Then,” said the stranger cheerily, “be it so.
What Hell may be I know not; this I know—
I cannot lose the presence of the Lord:
One arm, Humility, takes hold upon His dear
Humanity; the other, Love,
Clasps His Divinity. So where I go,
He goes; and better fire-walled Hell with Him
Than golden-gated Paradise without.”



Tears sprang in Tauler’s eyes; a sudden light,
Like the first ray which fell on chaos, clove
Apart the shadow wherein he had walked
Darkly at noon. And, as the strange old man
Went his slow way, until his silver hair
Set like the white moon where the hills of vine
Slope to the Rhine, he bowed his head and said—
“My prayer is answered. God hath sent the man
Long sought, to teach me, by his simple trust,
Wisdom the weary schoolmen never knew.”

So, entering with a changed and cheerful step
The city gates, he saw, far down the street,
A mighty shadow break the light of noon,
Which tracing backward till its airy lines
Hardened to stony plinths, he raised his eyes
O’er broad façade and lofty pediment,
O’er architrave, and frieze, and sainted niche,
Up the stone lace-work chiselled by the wise
Erwin of Steinbach, dizzily up to where
In the noon-brightness the great Minster’s tower,
Jewelled with sunbeams on its mural crown,
Rose like a visible prayer. “Behold!” he said,
“The stranger’s faith made plain before mine eyes.
As yonder tower outstretches to the earth

The dark triangle of its shade alone
When the clear day is shining on its top,
So darkness in the pathway of Man's life
Is but the shadow of God's providence,
By the great Sun of Wisdom cast thereon;
And what is dark below is light in Heaven."





Table of Contents

PART I

Translator's Preface

Preface by the Rev. Charles Kingsley

The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler

Introductory Notice respecting Tauler's Life and Times, by the Translator

PART II

SERMON

- I. Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent
How that we are called upon to arise from our sins, and to conquer our foes, looking for the glorious coming of our Lord in our souls.
- II. Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent
How that God is very near to us, and how we must seek and find the Kingdom of God within us, without respect to time and place.
- III. Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent
How that we must wholly come out from ourselves, that we may go into the wilderness and behold God.
- IV. Sermon for Christmas Day
Of the things by which we become children of God.
- V. Sermon for Epiphany
This Sermon on the Gospel for the day, from St. Matthew, showeth how God, of His great faithfulness, hath foreseen and ordained all sufferings for the eternal good of each man, in whatever wise they befall us, and whether they be great or small.
- VI. Second Sermon for Epiphany
Showeth on what wise a man shall arise from himself and from all creatures, to the end that God may find the ground of his soul prepared, and may begin and perfect His work therein.
- VII. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany



Of the great wonders which God has wrought, and still works for us Christian men; wherefore it is just and reasonable that we should turn unto Him and follow Him, and whereby we may discern between true and false conversion.

VIII. Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Of the proper marks of true humility.

IX. Sermon for Septuagesima Sunday

In this Sermon following we are taught how we must perpetually press forward towards our highest good, without pause or rest; and how we must labour in the spiritual vineyard that it may bring forth good fruit.

X. Sermon for Ash Wednesday

An Exposition of the three crosses, that of Christ, that of the malefactor on His left, and that of the malefactor on His right hand, how they are a type of the sufferings of three classes of men who are, in a spiritual sense, nailed to these three crosses.

XI. Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

Tells us how God drives forward some of His children by the struggle between the inward and outward man.

XII. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Of the power of the Word of God, of fiery desires, and the essence of self-renunciation.

XIII. Sermon for Palm Sunday

How a man ought in all His works to regard God alone, and purely to make Him his end without anything of his own, and shall freely and simply perform all these works for the glory of God only, and not seek his own, nor desire nor expect any reward. Wherewith he may do such works without any self-appropriation or reference to time and number, before or after, and without modes. How the Divine Word speaks and reveals itself in the soul, all in a lofty and subtile sense.

- XIV. Sermon for Thursday in Easter Week
How we ought to love God, and how Christ is a Master of the Eternal Good, wherefore we ought to love Him above all things; a Master of the Highest Truth, wherefore we ought to contemplate Him; and a Master of the Highest Perfectness, wherefore we ought to follow after Him without let or hindrance.
- XV. Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter
How we are to ascend by three stages to true peace and purity of heart.
- XVI Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter
How the Holy Ghost rebukes the World in man for sin, righteousness, and judgment; how hurtful it is to judge one's neighbour; after what fashion a pious man may rebuke his neighbour; further, what the Holy Ghost teacheth when he cometh to us.
- XVI Second Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter
Of three hindrances which resist the coming of the Holy Ghost in three classes of men.
- XVI Sermon for Ascension Day
This third sermon on the Ascension tells us how man ought continually to follow after Christ, as He has walked before us for three and thirty years, passing through manifold and great sufferings, before He returned unto His Father.
- XIX Sermon for Whit Sunday
How God drew the Apostles unto Christ by six degrees until they attained unto union with Himself, and so likewise draweth His friends unto Himself now.
- XX. Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity
This sermon telleth us of four measures that shall be rendered unto man, and of two grades of a godly life, and how we ought to love our neighbour.



XXI

Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity

Admonishing each man to mark what is the office to which he is called of God, and teaching us to practise works of love and virtue, and to refrain from self-will.

XXI

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Teaching us that we ought to receive God, in all His gifts, and in all His burdens, with true long-suffering.

XXI

Second Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

This sermon tells us how a man who truly loves God, whose ears have been opened to receive the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Spirit, is neither lifted up in joy nor cast down in sorrow.

XXV

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

This sermon forbiddeth all carefulness, and telleth in what righteousness consisteth, and rebukes sundry religious people and their works, likening their ways to simony.

XXV

Sermon for St. Stephen's Day

Of three grades of those who learn to die unto themselves, like a corn of wheat, that they may bring forth fruit; or of those who are beginners, those who are advancing, and those who art perfect in a Divine life.

XXVI

Sermon for St. Peter's Day

Of brotherly rebuke and admonition, how far it is advisable and seemly or not, and especially how prelates and governors ought to demean themselves towards their subjects.

XXVI

Sermon on a Martyr's Day

Of three sorts of spiritual temptation by which holy men are secretly assailed; to wit: spiritual unchastity, covetousness, and pride.



Translator's Preface

IN publishing a selection from the writings of a divine who nourished in an age and under social conditions so remote from our own as those of a German Dominican monk of the fourteenth century, it seems right to state at the outset whether the aim which has governed the selection is chiefly historical or devotional. The present work was undertaken, in the first instance, with a simply practical object. My earliest acquaintance with Tauler's Sermons was made while hearing them read in a family service; and believing, from further study, that they contained elements of truth not often brought into sufficient prominence in these days, yet possessing a most direct and valuable influence on Christian life, I wished to compile a volume of sermons for the Sundays and Holydays of the year, such as any head of a family might read to his household, or any district visitor among the poor.



To have carried out this idea completely would, however, have involved the omission, in many of the sermons, of passages either too abstruse for easy comprehension, or too much imbued with references to the Romish ritual and discipline, to be suitable for the Protestant common people. But such a mutilation seemed to me scarcely honest in the case of a writer now to be presented for the first time in a foreign language, and it appeared better therefore to reconcile historical truthfulness with practical usefulness, by restricting the selection, but giving all the sermons included in it in their complete form. Had it been my object merely to present an interesting picture of a remarkable man, the selection would possibly have been somewhat different,—certainly much wider. As it is, I have chosen the practical rather than the more metaphysical sermons, and have included none which seemed to me, in my conscientious judgment, open to objections as to their moral tendency.



Among such I should reckon some tinctured with an asceticism throwing contempt on the affections of ordinary life. Of the *duties* of ordinary life Tauler never speaks disparagingly. When he says that the inward work in the soul is more than all outward good works, it is always the outward practices of religion of which he is speaking—attendance in church, fasting, the repeating of prayers, &c.; never of the exercise of active benevolence, or even the performance of minor household duties. It is one good feature of the school to which he belonged, that these things are restored to their due honour, so far as that is compatible with the whole system of conventual life. But Tauler does teach that repression of the natural *affections* which is inevitable so long as the vital idea of monasticism,—viz., the severance of the religious from the secular in life,—is retained. That this severance is false and mischievous, Tauler no more perceived than did the whole body of his contemporaries; but while we have no right to censure him for errors which he shared with all the men of his age (and which he often divested for his own hearers of much of their baneful influence), it is equally unnecessary to place such doctrine before people at the present time. So, too, the sermons on the Mass and on the Virgin Mary, while containing many excellent practical remarks, are of course based on beliefs that would render them unprofitable to the great multitude of English Protestants nowadays, and I did not deem it needful to insert them merely for the sake of presenting a full view of all that Tauler believed or taught. But neither did it seem essential to practical usefulness to eliminate from sermons whose general scope is rich in Christian instruction, all such passages as might contain passing allusions to purgatory, transubstantiation, the invocation of saints, &c.; mystical and figurative interpretations of Scripture, or questionable philosophical

speculations, in order that nothing might be left but what Protestant Christians at the present day actually believe. For private reading it is the less necessary, as it is often curious and instructive to observe how Tauler, in many cases, supplies the practical antidote to the hurtful effects of a Romish doctrine without in the least seeing through the doctrine itself; while, should these sermons be used, as I earnestly wish they may be, for family reading, it will be very easy to omit anything which it might be undesirable to read to uneducated persons.

With regard to those not included, the greater number have been rejected simply because many of their ideas occurred in the sermons which I have chosen, and I was anxious to avoid repetition; and among these many were so good as to render the task of selection very difficult. A very small proportion have been omitted on account of their Romish doctrine; more because of their obscure mysticism, and a few because they contained figures that would sound coarse, or at least grotesque and unsuitable for the pulpit, to our modern ears. I believe that those I have given may be regarded, from the absence of omissions, and the variety of their scope, as furnishing, on the whole, a correct picture of the mind and faith of their author.

The edition of Tauler's Sermons which I have used for my Translation is that published at Frankfort in 1826. Among the numerous ancient and modern editions of these Sermons, that published at Leipsic, in 1498, holds the highest rank as an authority; but of this, now very rare work, it has not been in my power to consult a copy; and of the later editions that of Frankfort is the best. It is based upon an edition published at Cologne in 1543, and contains one hundred and fifty-three sermons; only eighty-four of these, however, are to be found in the MSS. now extant. Many of the MSS. have, indeed, only portions of these eighty-four; but the best and oldest are also the most complete. They are two which are in the Strasburg Library, and are most probably contemporary with Tauler himself,—certainly not of much later origin. The oldest printed edition, too, that of Leipsic, in 1498, has only these eighty-four sermons. These are, therefore, all of whose genuineness we have distinct certainty from external evidence. In an edition, however, which Johann Rynmann published at Basle in 1521 (probably induced to do so by Luther's republication of the *Theologia Germanica*, in 1517, and his recommendation of Tauler's writings to his friends¹), forty-two more sermons are added with the preface: "Here followeth the second part of the sermons of the said John Tauler, which have been more recently discovered, and collected with great care and diligence. Although there may be a doubt about some of them, let not that offend thee; for it is certain that they have been written by a right learned man of his age, and are all based on one foundation, namely, true self-surrender and the preparation of the spirit for God."

There can be no doubt that several of these are not productions of Tauler; and Surius, in his Latin Edition of 1548, appends the names of the authors Eckart, Suso, Ruysbroek, in several instances where he had ascertained them,—in which the Frankfort Editor follows his example.² The styles of Eckart and Suso are, indeed, very distinguishable from Tauler's. That of Ruysbroek seems to me less so. Finally, the Cologne Edition of 1543, which has been the basis of all the later

¹ Thus he writes to Spalatin in Dec. 1516: "Si te delectat puram, solidam, antiquæ" simillimam theologiam legere, in Germanica lingua effusam; Sermones Johannis Tauleri, prædicatoriæ professionis, tibi comparare potes, cujus totius velut epitomen ecce hic tibi mitto. Neque enim vel in Latina, vel in nostra lingua theologiam vidi salubriorem et cum Evangelio consonantiorem. Gusta ergo et vide, quam suavis est Dominus, ubi prius gustaris, et videbis quam amarus est, quicquid nos sumus."—De Wette, *Martin Luther's Briefe, &c.* Band i. Berlin, 1825.

² It is to the Preface of the Frankfort Editor that I am indebted for these particulars respecting the different editions of Tauler's Sermons.

20 editions of Tauler's Sermons, adds twenty-five more, and among these, too, some by the authors already named have crept in. Still, I cannot see any reason to question the statement of the Editor, Petrus Noviomagus, who says:—"Having made research in all directions, that I might obtain the most correctly-copied mss., I have at last, in 1542, found in the library of St. Gertrude's, at Cologne (where the said Doctor had his abode, and was wont to preach God's word), and also in some other places, old written books, in which many excellent, nay, some of the best of Tauler's Sermons stand clearly written, which have not yet been printed or made public."

Tauler did not himself write down his discourses, but they were compiled from notes taken by his hearers, which accounts at once for the fragmentary character of the style, and for the great number of various readings to be found in the different editions. It is important to bear this circumstance in mind in judging of the style of the following sermons. It seems highly probable that the eighty-four sermons contained in the Strasburg mss. were published during his life and received his own corrections; but there appear no adequate grounds for supposing that these eighty-four are the only genuine ones we possess; for in the numerous places where Tauler preached, many of his sermons would probably be taken down by single hearers, which in those times of rare and difficult communication, were never brought under the notice of the Strasburg Collector, but, as his fame spread in after years, came to be gradually put into the hands of later collectors by their possessors, as seems to have been the case with those of which Petrus Noviomagus speaks.

21 The Frankfort Edition has not, however, been the sole source of the following translation; for with great generosity, for which I beg to tender him my warmest thanks, Professor Schmidt of Strasburg, has placed at my disposal a transcript made by himself from the most ancient manuscript extant, by which I have corrected those of the following collection, which belong to the first eighty-four. In a very few passages only have I retained the version of the Frankfort Edition, where the sense was so evidently clearer and fuller as to indicate a high probability that the later collector had had the opportunity of consulting fuller notes than his more ancient predecessor. This, however, is very rarely the case; in general the oldest version is so much the best as to give great force to the supposition generally entertained that it had been corrected by the author himself. Of the following collection Nos. 5, 6, 9, 11, 16, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, may be thus said to be, in effect, translated from the Strasburg ms. The Frankfort Editor gives the sources from which he has taken his version of the sermons, and upon this authority I may mention that Nos. 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 17, 25, 26, 27, are from the Appendix to the Basle Edition of 1521; and Nos. 1, 2, 12, 15, 19, from that of the Cologne Edition of 1543. The sermon No. 2, is marked as Eckart's in the Frankfort Edition, and No. 4 as most probably the production of a disciple of his, commonly called Eckart, junior. It is, however, somewhat doubtful whether the two Eckarts were not in truth one and the same. The Cologne Editor expresses the wish that "God would anoint some man enlightened by the Holy Ghost to render this precious treasure into Latin for the comfort of many who desire it;" and this wish was fulfilled in 1543, by the Carthusian, Laurentius Surius, the translator also of the works of Suso and Ruysbroek.

22 The principal sources from which my sketch of Tauler and the "Friends of God" has been derived, are furnished by Professor Schmidt of Strasburg, in his *Johannes Tauler von Strasburg*; his essay on *Eckart* in the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, 1839, p. 684; and his work, *Die Gottesfreunde im Vierzehnten Jahrhundert*, Jena, 1855. I have, however, also to acknowledge my obligations to Wackernagel's essay on the *Gottesfreunde* in the *Beitraege zur Vaterlaendischen*

Geschichte (Basle, 1843, B. ii. s. III); to Neander's *Kirchengeschichte*; Hase's *Kirchengeschichte*; Milman's *Latin Christianity*, &c.

Any one acquainted with the admirable Essays of Professor Schmidt, above-named, will perceive how largely I am indebted to him for the facts of Tauler's life, and the account of Eckart; but will also observe that my theory of them is, in some points, very different from that of M. Schmidt. For my notices of the *Gottesfreunde*, his recent work has furnished the whole of the facts; but, again, it is only fair to state that for the light in which I regard these facts, I am alone responsible.



Preface
to original edition
by
Charles Kingsley

IT is with great diffidence that I have undertaken to furnish a preface to these Sermons. It must always be an invidious task to stand toward a far wiser and better man than one's self in a relation which is likely, at every moment, to be mistaken either for that of a critic or that of a commentator.

The critic of Tauler, no man has a right to become, who has not first ascertained that he is a better man than Tauler.

The commentator of Tauler, no man has a right to become, who has a strong belief (as I have) that Tauler's Sermons need no comment whatsoever: but that all which is good and eternal in them will recommend itself at once to those hearts, let their form of doctrine be what it may, who have hold of, or are seeking after, Eternal Goodness.

The historical and biographical information which may be necessary for a right understanding of the man and his times, will be found in the Life and the Introductory Notice which are appended to the Sermons; while any notions of mine as to the genesis of Tauler's views, as to how much of them he owed to divines, how much to his own vital experiences, are likely to be equally unsafe and uninteresting. The English churchman of the present day, enjoying a form of doctrine far more correct than that of any other communion, and resting on the sound dogma that nothing is to be believed as necessary to salvation but what can be proved by Scripture, has (whether rightly or wrongly, I do not here ask) become so satisfied with the good fruit, as to think little of the tree which bore it. The Church controversies, and the metaphysical inquiries, by which, after many mistakes, and long struggles, that form of doctrine was elicited from Scripture, are to him shadows of the past, and "Schoolmen's questions." The element in the ancient worthies of the Church which is most interesting to him is their human sorrows, temptations, triumphs, with which, as having happened in men of like passions with ourselves, we still can sympathise. We cannot, however, now understand how strong and generally just an influence those private and personal experiences had, in forming the opinions of the old worthies upon Scriptural doctrines, which we have been taught from childhood to find in Scripture, and are therefore astonished, if not indignant, that every one in every age did not find them there at first sight.

Thus, standing upon the accumulated labours of ages, we are apt to be ungrateful to those who built up with weary labour, and often working through dark and dreary nights, the platform which now supports us. We complain impatiently of the blindness of many a man, without whom we should not have seen; and of the incompleteness of many a man whose doctrine was only incomplete because he was still engaged in searching for some truth, which, when found, he handed on as a precious heirloom to us who know him not.

For the many, therefore, it will be altogether uninteresting for me to enter into any speculation as to the spiritual pedigree of Tauler's views. How far Philo-Judæus and the Brahmins may have



influenced the Pseudo-Dionysius; how far the Pseudo-Dionysius may have influenced John Erigena; how far that wondrous Irishman may have influenced Master Eckart; how far that vast and subtle thinker, claimed by some as the founder of German philosophy, may have influenced Tauler himself, are questions for which the many will care little; which would require to be discussed in a large volume, ere the question could not merely be exhausted, but made intelligible. Such matters may well be left for learned and large-minded men, to whom the development of Christian doctrine (both in the true and the false sense of that word) is a scientific study.

But let me express a hope, that such men will turn their attention more and more, not merely to the works of Tauler, but to those of his companions, and to that whole movement of the fourteenth century, of which Tauler is the most popular and easily accessible type, as to a most interesting and instructive page in the book of Christian, and indeed of human, thought. I say human; for it will be impossible for them to examine the works of such men as Erigena, Tauler, Eckart, and Ruysbroek, any more than those of the later mystics, whether Romish or Protestant, without finding that their speculations, whether right or wrong in any given detail, go down to the very deepest and most universal grounds of theology and of metaphysics; and howsoever distinctly Christian they may be, are connected with thoughts which have exercised men of every race which has left behind it more than mere mounds of earth. They will find in the Greek, the Persian, and the Hindoo; in the Buddhist and in Mohammedan Sufi, the same craving after the Absolute and the Eternal, the same attempt to express in words that union between man and God, which transcends all words. On making that discovery, if they have not already made it, two courses will be open to them. They can either reject the whole of such thoughts as worthless, assuming that anything which Christianity has in common with heathendom must be an adulteration and an interpolation; or, when they see such thoughts bubbling up, as it were spontaneously, among men divided utterly from each other by race, age, and creed, they can conclude that those thoughts must be a normal product of the human spirit, and that they indicate a healthy craving after some real object; they can rise to a tender and deeper sympathy with the aspirations and mistakes of men who sought in great darkness for a ray of light, and did not seek in vain; and can give fresh glory to the doctrines of the Catholic Church when they see them fulfilling those aspirations, and correcting those mistakes; and in this case, as in others, satisfying the desire of all nations, by proclaiming Him by whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist, who is The Light and The Life of men, shining for ever in the darkness, uncomprehended, yet unquenched.

There is another class of readers worthy of all respect, who may be dissatisfied, if not startled, by many passages in these sermons. Men well skilled in the terminology of the popular religion, and from long experience, well acquainted with its value, are apt to be jealous when they find a preacher handling the highest matters, and yet omitting to use concerning them the formulæ in which they are now commonly expressed. Such men I would entreat to have patience with, and charity for, a man whose character they must so heartily admire. Let them remember that many of our own formulæ are not to be found verbatim in Holy Writ, but have been gradually extracted from it by processes of induction or of deduction; and let them allow to Tauler, as far as is consistent with orthodoxy, Christian liberty to find likewise what he can in that Scripture, which he reveres as deeply as they do. Let them consider also, that most of those expressions of his which are most strange to our modern pulpits, are strictly Scriptural, and to be found in the Sacred Text; and that no man can be blamed at first sight for understanding such expressions literally, and for shrinking from reducing them to metaphors. God has ordained that the Pauline aspect of Christianity, and

the Pauline nomenclature, should for the last three hundred years at least, mould almost exclusively the thoughts of His church: but we must not forget, that St. John's thoughts, and St. John's words, are equally inspired with those of St. Paul; and that not we, but Tauler, are the fit judges as to whether St. Paul's language, or St. John's, was most fit to touch the German heart in the dark and hideous times of the Fourteenth Century. The important question is—Did Tauler, under whatsoever language, really hold in spirit and in truth the vital doctrines of the Gospel? That can only be ascertained by a fair and charitable induction, and of the result of such an induction I have little fear.

28

Some again, whose opinions will be entitled to the very highest respect, will be pained at the fantastic and arbitrary method (if method it can be called) in which Tauler uses Scripture to illustrate his opinions. Let them remember, that this was not a peculiarity of the man, but of his age; that for various reasons, a simple, literal, and historic method of interpretation (which doubtless is at the same time the most spiritual) was then in its infancy; that it is by no means perfect yet; and that it is quite possible that our great grandchildren may be as much surprised at our use of many a text, as we are at Tauler's.

But there are those—and thanks to Almighty God they are to be numbered by tens of thousands—who will not perplex themselves with any such questionings; simple and genial hearts, who try to do what good they can in the world, and meddle not with matters too high for them; persons whose religion is not abstruse, but deep; not noisy, but intense; not aggressive, but laboriously useful; people who have the same habit of mind as the early Christians seem to have worn, ere yet Catholic truth had been defined in formulæ; when the Apostles' creed was symbol enough for the Church, and men were orthodox in heart, rather than exact in head. For such it is enough if a fellow-creature loves Him whom they love, and serves Him whom they serve. Personal affection and loyalty to the same unseen Being is to them a communion of saints both real and actual, in the genial warmth of which all minor differences of opinion vanish, and a truly divine liberality enables them to believe with St. John, that "Thereby know ye the spirit of God; every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is born of God."

29

To such these sermons, should be, and I doubt not will be, welcome. If they find words in them which they do not understand, even words from which at first sight they differ, they will let them pass them by for awhile, in charity and patience. Seeing (as they will see at the first glance) that John Tauler was one of themselves, they will judge of what they do not understand by what they do, and give him credit for sense and righteousness, where their own intellects fail to follow him.

Especially too, if they be distracted and disheartened (as such are wont to be) by the sin and confusion of the world; by the amount of God's work which still remains undone, and by their own seeming incapacity to do it, they will take heart from the history of John Tauler and his fellows, who, in far darker and more confused time than the present, found a work to do, and strength to do it; who, the more they retired into the recesses of their own inner life, found there that fully to know themselves was to know all men, and to have a message for all men; and who, by their unceasing labours of love, proved that the highest spiritual attainments, instead of shutting a man up in lazy and Pharisaic self-contemplation, drive him forth to work as his Master worked before him, among the poor, the suffering, and the fallen.

30

Let such take heart, and toil on in faith at the duty which lies nearest to them. Five hundred years have passed since Tauler and his fellows did their simple work, and looked for no fruit from it, but the saving of one here and there from the nether pit. That was enough for which to labour:

but without knowing it, they did more than that. Their work lives, and will live for ever, though in forms from which they would have perhaps shrunk had they foreseen them. Let all such therefore take heart. They may know their own weakness: but they know not the power of God in them. They may think sadly that they are only palliating the outward symptoms of social and moral disease: but God may be striking, by some unconscious chance blow of theirs, at a root of evil which they never suspected. They may mourn over the failure of some seemingly useful plan of their own: but God may be, by their influence, sowing the seed of some plan of His own, of which they little dream. For every good deed comes from God. His is the idea, His the inspiration, and His its fulfilment in time; and therefore no good deed but lives and grows with the everlasting life of God Himself. And as the acorn, because God has given it “a forming form,” and life after its kind, bears within it, not only the builder oak, but shade for many a herd, food for countless animals, and at last, the gallant ship itself, and the materials of every use to which nature or art can put it and its descendants after it throughout all time; so does every good deed contain within itself endless and unexpected possibilities of other good, which may and will grow and multiply for ever, in the genial Light of Him whose eternal Mind conceived it, and whose eternal Spirit will for ever quicken it, with that Life of which He is the Giver and the Lord.

31

There is another class of readers, to whom I expect these sermons to be at once very attractive and very valuable; a class of whom I speak with extreme diffidence, having never had their experiences; and of whom I should not have spoken at all, were they not just now as much depreciated, as they were in past centuries rated too highly; I mean those who are commonly called “Mystics.” Doubtless, they are paying a penalty for that extravagant adoration which was bestowed of old upon the “Saint.” Mankind has discovered that much of what once, in such persons, seemed most divine, was most painfully human; that much of what seemed most supernatural, was but too degradingly natural, the consequences of diseased brain, deranged nervous system, or weakness brought on by voluntary asceticism; and so mankind, angry with its idols for having a flaw anywhere, has dashed them peevishly to the ground. Would it not have been better to give up making idols of such persons, and to have examined patiently, charitably, and philosophically what they really were, and what they were not? By so doing, I believe, men would have found that in these mystics and saints, after all bodily illusions, all nervous fantasies, all pardonable “confusions between the object and the subject,” had been eliminated, there still remained, in each and every one of them, and not to be explained away by any theory of diseased body or mind, one of the very loveliest and noblest human characters; and on that discovery the question must have followed,—Was that, too, the product of disease? And to that there can be, I trust, but one answer from the many. If here and there a man shall be found daring enough to assert that the most exquisite developments of humanity are grounded on a lie; that its seemingly loveliest flowers are but fungi bred of corruption; then the general heart of mankind will give their cynicism the lie, and answer, “Not so! this is too beautiful and too righteous to have been born of aught but God.”

32

And when they found these persons, whatsoever might be their “denomination,” all inclined to claim some illumination, intuition, or direct vision of Eternal truth, Eternal good, Eternal beauty, even of that Eternal Father in whom all live and move and have their being; yet making that claim in deepest humility, amid confessions of their own weakness, sinfulness, nothingness, which to the self-satisfied many seem exaggerated and all but insincere; they would have been, perhaps, more philosophical, as well as more charitable; more in accordance with Baconian induction, as well as with Saint Paul’s direct assertions in his Epistles to the Corinthians, if they had said: “The testimony

of so many isolated persons to this fact is on the whole a fair probability for its truth; and we are inclined to believe it, though it transcends our experience, on the same ground that we believe the united testimony of travellers to a hundred natural wonders, which differ as utterly from anything which we ever saw, as do these spiritual wonders from anything which we have ever felt.”

33 And, if men are willing (as they may be hereafter) patiently to examine the facts still further, they may possibly find, in the very circumstances which now make them scornfully incredulous of “mystic raptures,” a moral justification of their reality.

It will be found that these “mystics” are, in almost every case, persons who are suffering; perhaps disappointed, perhaps lonely, perhaps unhealthy, perhaps all three at once, bereaved of all social comfort, and tortured with disease.

34 It is easy enough to say that such persons are especially liable to melancholic delusions, liable to mistake the action of their diseased nerves for external apparitions and voices; liable, from weakness of brain, and the too intense self-introspection which disease often brings with it, to invest trifling accidents with an undue importance, and to regard them as supernatural monitions. Be it so. Mystics in all ages have not been unaware of their own dangers, their own liability to mistakes; and have tried to distinguish, by such canons as their age afforded them, the false from the true, the fleshly from the spiritual. But meanwhile, has this hypothesis no moral justice, and therefore moral probability (which must always depend on the amount of moral justice involved in any given hypothesis),—namely, the hypothesis that to these lonely sufferers more was granted than to the many, because they needed more? that some direct and inward “beatific vision” of God was allowed to them, because they had no opportunity of gaining any indirect and outward one from a smiling world, seen in the light of a joyful heart? There are those who have health and strength, health and beauty, wife and child; a past which it is pleasant to remember, and a future which it is pleasant to work out. Such find no difficulty in saying that God is Love; that God cares for them, and His mercy is over all his works. But if they had lain, and lain perhaps from childhood, in the lowest deep, in the place of darkness, and of storm, while lover and friend were hid away from them, and they sat upon the parching rock, like Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, beside the corpses of their dead sons, dead hopes, dead health, dead love, as on a ghastly battlefield, stript among the dead, like those who are wounded, and cut away from God’s hand; if they had struggled in the horrible mire of perplexity, and felt all God’s billows and waves go over them, till they were weary of crying, and their throats were dry, and their sight failed them with watching so long for their God, and all the faith and prayer which was left them was: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither suffer Thy holy one to see corruption”—If all this—or less than this had come upon them; then they might have felt it not altogether so easy to say that God is Love. They, too, might have longed for some inward proof, some token which transcends all argument, that though they go down to hell, God is there; that in their most utter doubt and darkness, and desolation, all is well; for they dwell in God, and God in them. They might have longed for it: and God might have been just and merciful in giving it to them; as He may have been in giving it already to thousands, who by no other means could have been able to face the fearful storm of circumstances, which seemed to proclaim the Devil, and not God, the master of the world. Why not let the mystics tell their own story? It is more philosophical, after all, perhaps, as well as more Scriptural, to believe that “wisdom is justified of all her children.”

35 As for the impossibility of such a direct assurance, it is an assertion too silly to be seriously answered in the nineteenth century, which is revealing weekly wonders in the natural world, which

would have seemed impossible to our fathers. Shall the natural world, at every great step, transcend our boldest dreams: and shall the spiritual world be limited by us to the merest commonplaces of everyday experience, especially when those very commonplaces are yet utterly unexplained and miraculous? When will men open their eyes to the plain axiom, that nothing is impossible with God, save that He should transgress His own nature by being unjust and unloving?

But whether or not the popular religion shall justify and satisfy the aspirations of the mystics, Tauler's sermons will do so. They will find there the same spiritual food which they have found already in St. Bernard, a Kempis, and Madame Guyon; and find there also, perhaps more clearly than in any mystic writer, a safeguard against the dangers which specially beset them; against the danger of mistaking their passing emotions for real and abiding love of good; against exalting any peculiar intuition which they may think they have attained, into a source of self-glorification, and fancying that they become something, by the act of confessing themselves nothing. For with Tauler, whether he be right or wrong in any given detail, practical righteousness, of the divinest and loftiest kind, is at once the object, and the means, and the test, of all upward steps. God is the Supreme Good which man is intended to behold: but only by being inspired by Him, owing all to Him, and copying Him, can he behold Him, and in that sight find his highest reward, and heaven itself.

But there are those oppressed by doubts, and fears, and sorrows, very different from those of which I have just spoken, who may find in Tauler's genial and funny pages a light which will stand them in good stead in many an hour of darkness. There are those, heaped beyond desert with every earthly bliss, who have had to ask themselves, in awful earnest, the question which all would so gladly put away: Were I stripped to-morrow of all these things, to stand alone and helpless, as I see thousands stand, what should I then have left? They may have been tempted to answer, with Medea in the tragedy:—

“Che resta? . . . Io!”

But they have shrunk from that desperate self-assertion, as they felt that, in the very act, they should become, not a philosopher, but, as Medea did, a fiend. Tremblingly they have turned to religion for comfort, under the glaring eye of that dark spectre of bereavement, but have felt about all commonplaces, however true, as Job felt of old; “Miserable comforters are ye all! . . . Oh, that I knew where I might find HIM. I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I should know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say to me!”

To such, Tauler can tell something, though but a little, of that still waste, where a man, losing all things else, shall find himself face to face with God, and hear from Him that which no man can utter again in words, even to the wife of his bosom. A little, too, though but a little, can Tauler tell him how he may die to those whom he loves best on earth, that he may live to them, and love them better still, in the ever-present heavens; of how he may lose his life, and all persons and things which make his life worth having, that he may find again all of them which God has indeed created, in that God to whom all live eternally.

There are those, too, who have endured a struggle darker still; more rare, perhaps, but just as real as the last; men on whom the “nothingness” of all created things has flashed, not as a mere sentimental and exaggerative metaphor, but as a stern, inevitable, logical fact; who have felt, if for a moment, that perhaps they and all they see and know,—

“Are but such stuff
As dreams are made of——”

who have hung, if but for one moment, self-poised over the abyss of boundless doubt; who have shuddered as they saw, if but for a moment, sun, and hills, and trees, and the faces which they loved, and the seeming-solid earth beneath their feet,—yea, their own body, flesh and blood,—reel, melt, and vanish, till nothing was left of the whole universe but solitary self with its eternal malady of thought; who have cried out of the lowest deep: “What is all which I love—all which I hate? I gaze on it; but I see not it, but a picture on my own eyeball. I clutch it in despair: but I feel not it, but the nerves of my own finger-tip: if, indeed, eyeball and finger-tip be not, like the rest, phantoms of a homeless mind, and the only certain existence in the universe is I—and that I at war with myself, self-discontented, self-despising, and self-damned.”

That problem Tauler will solve for no man; for he will say that each man must solve it for himself, face to face with God alone: but he can tell how he solved it for himself; how he came to find an eternal light shining in for ever in that utter darkness, which the darkness could not comprehend; an eternal ground in the midst of that abyss, which belonged not to the abyss, nor to the outward world which had vanished for the moment, nor to space, nor time, nor any category of human thought, or mortal existence; and that its substance was the Everlasting Personal Good, whose Love is Righteousness. Tauler can point out the path by which he and others came to see that Light, to find that Rock of Ages;—the simple path of honest self-knowledge, self-renunciation, self-restraint, in which every upward step towards right exposes some fresh depth of inward sinfulness, till the once proud man, crushed down, like Job and Paul, by the sense of his own infinite meanness, becomes, like them, a little child once more, and casts himself simply upon the generosity of Him who made him:—

“An infant crying in the night;
An infant crying for the light,
And with no language but a cry.”

And then, so Tauler will tell him, there may come to him the vision, dim, perhaps, and fitting ill into clumsy words, but clearer, surer, nearer to him than the ground on which he treads, or than the foot which treads it—the vision of an Everlasting Spiritual Substance, Most Human and yet Most Divine, who can endure; and who, standing beneath all things, can make their spiritual substance endure likewise, though all worlds and æons, birth, and growth, and death, matter, and space, and time, should melt in very deed,—

“And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a rack behind.”

If there be any to whom these sentences shall seem merely an enigmatic verbiage, darkening counsel by words without knowledge, I can only beg them not to look at Tauler’s wisdom through my folly; his *siccum lumen* through my glare and smoke. As I said at first, he needs no Preface. There are those who will comprehend him without comment. There are those, also, who will rise up and follow him, and his Master.



The History and Life of the Reverend Doctor John Tauler.

FIRST CHAPTER

IN the year of Our Lord 1340, it came to pass, that a Master in Holy Scripture preached oft-times in a certain city, and the people loved to hear him, and his teachings were the talk of the country for many leagues round. Now this came to the ears of a layman who was rich in God's grace, and he was warned three times in his sleep that he should go to the city where the Master dwelt, and hear him preach. Now that city was in another country, more than thirty leagues distant. Then the man thought within himself, "I will go thither and wait to see what God is purposed to do or bring to pass there." So he came to that city and heard the Master preach five times. Then God gave this man to perceive that the Master was a very loving, gentle, good-hearted man by nature, and had a good understanding of the Holy Scripture, but was dark as to the light of grace; and the man's heart did yearn over him, and he went to the Master 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 in God's name to let me make my confession to you." The Master answered, "With all my heart." Then the man confessed to the Master in all simplicity, and when he desired to receive the Lord's Body, the Master gave it him. When this had lasted twelve weeks, the man said to the Master, "Dear Sir, I beg you for God's sake to preach us a sermon, showing us how a man may attain to the highest and utmost point it is given to us to reach in this present time." The Master answered, "Ah! dear son, what dost thou ask for? how shall I tell thee of such high things? for I ween thou wouldst understand but little thereof." But the man said, "Ah! dear Master, even though I should understand little or nothing thereof, yet I cannot but thirst after it. 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.

So, when the Master had finished his sermon, he announced to the people that in three days they should come together again, for he had been requested to teach how a man could attain to the Highest and Best and nearest to God that might be reached in this present time. And when the day was come, much people came to the church, and the man sat down in a place where he could hear well; and the Master came, and thus began his discourse, and said:



SECOND CHAPTER

In the following gracious Sermon, twenty-four articles are rehearsed whereby a man may perceive who are the proper, true, reasonable, enlightened, contemplative men; and what sort of man it is to whom Christ may well speak these words: Ecce vere Israelita in quo dolus non est—Lo! see a true beholder of God in whom is no guile (John i. 47).

DEAR children, I have much to say to you in this sermon concerning those things of which I have promised to speak; wherefore I cannot for this time expound the gospel of the day to you as is my wont, neither shall I speak much Latin in this sermon; for what I have to say, I will prove with Holy Scripture [and he said]: “Dear children, I would have you to know that there be many men, who indeed attain to a clear understanding and reasonable judgment, but who do this by means of images and forms through the help of other men, and without the Scriptures. Further, there be found many who, when they mark that something is known to them through the Scriptures, are not therewith content. Such a man is still far from his highest and greatest good. Dear children, if a man had broken through these things, and was become dead to them, and had got above forty stages of contemplation, and above the conceptions of our reason, whether they come to us through images or forms of speech—if there were a man who had come to this, he would be dearer and more precious in God’s sight than a hundred thousand men who never get out of their own self, and live after the way of their own choosing; for to such God cannot find entrance, nor work in their souls. This all comes of their own will, and their self-glorifying folly, which takes delight in the dexterity of their own reason, in framing and handling conceptions. But those men who while on earth have broken through those things, and have given themselves to God in such sort that they have died unto themselves, and have both made themselves free from all outward forms, and the use of sensible images in their exercises of contemplation, and humbly toiled and pressed onwards above the images of mere reason, as Dionysius says, “the light of faith requires that a man should be raised above the apprehensions of reason;”—know, dear children, that in such souls God doth find rest, and a place wherein to dwell and to work when He chooseth. Now when God findeth thus no hindrance in such a man, He works His own works in him, and draweth him truly to Himself in Himself. Now know that such a man is rare, for his life and ways are hidden from others, and unknown to them, except to such as have a like life, of whom, alas! I fear there be but few. To this state, and this noble perfectness, none can come except through boundless humility, an unclouded understanding, and a clear reason; for it has happened ere now that some great doctors and priests have fallen; and a multitude of rational spirits belonging to the angelic hosts, who perceived nothing else in their nature and essence but mere reason, have erred hence, and fallen everlastingly away from eternal truth. And this is what happens still to all those who look to their own reason, and want to be and do as God by the light of their self-willed understanding. For which reason it is profitable and needful to know who are the proper, truly reasonable, enlightened, contemplative men. Now as far as I can find from Scripture, there are four and twenty tokens which such a man must possess.

The First is given us by the highest Master of all doctors, arts and wisdom, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he says: “Hereby shall ye know whether ye be my disciples, if ye have love one to another even as I have loved you.” As much as to say, ‘Though ye should possess arts and wisdom, and high understanding, it is all in vain if ye have not withal fidelity and love.’ We believe that Balaam was so replete with understanding, that he perceived what things God purposed to do

or reveal hundreds of years after his day; but it availed him nothing, forasmuch as he did not cleave with love and loyalty to the things which he understood.

The Second mark appertaining to a truly reasonable, enlightened man is that he must become empty of self; and this must not make him proud, but he shall consider how he may ever more attain to this freedom, and sit loose by all creatures.

The Third Article: He shall resign Himself utterly to God, that God may work His own works in him, and he shall not glory in the works as being his own, but always think himself too mean to have done them.

The Fourth Article: He shall go out from himself in all the things in which he is wont to seek and find himself, whether belonging to time or to eternity, and by so doing he shall win a true increase.

Fifth Article: He shall not seek his own ends in any creature, whether temporal or eternal, and hereby he shall attain to perfect satisfaction and content.

The Sixth Article: He shall always wait on that which God will have him to do, and shall try, with the help of God, to fulfil that to the uttermost, and shall take no glory to himself therefor.

The Seventh Article: He shall daily, without ceasing, give up his will to the will of God, and endeavour to will nothing but what God willeth.

The Eighth Article: He shall bend all his powers into submission to God, and exercise them so constantly and so strenuously in God, and with such power and love, that God may work nothing in him without his active concurrence, and he may do nothing without God.

The Ninth Article: He shall have the sense of the presence of God in all His works, at all times, and in all places, whatever it please God to appoint, whether it be sweet or bitter.

The Tenth Article: All his pleasure and pain he shall receive, not as from the creature, but from God; howbeit God oftentimes works through the creature, yet he shall receive all things as from God alone.

Eleventh Article: He shall not be led captive by any lusting or desire after the creatures without due necessity.

The Twelfth Article: No contradiction or mishap shall have power to move or constrain him so that it separate him from the truth; therefore hold fast always and entirely by the same.

Thirteenth Article: He shall not be deceived by the glory of the creature, nor yet by any false light, but in a spirit of kindness and love he shall confess all things to be what they are, and from all things draw out what is best, and use it to his own improvement, and in no wise to his own detriment; for such a course is a certain sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Fourteenth Article: He shall at all times be equipped and armed with all virtue, and ready to fight against all vice and sin, and with his good weapons he shall obtain the victory and the prize in all conflicts.

Fifteenth Article: He shall confess the truth in simplicity, and he shall mark what it is in itself, what God requireth of us, and what is possible to man, and then order his life accordingly, and act up to what he confesses!

The Sixteenth Article: He shall be a man of few words and much inward life.

The Seventeenth Article: He shall be blameless and righteous, but in no wise be puffed up by reason of the same.

The Eighteenth Article: His conversation shall be in all uprightness and sincerity; thus he shall let his light shine before men, and he shall preach more with his life than with his lips.

The Nineteenth Article: He shall seek the glory of God before all things, and have no other aim in view.



The Twentieth Article: He shall be willing to take reproof; and when he striveth with any he shall give way if the matter concern himself alone, and not God.

The Twenty-first Article: He shall not desire or seek his own advantage, but think himself unworthy of the least thing that falls to his lot.

The Twenty-second Article: He shall look upon himself as the least wise and worthy man upon earth, yet find in himself great faith; and above all he shall take no account of his own wisdom and the works of his own reason, but humble himself beneath all men. For the Author of all truth will not work a supernatural work in the soul, unless He find a thorough humility in a man, and go before his doings with his perfect grace, as he did with St. Paul. But I fear, alas! that little heed is taken to this in these our days.

The Twenty-third Article: He shall set the life and precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ before him for a pattern to his life, words, and works, and without ceasing look at himself therein as in a mirror, that, in so far as he is able, he may put off everything unbecoming the honoured image of our Lord.

The Twenty-fourth and last Article is: He shall comport himself as a man of small account,—as nothing more than a beginner in a good life; and though he should therefore be despised by many, it shall be more welcome to him than all the favour of the world.

Now, dear children, these are the signs that the ground of a man's soul is truly reasonable, so that the image of all truth shineth and teacheth therein: and he who does not bear in himself these signs, may not and must not set any store by his own reason, either in his own eyes or those of others. That we all may become such a true image, in thorough sincerity and perfect humility, may He help us who is the Eternal Truth, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!



THIRD CHAPTER

How this pious man privately reveals to the doctor in part his own hidden holiness, and convicts the Master that he is still walking in the night of ignorance, and has an unclean vessel, and therefore is yet a Pharisee.

WHEN this sermon was ended, the man went home to his lodging, and wrote it down word for word 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 over, 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." The Master said, "Dear son, thou hast written 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 down every word so exactly as thou hast done it here, unless I set to afresh to draw it from the Scripture. I confess that I am greatly astonished at thee to think that thou hast been concealed from me so long, and I should never have perceived how full of wit thou art, and so often as thou hast confessed to me, thou

50

shouldst so have hidden thy talent that I have never perceived it in thee.” Then the man made as though he would depart, and said, “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 hast neither wife nor child to provide for; thou must eat there as well as here: 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, who 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; 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 clerk, 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 know that neither your sermons, nor any outward words that man can speak, have power to work any good in me, for 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 shall come to a man, he must be empty and quit of all the things of time. Know ye that when this same Master cometh to me, He teaches me more in an hour than you or all the doctors from Adam to the Judgment Day will ever do.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, stay here, I pray thee, and celebrate the Lord’s Death with me.” Whereon the man answered, “Seeing that you adjure me so solemnly, it may be that, in obedience to God, I ought to stay with you; but I will not do it unless you promise to receive all that I have said to you, and all I may yet say to you, as under the seal of confession, so that none may know of it.” Quoth the Master: “Dear son, that I willingly promise, if only that thou wilt stay here.” Then said the man, “Sir, ye 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.” Quoth the Master: “Dear son, what dost thou mean by this?” The man said, “I mean that your vessel is unclean, and much lees are cleaving to it, and the cause is, that you have suffered yourself to be killed by the letter, and are killing yourself still every day and hour, albeit you yourself know full well that the Scripture saith, ‘The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.’ Know, that same letter which now killeth you will make you alive again, if so be you are willing; but in the life you are now living, know that you have no light, but you are in the night, in which you are indeed able to understand the letter, but have not yet tasted the sweetness of the Holy Ghost; and, 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.” The man said, “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, you are in truth guilty of all I have said, and I will prove to you from your own self that it is true.” Then said the Master, “I ask for no more, for I have ever been an enemy to all Pharisees.” Quoth the man, “I will first tell you how it is that the letter is killing you. Dear sir, as you know yourself, when you were arrived at the age to understand good and evil, you began to learn the letter, and in so doing you sought your own welfare, and to this day you are in the same mind; that is to say, you are trusting to your learning and parts, and you

51

52

do not love and intend God alone, but you are in the letter, and intend and seek yourself, and not the glory of God, as the Scripture teacheth us to do. You have a leaning towards the creatures, and specially towards one creature, and love that creature with your whole heart above measure, and that is, moreover, the cause why the letter killeth you. And whereas I said that your vessel is unclean; that is also true, inasmuch as you have not in all things a single eye to God. If you look into yourself, you will, for one thing, find it out by the vanity and love of carnal ease whereby your vessel is spoiled and filled with lees; wherefore, when the pure unmixed wine of godly doctrine has gone through this unclean vessel, it comes to pass that your teaching is without favour, and brings no grace to pure, loving hearts. 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. Was it not a mark of the Pharisees that they loved and sought themselves in all things, and not the glory of God? Now examine yourself, dear sir, and see if you are not a proper Pharisee in the eyes of God. Know, dear Master, that there are many people in the world who are all called Pharisees in God's sight, be they great or small, according to what their hearts or lives are bent upon."

53

As the man spoke these words the Master fell on his neck and kissed him, and said: "A likewise 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 I have an affection for one creature; but I tell thee of a truth that I know it not myself, nor do I believe that any human being in the world can know of it. I wonder greatly who can have told thee this of me? But doubt not that thou hast it from God. Now, therefore, I pray thee, dear son, that thou celebrate our Lord's Death, and be thou my ghostly father, and let me be thy poor sinful son." Then said the man, "Dear sir, if you speak so contrary to ordinances, I will not stay with you, but ride home again; that I assure you." Hereupon said the Master, "Ah, no! I pray thee, for God's sake, do not so; stay awhile with me; I promise thee readily not to speak thus any more. I am minded, with God's help, to begin a better course, and I will gladly follow thy counsel, whatsoever thou deemest best, if I may but amend my life." Then said the man, "I tell you of a truth, that the letter and learning lead many great doctors astray, and bring some into purgatory and some into hell, according as their life here hath been,—I tell you 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."

54

55

FOURTH CHAPTER

How God had wrought a great miracle through this pious man, and how this had come to pass because God found in him a good and thorough humility.

THEN said the Master, "I pray thee, for God's sake to tell me how it is that thou hast attained to such a life, and how thou didst begin thy spiritual life, and what have been thy exercises and thy history." The man said, "That is, indeed, a simple request: 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 that you have not a book large enough to contain it if it were all written; however, I will tell you somewhat thereof for this time.

“The first thing that helped me was, that God found in me a sincere and utterly self-surrendering humility. Now I do not think there is any need to tell you the bodily exercises by which I brought my flesh into subjection: for men’s natures and dispositions are very unlike; but whenever a man has given himself up to God with utter humility, God will not fail to give him such exercises, by temptations and other trials, as He perceives to be profitable to the man, and such as he is well able to bear and endure if he be only willing. But this you ought to know: he who asks counsel of many people will be apt to go often astray; for each one will point him to his own experience. But oftentimes a man may exercise himself in a certain practice which is good and profitable to himself; while, if another did the same, it might very likely be useless, or even hurtful to him. The Devil 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 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, too, had not sinned as I have.’ And when these thoughts came into my head, I began to exercise myself in the life of the Saints with 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, that I had exercised myself so 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 art 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 had begun these exercises without counsel: I will go and tell the old hermit all that has happened to me. And I did so, and told him the words that I had 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 about thy exercises.’ 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 utterly give thyself up 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 myself and my doings altogether up to God. For the rest, dear sir, you must know that by nature I was a very ingenious, clever, good-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 with this sometimes I got so far that I was surprised at myself. And once upon a time, I thought in my reason, ‘Thou hast such good parts, may be, if thou shouldst give thy mind to it with all earnestness, thou couldst attain to comprehend somewhat of divine things.’ 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 an impure false counsel hast thou put in my heart, thou bad, false counsellor! If we had such a God I would not give a berry for him.’ After that, another night, when I was saying my matins,³ an ardent longing came over me, so that I said, ‘O eternal

³ Three o’clock in the morning.

58

and merciful God, that it were thy will to give me to discover something that should be above all our sensual reason!’ As soon as I had said it I was sorely affrighted at this great longing, and said with great fervour, ‘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, and I confess indeed that I have not always lived as I ought of right 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, still less that such an ardent, gracious desire should spring up in me; wherefore my body must be punished for my sin.’ With that I threw off my garments and scourged myself till the blood ran down my shoulders. And as these words remained in my heart and on my lips till the day broke, and the blood was flowing down, in that same hour God showed His mercy on me, so that my mind was filled with a clear understanding. And in that same hour I was deprived of all my natural reason; but the time seemed all too short to me. And when I was left to myself again I saw a supernatural mighty wonder and sign, insomuch that I could have cried with St. 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 for this time, as to how it stands with you.”

59

FIFTH CHAPTER

How God converted a heathen in a foreign land through this pious layman, and how that the Holy Ghost still to this day displays His grace with the same power that He showed on the day of Pentecost, when He finds fitting hearts to receive Him. Further, how this pious man gives still better instruction to the Doctor in these matters, and shows him that he is a true Pharisee, and brings him to submit to be converted and amend his ways.

60

THEN said the Master, “If God 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 five thousand 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, “Then, dear son, thou art indeed the steward of a rich man and a great Lord! 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?” Then said the man, “Sir, methinks it seems impossible that after I have said so much to you, you should talk in such a childish fashion! Look here, dear Master! I will ask you a question, and if with all your reason you can explain it to me, either by the Scriptures, or without the Scriptures, I will give you ten thousand florins.” Then said the Master, “What is that?” The man said, “Can

you instruct me how I should write a letter to a heathen far away in a heathen land, in such fashion and language 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; tell me where has this happened? If thou know anything of the matter, tell me in what way this came to pass, and whether it happened to thyself?" Then said the man, "Albeit I am unworthy of it, yet did the Holy Spirit work through me, a poor sinner; and how it came to pass would take long to tell, and make such a long story that one might write a large book about it: The heathen was a very good-hearted man, and often cried to Heaven, and called upon Him who had made him and all the world, and said: 'O Creator of all creatures, I have been born in this land: now the Jews have another faith, the Christians another. O Lord, who art 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: but if it should be that Thou dost not show it me, and I should die in my faith, since I knew no better, if there were a better faith, but Thou hadst not shown it nor revealed it to me, Thou wouldst have done me a grievous injustice.' 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, the which stood written in a good German tongue, that I could read it quite well. Dear sir, there were much to be said on this matter, but for this time it is enough; you are well able to mark the meaning thereof." Then said the Master, "God is wonderful in all His works and gifts! Dear son, thou hast told me very strange things."

61

The man said, "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 calledst 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 said the man, "Now tell me, dear Master, how it was, or whose work it was, that the blessed Saint Katharine, who was but a young virgin barely fourteen years old, overcame some fifty of the great masters, and moreover so prevailed over them that they willingly went to martyrdom? Who wrought this?" 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?" The Master, "Yes, I believe it fully." 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. This should have been enough to content you, but since it is not, I must say still more, and prove

62

63

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 enough of them 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, “He speaks them still, now and evermore, to all men. 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 hell-fire.” The Master said, “I know not what I shall 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.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, do not be wroth with me; but I tell you of a truth that 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.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, because you have received grace from God, and are willing to humble yourself and submit, and to bow down before 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 in love to Him, and 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:

64

65

SIXTH CHAPTER

This is the golden A B C which this pious man set the Doctor to learn, for the amending of his life, and which, doubtless, it were very profitable and needful for us all to repeat many times and oft, and amend our lives thereafter.

AFTER a manly and not a childish sort, ye shall, with thorough earnestness, begin a good life.

BAD ways ye shall eschew, and practice all goodness with diligence and full purpose of mind.

CAREFULLY endeavour to keep the middle path in all things, with seemliness and moderation.

DEMEAN yourself humbly in word and work, from the inward holiness of your heart.

ENTIRELY give up your own will; evermore cleave earnestly to God, and forsake Him not.

FORWARD and ready shall ye be to all good works, without murmuring, whatever be commanded you.



GIVE heed to exercise yourself in all godly works of mercy toward the body or the spirit.

HAVE no backward glances after the world, or the creatures, or their doings.

INWARDLY in your heart ponder over your past life with honesty, sincere repentance in the bitterness of your heart, and tears in your eyes.

KNIGHTLY and resolutely withstand the assaults of the Devil, the Flesh, and the World.

LEARN to conquer long-cherished sloth with vigour, together with all effeminacy of the body, and subservience to the Devil.

MAKE your abode in God, with fervent love, in certain hope, with strong faith, and be towards your neighbour as towards yourself.

No other man's good things shall ye desire, be they what they may, corporeal or spiritual.

ORDER all things so that you make the best and not the worst of them.

PENANCE, that is, suffering for your sin, you shall take willingly, whether it come from God or the creatures.

QUITTANCE, remission, and absolution, you shall give to all who have ever done you wrong in thought, word, or deed.



RECEIVE all things that befall you with meekness, and draw improvement from them.

SOUL and body, estate and reputation, keep undenied with all care and diligence.⁴

TRUTHFUL and upright shall ye be towards all, without guile or cunning.

⁴ The letters R and S have been transposed; the rest follow the order of the original, in which, as in the translation, the important word of the sentence is by no means always the one with which it commences. The letters V and W are wanting in the original.—TR.

WANTONNESS and excess, of whatsoever kind it may be, ye shall learn to lay aside, and turn from it with all your heart.

Xt., our Blessed Lord's life and death, shall ye follow, and wholly conform yourself thereunto with all your might.

Ye shall evermore, without ceasing, beseech our blessed Lady that she help you to learn this our lesson well.

ZEALOUSLY keep a rein over your will and your senses, that they may be at peace with all that God doth, and also with all His creatures.

All this lesson must be learnt of a free heart and will, without cavilling.



SEVENTH CHAPTER

How the Doctor learns this task very quickly (though with trouble), and how this layman further instructeth him in the shortest way to the highest contemplation; also how he was obliged to begin a dying life, and exercise himself therein till at last he prevailed over himself. And in this following lesson lies the true ground of almost all the sermons that stand in this book, from which lesson also this Doctor obtained his understanding of Holy Scripture, and the perfecting of his life, as shall be hereafter set forth.

NOW, dear sir, take kindly as from God, without cavilling, this child's task, which He sets you by the mouth of me, a poor and unworthy human being."

Then said the Master, "However thou mayst call this a child's task, methinks it needs a man's strength to attack it. Now tell me, dear son, 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. 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 into subjection to your soul and reason." Then said the Master, "I will gladly be obedient."



Now when this discipline had lasted three weeks, the man said to the Master, "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."

But at the end of another three weeks the Master sent for the man, 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 said the Master, “I tell thee of a truth it has gone hard with me. And now, dear son, I pray thee give me further instruction.” Then said 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 to thee.” Then said the man, “Since your heart is steadfastly fixed to commit yourself wholly unto God, I counsel you in all faithfulness that ye be obedient to your order and your superiors; as it may be that you may be brought into great perplexity if you be minded to go the straight and narrow way, and that you will be hard pressed and assailed, and most of all by your brethren. And if this should come to pass, your earthly feelings will seek everywhere for help, and make you call to mind the words in which you pledged yourself to God, and also other things, with the intent that, if possible, they might break away from the cross; and that must not be, but you must yield a willing obedience to suffer all that is appointed you, from whatsoever it may proceed. For know that you must needs walk in that same path of which our Lord spoke to that young man;—you must take up your cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ and His example, in utter sincerity, humility, and patience, and must let go all your proud, ingenious reason, which you have through your learning in the Scripture. You shall also for a time neither study nor preach, and you shall demean yourself with great simplicity towards your penitents; for when they have ended their confession, you shall give them no further counsel than to say to them, ‘I will learn how to counsel myself, and when I can do that I will also counsel you.’ And if 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.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, I will willingly do so; but how then shall I occupy myself?” The man replied, “You shall enter into your cell, and read your Hours, and also chant in the choir if you feel inclined, and shall say mass every day. And what time is left, you shall set before you the sufferings of our Lord, and contemplate your own life in the mirror of His, 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. In all lowliness ye shall study these things, whereby in some measure ye may be brought to true humility, and also wean yourself from your old habits, and cease from them. And then, when our Lord sees that the time is come, He will make of you a new man, so that you shall be born again of God.

“Nevertheless, you must know that before this can come to pass, you must sell all that you have, and humbly yield it up to God, that you may truly make Him your end, and give up to Him all that you possess in your carnal pride, whether through the Scriptures or without; or whatever it be, whereby you might reap honour in this world, or in the which you may aforesaid have taken pleasure or delight, you must let it all go, and, with Mary Magdalene, fall down at Christ’s feet, and earnestly strive to enter on a new course. And so doing, without doubt, the Eternal Heavenly Prince will look down on you with the eye of His good pleasure, and He will not leave His work undone in you,



but will urge you still further, that you may be tried and purified as gold in the fire; and it may even come to pass, that He shall give you to drink of the bitter cup that He gave to His only-begotten Son. For it is my belief that one bitter drop which God will pour out for you will be that your good works and all your refraining from evil, yea your whole life will be despised and turned to nought in the eyes of the people; and all your spiritual children will forsake you and think you are gone out of your mind, and all your good friends and your brothers in the convent will be offended at your life, and say that you have taken to strange ways.

“But when these things come upon you, be not in any wise dismayed, but rejoice, for then your salvation draweth nigh; howbeit, no doubt, your human weakness will shrink back in terror, and give way. Therefore, dear Master, you must not be fainthearted, but trust firmly in God, for He forsakes none of His servants, as you know well from the examples of the blessed saints. Now, dear sir, if so be that you are minded to take these things in hand, know that there is nothing better or more profitable for you at this present than an entire, hearty, humble self-surrender in all things, whether sweet or bitter, painful or pleasant, so that you may be able to say with truth, ‘Ah, my Lord and my God, if it were thy will that I should remain till the Day of Judgment in this suffering and tribulation, yet would I not fall away from thee, but would desire ever to be constant in thy service.’ Dear sir, I see well, by God’s grace, 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 told you that if you went back like that young man, I would not have it laid to my charge.” Then said the Master, “Thou sayest truly; I confess it does seem to me a hard thing to follow your counsel.” The man answered, “Yet you begged me to show you the shortest way to the highest perfectness. Now I know no shorter nor surer way than to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. But, dear sir, I counsel you in all faithfulness, to take a certain space of time to consider these matters, and then in God’s name do as God gives you grace to do.” Then said the Master, “That will I do, and wait and see whether, with the help of God, I may prevail.”



EIGHTH CHAPTER

How it fared with the Doctor after this, and how he fell into great tribulation and contempt, till he fell ill thereby; and how the layman counselled him, and allowed him to help nature with some good food and spices, and afterwards departed from him.

ON the eleventh day after this, the Master sent for the man, and said to him, “Ah, dear son, what agony and struggle and fighting have I not had within me day and night, before I was able to overcome the Devil and my own flesh. But now by God’s grace I have gathered myself together with all my powers inward and outward, and set my hand to this work with good courage, and am purposed to remain steadfast therein, come weal come woe.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, do you remember still all I said to you when you asked me how you should begin?” The Master answered, “Yes, the moment thou didst depart I wrote down all thou hadst said to me, word for word.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, that through God you have found this bold heart, rejoices me from the bottom of my soul, and I am as well pleased as if it had happened to myself, so God be my witness.

And now in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, set forward.” Then the man took his leave, and the Master did as he had been bidden.

75

Now it came to pass that before a year was out the Master grew to be despised of all his familiar friends in the convent, 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 the man 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 humbly cleave to God, and put your firm trust in Him. Know that this account of yours pleases me well, and it stands well with your life, and will grow better every day.

“Dear sir, you know well that he who will walk in the right way, and tread this path, must be made a partaker of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore be not afraid, but commit yourself wholly to God. For know that 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. But you must know that I always gave myself up body and soul to God, that He might do with them what he pleased.”

Then said the Master, “But thou didst tell me before that I must shun good eating and drinking.” The man answered, “Yes, sir, that was in the first beginning, when the flesh was yet wanton, but now that it is tamed and obedient to the spirit, we may come to its help with remedies, else we should tempt God. So long as you are in this sickness, you will be serving God to cherish your body by allowable means, but not to live disorderly; that must not be. Dear sir, make God your help, and go forward with cheerful mind, and commit yourself to God with true and thorough resignation, and put your trust in His boundless mercy, and wait for His grace to show you what He will have you to do, and then with His help strive to fulfil that to the uttermost, 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, which I assure you in all earnestness I have much at heart; 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, who has called and invited and brought you to this point, by means of me His poor creature, but it is His work which has been wrought in you, and not mine; I have been merely His instrument, and served Him therein, and have done so right willingly, for the glory of God and the salvation of your soul.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, may God be thine eternal reward! Since it is so weighty a matter, I will commit myself to God, and bear this suffering as best I may.” The man said, “Dear sir, since you are now under the yoke, and have entered on a spiritual life and obedience to God, and have voluntarily devoted yourself thereto, you should know how to live discreetly and wisely, and to govern yourself aright; and do not let it repent you because you are forsaken of the creatures, but if it should happen that you lack money, or have need of some, put a part of your books in pawn, and do not suffer yourself to want for anything, but by no means sell the books, for a time will come when good books will be very useful, and you will have need of them.” Then the man took his leave and departed from that place, but the Master’s eyes filled with tears, and he began to weep.

76

77



NINTH CHAPTER

How Doctor Tauler was visited, touched, and illuminated after a wonderful manner by God, and how the layman came to him again, and admonished him tenderly to begin to preach afresh, and to exercise himself in the Holy Scriptures. Also concerning a strange event that befell him afterwards, whereby he was still more tried and humbled, yet not without fruit.

NOW when the Master had suffered thus for two years, from sore assaults and temptations of the Devil, and great contempt from all his friends, and also great poverty, so that he was obliged to pledge a part of his books, and withal fell into great weakness of the body, and he had demeaned himself with great humility throughout;—behold, it came to pass on the Feast of St. Paul’s Conversion, that in the night he was overtaken by the most grievous assault that may be imagined, whereby all his natural powers were so overcome with weakness that when the time for matins came he could not go in to chapel, but remained in his cell, and commended himself to God in great humility, without help or consolation from any creature. And as he lay in this state of weakness, he thought of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His great love that He had for us, and considered his own life, how poor his life had been compared to the love of God. Whereupon he was overwhelmed with contrition for all his sins and all his wasted time, and exclaimed with 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 was lying in this weakness and great sadness, but fully awake, he heard with his bodily ears a voice saying: “Stand fast in thy peace, and trust God, and know that when He was on earth in human nature, He made the sick whom He healed in body sound also in soul.” Straightway when these words were uttered, he lost his senses and reason, and knew not how or where he was. But when he came to himself again, he felt within himself that he was possessed of a new strength and might in all powers outward and inward, and had also a clear understanding in those things which aforetime were dark to him, and he wondered greatly whence this came, and thought to himself, “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, as the letter hath in some measure slain you, so it shall likewise make you alive again, for your doctrine will come now 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 you already know the Holy Scriptures. Therefore you have now a great advantage, and you will henceforward have a much clearer insight into the Scripture than you had before. For, as you know, the Scripture sounds in many places as if it contradicted itself, but since that you have now, by the grace of God, received the Holy Scriptures into your own heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, you will perceive that all Scripture has the same intent, and does not contradict itself, and you will also be able rightly to follow the pattern left us by the Lord Jesus Christ. You ought also to begin to preach again, and to teach your fellow-Christians, and show them the right path to eternal life. The time is come now when good books will be profitable to you; for know that one of your sermons will be more profitable now,



and the people will receive more fruit therefrom, than from a hundred aforetime, for the words that you say now, coming from a pure soul, will have a pure and simple favour. Wherefore, just as much as you have been despised by the people, so shall you now be esteemed and beloved by them. 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 such a noble and precious treasure, and the devils will set all their arts and wisdom, and their lusts too, to work, to rob and bereave you of this costly treasure; wherefore look wisely to your goings, for nothing will so greatly help you to preserve it as utter humility. 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 Master, whose instrument I have been: to Him give ear, and obey His commands; this is my most faithful counsel. And now, in all godly love, I desire to receive instruction from you, for I have, with God's help, accomplished the good work for which I was sent and came hither. 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 said the Master, "Dear son, what had I better do; I have pledged a great many good books, as many 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 ordered notice to be given that he would preach 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 pulpit in a high place 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, "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, "Oh, 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 on 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 a public laughing-stock, despised by all; and the people said, "Now we all 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

83

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 been conscious of yourself, and therefore it is that you have been put to shame. You may have received some great gifts of God, which you yourself do not know or perceive, that have been given you by means of the patience with which you have endured this assault; therefore be of good cheer, and be joyful and humble. Neither should you think this a strange thing, for I have seen many such instances in other people. You shall not despise this pressure of the cross which God has sent you, but count it a great blessing and favour from God. I counsel you that you remain alone for the next five days, and endure without speaking to any, to the praise and glory of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when the five days are ended, beg your Prior to give you permission to deliver a sermon in Latin. If he refuse, beg him to let you try in the school and read a lecture to the brethren.” And he did so; and read to his brethren such an excellent 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 their brethren 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 the convent (it was a convent of ladies), and began to preach, and said:

84

85

TENTH CHAPTER

An excellent sermon which this Doctor delivered in a convent after his illumination, concerning Christ the true Bridegroom of the soul, in the which he showed how she is to follow Him in true, shamefaced, humble, and patient resignation, and how Christ tries her beforehand in divers ways, and at last accepts her lovingly. Taken from these words—“Ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei” (Matt. xxv. 6).

DEAR children, it may be now two years or more since I last preached. I spoke to you then of four-and-twenty Articles, and it was then my custom to speak much Latin, and to make many quotations; but I intend to do so no more, but if I wish to talk Latin, I will do so when the learned are present, who can understand it. For this time repeat only an Ave Maria to begin with, and pray for God’s grace.

Dear children, I have taken a text on which I mean to preach this sermon, and not to go beyond it: in the vulgar tongue it runs thus,—“*Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.*”

The Bridegroom is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bride is the Holy Church and Christendom. Now we are all called brides of Christ, wherefore we ought to be willing to go forth and meet our Bridegroom; but, alas! we are not so. The true paths and straight highways by which to go out to meet the Bridegroom are, alas! nowadays quite deserted and falling into decay, till we have come hardly to perceive where they are; nay, this highway is to many quite strange and unknown, so that

86

they do not go out to meet the Bridegroom, as they are in duty bound to do, of which I will speak another time, with God's help; but now, since we hear that we are all called brides, I will tell you somewhat concerning what the Bride must do in order to go and meet the Bridegroom.

It is seemly that a faithful Bride should avoid everything that is displeasing to the Bridegroom, such as vain-glory, pride, envy, and all the other sins of this world, and all the delights of the body and the flesh, whether it be the ease and indulgence of the body, or other things which are beyond the necessaries of life. Further, it beseems a faithful Bride to be shamefaced. When this comes to pass, and the Bride, for her Bridegroom's sake, has despised and given up all these things, then she begins to be somewhat well-pleasing to the Bridegroom.

But, if she desires to be yet more well-pleasing in His sight, she must humbly bow down before Him, and say with heart and lips, "Ah! my dear Lord and Bridegroom, Thou knowest all hearts. I have said to Thee, with my whole heart, that I desire to do all that I can and may, and to do it willingly, as far as Thou givest me to perceive through my conscience what is agreeable and well-pleasing to Thee." When the Bride makes this vow to the Bridegroom, He turneth himself and begins to look upon her. Then she beseeches Him to bestow upon her some gift as a token of love. What is the gift? It is that she is inwardly and outwardly beset with divers assaults, with which He is wont to endow his special friends.

But if the Bride be as yet unaccustomed to suffer, she will say, "Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, this is very hard upon me; I greatly fear that I shall scarcely be able to endure it. Therefore, dear Lord and Bridegroom, I pray Thee to make my burden somewhat more tolerable, or else to take a part of it away." Then the Bridegroom answers, "Tell me then, dear Bride, should the Bride fare better than the Bridegroom has fared? If thou desirest to meet the Bridegroom, thou must imitate Him in some sort, and it is, moreover, reasonable that a faithful Bride should suffer somewhat with Him for her Bridegroom's sake." Now when the Bride heareth what is the will of her Bridegroom, and how grave a matter it is, she is sore affrighted, and says, "Dear Lord and Bridegroom, be not wroth with me, for I will gladly hearken unto Thee: appoint unto me what Thou wilt; I am willing to suffer all things with Thy help and in thy love." When the Bridegroom heareth this, He loveth the Bride yet better than He did before, and giveth her to drink of a still better cup. This cup is that she is to cease from all her own thoughts, and all her works and refrainings will give her no content, for she can take pleasure in nothing that is her own. However good the actions may be in themselves, she is always thinking how she shall anger her Bridegroom therewith, and feareth much that she will, perhaps, have to suffer a great punishment for them hereafter. Moreover, she is derided by all, and these things are accounted her folly.

Now, children, by reason of all these things, her natural powers become wearied out and grow feeble, insomuch that she is constantly in fear lest she should not hold out to the end, but must die at last; and hereupon she is greatly terrified, for she is yet somewhat timorous and faint-hearted. Then she cries earnestly unto the Bridegroom, and says, "Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, how great are Thy terrors; know that I cannot endure them long: I must die." But the Bridegroom answers, "If thou wilt in truth go out to meet thy Bridegroom, it is fitting that thou should first tread some portion of the path that He has travelled. Now whereas the Bridegroom has suffered shame, hunger, cold, thirst, heat, and bitter pains, for three and thirty years, and at last a bitter death, for the Bride's sake, out of pure love, is it not just and right that the Bride should venture even her life for the Bridegroom's sake, out of love, and with all her heart? Verily, if thou hadst the right sort of love and true faithfulness unto thy Bridegroom, all thy fear would vanish."

Then when she hears these words of the Bridegroom her whole heart is moved with fear, and she says, "Ah! dear Lord, I acknowledge in all sincerity that I have done wrong, and I am out of all measure terrified at it; I grieve from the bottom of my heart that I have not with a faithful heart yielded myself up unto Thee, even unto death. Dear Lord and Bridegroom, I here vow and promise to Thee surely that all which Thou willest I also will. Come sickness, come health, come pleasure or pain, sweet or bitter, cold or heat, wet or dry, whatever Thou willest, that do I also will; and desire altogether to come out from my own will, and to yield a whole and willing obedience unto Thee, and never to desire aught else either in will or thought: only let Thy will be accomplished in me, Thy poor unworthy creature, in time and in eternity. For, dear Lord, when I look at what I am, I am not worthy that the earth should bear me."

Now when the Bridegroom seeth this entire and faithful will in the Bride, and her deep and thorough humility, what does He then do? His heart yearns over the Bride, and giveth her a very costly, noble, sweet cup to drink. What is this cup? It is that she suffers yet far more from all manner of temptation and tribulation than she has ever suffered before. And when the Bride perceiveth this, and seeth the Bridegroom's earnestness and good pleasure concerning her, she suffereth all these things willingly and gladly for the Bridegroom's sake, and boweth herself down humbly before Him, and saith, "Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, it is just and right that Thou shouldest not will as I will, but I desire and ought to will as Thou wilt; I receive this gift right willingly and gladly for Thy love from Thy divine hand, whether it be pleasant or painful to the flesh, I acquiesce wholly in it for love of Thee."

Now when the Bridegroom, in His eternal wisdom, perceives this disposition within His humble Bride, and her thorough earnestness, she begins to grow precious to Him, and from hearty love He giveth her to suffer in all her nature, until the Bride is wholly purified from all faults and stain of sin, and become perfectly fair and unspotted. Then He says, "Now rise up, my beloved, my pleasant, my beautiful Bride, for Thou art pure and without spot, and altogether lovely in my eyes." Then He looks 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, chosen beloved, it is time to go to Church," and He taketh the Bridegroom and the Bride, and leadeth them to the Church, 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 again, either in time or eternity. And when, in these divine espousals, they have been made one, the Bridegroom saith, "O, beloved and Eternal Father, what shall be our wedding-gift?" And the Father saith, "The Holy Ghost, for that it is His office to be in the Father's stead." And He sheds forth upon the Bride the torrent of divine love, 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, in time or eternity, together with herself.

Now 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. Now is this Bride a true worshipper, for she worshippeth the Father in the Holy Spirit. In this marriage-feast is joy upon joy, and therein is 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 vast that no senses or reason can apprehend or attain unto it."

As the Doctor spoke 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 your 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. For verily we have all need so to do, seeing that, alas! we have grown so dull of hearing and foolish of heart that none of us has compassion on his fellow, although we confess that we are all called brothers and sisters. There be also few who are willing to fight their way against their own flesh, and follow the Bridegroom, in order to reach a nobler joy and a glorious wedding-feast.

I give you to know that in these days those be few and far between who do truly go out to meet the Bridegroom, such as there were many in the olden time. Therefore it behoveth 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 that hear not.” Dear children, let us all strive to enter into this wedding-feast, most rich in joy, and honour, and blessedness.

But when the Bride departs from this marriage-feast and is left to herself, and beholds that she has come back again to this miserable earthly state, she says within herself, “O! poor miserable creature that I am, am I here again?” And she is sad in herself; nevertheless, she is so utterly resigned in boundless humility to her Bridegroom, that she in no wise may think of or desire His presence, because she deems herself wholly unworthy thereof. But the Bridegroom does not therefore forsake her, but looketh upon His Bride from time to time, because He well knoweth that none will or can comfort her, but He alone.



And now that you have heard this, let it not surprise you that I have not told you how lovingly the Bridegroom talketh with the Bride. It might well happen that none would believe me (except such a one as had tried and tasted it himself), should I tell you what strange words the Bride saith to her Bridegroom. We find, too, in the Scriptures, that the loving soul oftentimes holds such converse with her Beloved as words cannot perfectly express. Nay, does it not happen every day with earthly lovers, that a bride and bridegroom talk together in such wise that if others heard it they would declare them mad or drunk?

Now, dear children, I fear that I have kept you too long; but the time has not seemed long to me: also, I have said it all for your good, and could not well this time make my sermon shorter if I were rightly to explain my meaning; therefore receive it kindly.

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



ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Of a great prodigy that was wrought in certain persons through this sermon, as afterwards appeared, whereby we are given to understand what great wonders God works by good instruments, that is that He will do more by one sermon of an enlightened man than by a hundred others.

WHEN this sermon was ended, the Master went down and read Mass, and gave the Lord's Body to certain good people; but after the sermon the man perceived that some forty people remained sitting in the churchyard. When Mass was over he told the Master of it, and they went out to where he had seen the people sitting that they might see how it was with them. But in the meantime, while the Master had been celebrating Mass, they had risen up and gone away, except twelve, who were still there. Then said the Master to the man, "Dear son, what dost thou think we had best do with these people?" Then the man went from one to another and touched them, but they lay as if they were dead, and scarcely moved. The Master knew not what to think of this strange thing, for he had never seen the like before, and so 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 your fault and the Bridegroom's; how then should you bring them round again?" The Master said, "But if the Bridegroom be with me in this business, ought I to awaken them?" The man answered, "Sir, these people are still in this present state, and 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 to their bodies, 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 awhile, 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, seeing it is now Lent." And the Master did so gladly, and preached also to those who were in the world, to the great amendment of certain of them.⁵



FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

How this holy Doctor came to his end, and afterward appeared to his dear friend the layman, and showed him the cause of his painful departure from this world, to wit that it had been his purgatory, after which he attained great joy and eternal blessedness, which were given him by God as the reward of his good and faithful teaching.

NOW you must know that the Master made progress in the divine life, and received such wisdom, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he preached both to clergy and laity, and came to be held in

⁵ Here follow two chapters in the original, containing sketches of other sermons preached by Tauler; but as they are less valuable than most of his sermons, and have nothing whatever to do with the progress of the story, I have judged it best to omit them.—Tr.

such esteem and honour throughout the land, and also in that city, that whenever the people had any weighty matter to transact, he was called in to settle it with his wisdom, whether it concerned spiritual or temporal affairs, and whatever he counselled them was right in their eyes, and they hearkened unto him gladly. And after that the Master had led this faithful life full eight years, God would not leave His servant longer in this earthly misery, and saw fit to take him to Himself without purgatory. Wherefore He sent His judgments upon him, and visited him with sickness, so that the Master kept his bed for more than twenty weeks, and his sufferings were very sore, and his pains grievous. Then he perceived, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he was about to depart from this world (God was minded to reward him for his work); wherefore he sent for the man, his dear friend, and begged him to come to him, for he expected not to be much longer in this world. And the man hearkened and came to the Master, who received him after a most friendly sort; and the man was glad that he found him yet alive, and said, "Dear Master, how fares it with you?" The Master said, "I believe that the time is very near when God purposes to take me from this world, for which cause, dear son, it is a great consolation to me that thou art present at my end. I pray thee take these books which are lying there: thou wilt find written therein all thy discourse with me aforetime, and also my answers, and thou wilt find somewhat concerning my life, and the dealings of God with me His poor unworthy servant. Dear son, if thou think fit, and if God give thee grace, make a little book of it." Then said the man, "Dear Master, I have written down five of these sermons, and if it please you, I will write them out also, and will make a little book about you." Quoth the Master, "Dear son, I lay upon thee my most solemn admonition, that thou write nothing about me, and that thou do not mention my name; for thou must know that of a truth the life, and words, and works which God has wrought through me a poor, unworthy, sinful man are not mine, but belong to God Almighty, now and for evermore; therefore, dear son, if thou wilt write it down for the profit of our fellow-Christians, write it so that neither my name nor thine be named, but thou mayst say the Master and the man. Moreover, thou shalt not suffer the book to be read or seen by any one in this town, lest he should mark that it was I, but take it home with thee to thy own country, and let it not come out during my life."

And for a space of eleven days the Master held much discourse with the man. After that, the time came that the Master should die. Then he said, "Dear son, I pray thee, in God's name, to give thy consent to it, if God should permit my spirit to come back to thee, and tell thee how it fared with me." The man answered, "Dear Master, if God will have it so, I am also willing." But it came to pass that at the last the Master had a most horrible and frightful death-struggle, insomuch that all the brethren in the convent, and also other people, were greatly terrified and distressed thereat, and were sore amazed at the dreadful anguish that they saw in his death.

Now when he was dead, all who were in the convent and the city were filled with sorrow. But when they perceived who was the man that had been so long his bosom-friend in secret, they came and desired to show him honour, and besought him to be their guest. But when he was aware of their intent, he fled that same hour out of the city, and travelled home again. And as he was on the way, the third day after the Master's death, at nightfall he was passing through a little village with his servant, and seeing a nobleman go past along the road, he said to him, "My friend, is there any inn in this village?" The nobleman answered, "No." Then said the man, "Then show us the kindness, dear friend, in God's name, to let us lodge in thy house for to-night, and take for it what thou wilt." Then he said, "If you will put up with such things as we have, I will willingly lodge you, and give

98

you the best in my power.” So he took him home with him. When it was night he laid the man upon a feather-bed, and showed the servant into the barn to lie upon the straw. Now in the night the man awoke and heard a voice close by; yet he saw no one. Then a shudder ran through him, and he made the sign of the Cross. Then the voice said, “Fear not, dear son, it is I, the Master.” Then said the man, “Dear Master, is it you? Then I beseech you, with my whole heart, to tell me, if God will, how it standeth with you, and how it came to pass that you had such a dreadful end; for your brethren in the convent were much astonied at you, and it is to be feared that your frightful end will be a great stumbling-block to your own brethren in the convent.” Then said the Master’s voice, “Dear son, that will I tell thee. Thou must know that our Lord God saw fit to appoint me such a hard death in order that the holy angels might straightway receive my soul to themselves; and for the same cause thou shalt also have such a like hard death. It was needful that I should suffer this as a purgatory; but know likewise, my dear son, that the evil spirits tormented me greatly, and assailed me with such cunning and instancy, that I was in constant fear lest my courage should fail me. But, however hard my death was, it was as nothing compared to the joy which the Almighty, Eternal, and Merciful God hath given me in return. Know, dear son, that the same hour in which my soul left my body, the blessed angels received it, and conducted me to Paradise, and said to me, ‘Here shalt thou tarry five days, and shalt know no anxiety or fear lest the evil spirits should harm thee any more, neither shalt thou labour any more, only thou shalt be deprived for these five days of the blissful company of the blessed in eternity. And then we will come again with joy, and bring thee to the unspeakable joys, and reward thee for thy good and faithful teaching and useful counsels;’ all which I have received by thy excellent instruction, for the which I can never thank God and thee enough.”

99

Then said the man: “Dear Master, I beseech you from the bottom of my heart that when you come into the presence of God, you pray Him for me.” But whatever the man said after this, or whatever questions he put, no one answered him again. Then he would fain have slept, and turned from one side to the other; but it availed him nothing: he got no more rest that night, and could hardly wait till it was light. And at daybreak he rose up, and wrote that same hour word to the Prior and brethren of all things that the spirit had said to him, and returned to his own house, and came also to a good and blessed end.

That we may all follow the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ, insomuch that after this miserable life and this transitory world we may come to eternal and never-ending joys,—to God and His chosen and beloved friends, may He help us, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen!

Here endeth the History of the Life of the enlightened Doctor John Tauler.



Introductory Notice

respecting

Tauler's Life and Times

By the Translator.

JOHN TAULER, who appears as “the Master” in the foregoing History, was born at Strasburg in the year 1290. His father was most probably Nicolas Tauler, whose name occurs among those of the senators of Strasburg in 1313. At all events, he belonged to a tolerably wealthy family, and might have lived on his patrimony since he tells us in one of his sermons: “Had I known when I lived as my father’s son, all that I know now, I would have lived on his heritage and not upon alms.” He devoted himself, however, in early years to a clerical life, and entered the Dominican Order in Strasburg, taking up his abode in the handsome, spacious convent belonging to that Order, the church of which was consecrated in the year 1308. A sister of his was a nun in the convent of St. Nicolas at Krautenau, likewise belonging to the Dominican Order. In what year Tauler renounced the world cannot be determined with precision, but there can be little doubt that he did so at the same time with his friend John von Dambach, in 1308. From allusions in his writings, it seems probable that he soon after, with the same friend, betook himself to Paris, the great metropolis of Christian learning in that age, in order to study theology in the famous Dominican College of St. Jacques, from which the monks of that Order were called Jacobins in France.

The University concentrated within its precincts representatives of the varied intellectual tendencies of the age. Up to the middle of the thirteenth century, it had been distinguished by the freedom of thought which prevailed among its teachers, unshackled as they were by any episcopal, almost by any regal jurisdiction over their doctrine, and acknowledging only the authority of the Pope himself, directly exercised. The influence of the all-questioning Abelard, the subtle Gilbert de la Porée, the pantheistic Amaury de Bene, and other free-thinking teachers, was not extinct, though they lay under the censure of heresy. The works of Aristotle, condemned in 1209, had been gradually introduced into the schools, with the Arabian commentaries of Avicenna and Averrhoes. The Dominican Order, founded for the extirpation of heresy, early recognised the prime necessity of providing instruction which should purify the streams of human thought at their fountain-head; and in spite of the opposition raised by the heads of the University, succeeded, in 1228, in establishing theological chairs in their convent in Paris, from which to combat the heathenising philosophers of Christendom with their own weapons of reason; and in Albert the Great, and Thomas Aquinas they may be said to have reconquered philosophy for the Church, and Christianised Aristotle, who thenceforth became the established master of philosophy, but was studied through the commentaries of the great Dominican luminary.

But the colossal volumes of the schoolmen, embracing as they did within the vast sweep of their speculation disquisitions upon the nature of the Godhead, upon the universe of superhuman

intelligence revealed by the pseudo-Dionysius, and upon the nature of man and matter,—while affording a tremendous gymnastic discipline to the human intellect, were barren in actual practical results, and might well be unsatisfactory to one whose soul craved to be something more than a logical athlete. And it is evident that, in his later life, Tauler did not look back upon the scholastic theology which he studied during his sojourn in Paris as having taught him that which answered to the needs of his spirit. Thus, in one passage of his sermons he says: “These great masters of Paris do read vast books, and turn over the leaves with great diligence, which is a very good thing; but these [spiritually enlightened men] read the true living book, wherein all things live: they turn over the pages of the heavens and the earth, and read therein the mighty and admirable wonders of God.” He seldom cites any of the schoolmen in his writings, with the exception of “Master Thomas;” but he not unfrequently refers to Aristotle, under the title of the “Natural Master,” or the “Master of Nature.” The authors who seem to have had the greatest attraction for him, and whom he must have early made the subject of his study, judging from the acquaintance with them displayed in his writings, and the little leisure which he could have had for such pursuits during the busy activity of his later years, were the more mystical and speculative among the ecclesiastical writers, the pseudo-Dionysius, the Monks of the school of St. Victor, St. Bernard, and above all St. Augustine. Neither was he a stranger to the Neo-platonists,—Proclus is referred to several times in his writings.

103

While the whole bent of Tauler’s mind thus appears to have disposed him to contemplation on the great spiritual questions immediately affecting man’s actual destiny, rather than more purely intellectual theses, he must, on returning from Paris to Strasburg, have come in contact with several of the mystical teachers whom we know to have flourished there about this time, and who certainly cannot have been without influence on the course of his mental development. The most eminent of these was the celebrated Master Eckart, a brother of his own Order, who, after having filled the important offices of Provincial in Saxony and Vicar-General in Bohemia, had returned to Strasburg, where, with the earnestness of profound conviction, he was now discoursing to the people in their native tongue, on lofty philosophical themes, till then only deemed fit to be treated of in Latin before learned assemblies; and which he handled in a way that he himself confesses to be contrary to what any of the Masters had taught hitherto. Yet it is clear, from the accusations afterwards brought against him of misleading the vulgar, that the metaphysical speculations which form the staple of his sermons, though they would seem to us utterly beyond the range of ordinary thinkers, must have touched some chords in the hearts of the multitude, expressed as they are, not only in a sharp, clear, forcible style, but often clothed in a thoroughly popular form, and illustrated by metaphors appealing to the eye, and allegorical interpretations of Scripture histories.⁶

104

The man himself and his doctrines were equally calculated to make a powerful impression on the mind of the youthful Tauler, already dissatisfied with the frigid subtleties of the dialecticians,

⁶ I borrow the following note from Schmidt’s “*Eckart.*” *Theolog. Stud. u. Krit.* 1839, S. 684, An. 15. “The raising of the widow’s son furnishes him with materials for more than one allegory. In the Second Sermon on the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, the widow is first the soul, and her dead son, the Reason, which our Lord animates with new life; afterwards a widow signifies a forsaken one, and taken in an abstract sense, a state of loneliness, and forthwith Eckart springs to the conclusion, that therefore we also must forsake all things. In the story of the woman of Samaria, the woman is a type of the soul, the five husbands whom she has had are the five senses; with these she had sinned, and therefore are they dead. Christ says: ‘Bring hither thy husband;’ this is Free-will. She replies; ‘I have no husband;’ on which Christ says: ‘Thou hast well said I have no husband;’ that is, her Free-will was not her own, but in bondage to sin, etc.”

and arriving at an age when he was called on to exercise his vocation as a preaching friar in times of extraordinary commotion and perplexity.

Eckart's keen and soaring intellect had been trained by a close study of the Fathers and the Schoolmen before he became a professor in the convent at St. Jacques at Paris, in which position he soon acquired no ordinary fame; being esteemed (according to the statement of the Abbot Trithemius in his great encyclopædia of ecclesiastical writers) "the most learned man of his day in the Aristotelian philosophy." The vivid remembrance of such a master would be still lingering in the hearts of many pupils when Tauler came to Paris; though Eckart himself must have quitted his professorship some years before, as, on account of the severity of his morals and the firmness of his character, he was appointed, in 1304, Provincial of the Dominican Order in Saxony, where he laboured with such success in the restoration of discipline, that three years later he was made Vicar-General of Saxony, with the express commission to undertake any improvements and reforms in the Order that he might judge necessary. In this new sphere of action, likewise, he soon became celebrated as a preacher and metaphysical teacher. From this date, when he was held in reverence by the Church, he disappears from our view for a space of some years; after which we find him in Strasburg, divested of his dignities, but preaching with great effect his peculiar doctrines, now in his mature life elaborated into a system which has been claimed by Hegel and some of his disciples as the parent of the German philosophy.⁷ To say whether this claim is just would require a knowledge of Hegel and his school, which I do not possess.⁸ That which was the aim of all Eckart's reasonings, to which all else was but a means, was the perfect repose of a spirit in absolute union with God, and dwelling in a region far above the clouds and tempests of this changeful, barren life of sense. He himself appears to have attained in a high degree to this state of abiding peace; yet his writings are pervaded by a strain of deep lamentation over the imperfections of this earthly sphere, and the misery arising from a sense of separation from God. In fact, he certainly retains a positive and vivid sense of the nature of sin; whether this be consistent with Pantheism or Hegelianism, I leave those better qualified to judge. In the passionate endeavour to free himself from the entanglements of the creature, and to enter into living union with God, he, however, undoubtedly does not escape the danger of merging created existence in the one uncreated Essence which alone has true Being, and forgetting the limits that bar our approach to the Infinite. Thus he says; "That word, I *am*, can none truly speak but God alone." "He has the Substance of all creatures in Himself; He is a being that has all Being in Himself." "All things are in God, and all things are God." "All creatures in themselves are naught; all creatures are a speaking of God." "Dost thou ask me what was the purpose of the Creator when He made the creatures? I answer, Repose. Dost thou ask again what all creatures seek in their spontaneous aspiration? I answer again, Repose. Dost thou ask a third time what the soul seeks in all her motions? I answer, Repose. Consciously or unconsciously all creatures seek their proper state. The stone cannot cease moving till it touch the earth; the fire rises up to heaven: thus a loving soul can never rest but in God, and so we say God has given to all things their proper place,—to the fish the water, to the bird the air, to the beast the earth, to the soul the Godhead." "Simple people conceive that we are to see God, as if He stood on that side and we on this. It is not so; God and I are one in the act of my perceiving Him." "O noble soul, put on these wings to

105

106

⁷ See Schmidt's *Eckart. Theol. Stud. u. Krit.* 1839, S. 663.

⁸ Neither is my acquaintance with Eckart extensive; but I have made no statement in the text which does not seem to me to be substantiated by what I have read of his writings.

thy feet and rise above all creatures, and above thine own reason, and above the angelic choirs, and above the light that has given thee strength, and throw thyself upon the heart of God; there shalt thou lie hidden from all creatures.” But if, in thus denying a separate existence to the creature, he uses expressions which logically conduct to Pantheism, on the other hand his God is clearly a living God; not a mere object of philosophical thought, but an actual and working reality.⁹ So, again, some of his expressions might seem to imply Antinomianism, as when he says: “Whenever a man enters into this union with God, that God is so dear to him that he forgets himself, nor seeks himself either in time or in eternity, so oft does he become free from all his sins and all his purgatory, though he should have committed all the sins of all mankind:” and we can hardly doubt, from what we read of the Brethren of the Free Spirit, that some did abuse Eckart’s doctrine of the inward freedom of the spirit to justify sin in pretenders to piety. But it does not seem that even his enemies ever doubted of his own high morality; while Quétif and Echard, in their *Scriptores ordinis Prædicatorum*, praise him as a *virum moribus et scientia probatissimum, omni laude superiorem*, and add that a hundred years after him a brother of his Order says of him, that he was *vita purissimus, expedites Doctor Ecclesiæ, suo tempore incomparabilis eruditione, fide, conversatione et moribus insignis*.

Eckart always endeavours to bring his speculations into combination with the theology of the Church; but the interpretation which he puts upon the received dogmas often deviates widely from their spirit.¹⁰ He evidently regards, nay, openly proclaims outward rites and observances as not necessary to the essence of piety. Traces of his familiarity with the Schoolmen may be found in his subtile and often purely formal distinctions and syllogisms; but their spirit was utterly repugnant to his. On this point Professor Schmidt says:—“Regarding Neoplatonism as by no means incompatible with Christianity, his philosophical views resemble in their general tendency those of Dionysius Areopagita, combining with them the mystical elements contained in the writings of St. Augustine. The theory of that great Father respecting the total corruption of human nature does not, however, occur in his writings in the sense in which it is understood by the Church. With Plato himself he is not unacquainted, but cites him several times, calling him ‘the great Parson’ (*Der grosse Pfaffe*). Scotus Erigena, the translator of the Platonizing Dionysius, though not named in his writings, must be regarded as furnishing the starting point for his theories. Of the other mystics of the middle ages he only names St. Bernard. But he has not rested within the systems advanced by any of the philosophers he studied; he made all the ideas that he may have derived from them his own, and gave them a further development, so that his position is that of a thoroughly original thinker.”

⁹ The second Sermon in the following collection, which is undoubtedly by him, exhibits the mode in which he presents abstract doctrines clothed in a popular form, and is not an unfavourable specimen of his style, though even more fragmentary than some others of his discourses.

¹⁰ He was, for instance, accused of teaching that Hell did not exist: his real teaching was that it consisted in the absence of God, as appears from the following passage:—“It is a question, what burns in hell? The Masters commonly say, Self-will. But I say of a truth that *Nought* burns in hell. Whereof mark this likeness. Were you to take a burning coal and lay it on my hand, if I were to say that the coal burnt my hand I should do it a great injustice. Strictly speaking, what burns me is *Nought*; for the coal has something in it which my hand has not. See, it is that same *Not* which burns me. If my hand possessed all the essence and qualities of a coal, it would have altogether the nature of fire; and then, if you were to throw all the fire that ever burnt upon my hand, it would not give me pain. In like manner, I say, if God, and those who are in the light of His countenance, have aught of true blessedness which those have not who are separated from God, it is that same *Not* which tortures the souls that are in hell, more than any fire or than self-will.”

After preaching some time in Strasburg, Eckart appears to have removed to Cologne. It is not known whether or not he had found it necessary to leave the former city; but it seems not improbable that he may have fallen under accusation of heresy there, from the circumstance that many of the propositions condemned, by the Bishop (John of Ochsenstein) in 1317, as the doctrines of the Strasburg Beghards, agree, often word for word, with propositions to be found in Eckart's writings. In Cologne he preached publicly for a few years in the church of his convent, and taught in the university; but he was not suffered to remain long unmolested. The way in which his writings were used by the Beghards, who were condemned by the Archbishop of Cologne in 1322, appears to have drawn the attention of the latter to his preaching. He cited Eckart to appear before him, and accused him of heresy; but as Eckart refused to submit to his sentence, and continued to preach, the Archbishop appealed to the Pope. His writings were at length condemned in a bull dated March 1329, from which it appears that he was then no more, as it is stated that he had returned to the Catholic faith before his death. It seems utterly inconsistent with the deep conviction that pervades his writings, and the inflexibility of his character, to suppose that he should have recanted any of his doctrines; but probably he merely expressed his adherence to the doctrines of the Church, which he never seems to have intended to impugn, but to place upon what he regarded as their true foundation. He never separated from the communion of the Church, and gathered round him in Cologne a circle of ardent admirers, among whom was probably Tauler¹¹ (who seems to have often visited Cologne), and certainly Suso, whose biographer relates: "After these dreadful sufferings (of conscience) had lasted near upon ten years, . . . he came to the holy Master Eckart, and told him of his pain, . . . and the Doctor helped him out of it."¹²

Tauler's influence upon his countrymen has been so much more powerful and enduring than that of Eckart, that he has often been called erroneously the first of the German Mystics, and Eckart represented as his pupil. While, however, in his general cast of thought and language, Tauler bears traces of Eckart's influence, his views do not appear at any period to have been identical with those of his forerunner. Though inclined to speculation, his whole turn of mind and character was more practical than that of Eckart, and his attention more directed to the application of religious principles to real life. Even the sermon which, as we have read, he preached before the remarkable change wrought in him through the agency of the great Layman, though displaying more formality and subtlety with less of tenderness, unction, and spirituality than generally characterize his later sermons, is yet far less abstruse and metaphysical, and has far more bearing upon morals and life, than is the case with Eckart's discourses.

There was, however, another famous Dominican preacher at Strasburg, in Tauler's youthful days, Nicolas of Strasburg, who though also a mystic, and possessing a very powerful intellect, was a man of a very different stamp from Eckart, and who appears to have always stood in high favour with the heads of the Church. He was the author of several works, and was appointed by Pope John XXII. Nuncio, with the oversight of all the Dominican convents in the province of Germany. I have not had the opportunity of reading any of his productions; Professor Schmidt describes his preaching as less speculative and much more popular, intelligible, and practical than Eckart's, and says that "his sermons are rather mystical and ascetic than, strictly speaking,

¹¹ Tauler quotes Eckart. See the Second Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

¹² See Diepenbrock's *Suso*. Regensburg, 1829. S. 71. A very interesting account of Suso's life, concerning which much more is known than of Tauler's, is given in Ullmann's "Reformers before the Reformation." See p. 190, etc.

metaphysical; they breathe a profound yearning after inward peace and a glowing love to God, but do not display an intellect so lofty as that of the great mystic.” That he was, however, a man of extraordinary learning is evinced by a work which he wrote on the coming of Anti-Christ, and the second Advent of Our Lord, in order to prove that the numerous legends and prophecies current in that age, as in all times of great calamity and mighty convulsions, were unworthy of credit, and that nothing positive was to be learnt from Holy Scripture respecting the date of future events.¹³

112

There were many other mystics in Strasburg at this date, of whom nothing is known beyond their names, but this very fact is sufficient to prove the wide diffusion of such doctrines in that city. The same phenomenon also meets us in a heretical guise, among the fanatical Beghards who since the close of the thirteenth century had filled the Rhenish provinces with their doctrines of the absolute freedom of the spirit, and the abolition of all distinctions between the Creator and the creature. They were denominated (most likely by the title of their own choosing) the Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit, and made proselytes equally among the laity and clergy. In the year 1317, Bishop Ochsenstein complains that Alsace was full of them, and in a circular to the clergy of his diocese, he condemns the mystical and pantheistic doctrines of this sect, whose members were given over to the secular authorities, and by them apparently punished with imprisonment. Whether or no Eckart was connected with them, they do not seem to have exercised any influence upon Tauler; for in his sermons he repeatedly inveighs against “The Free Spirits,” who he says, “striving after a false freedom, and on pretext of following the inward light, follow only the inclinations of their own nature.”

113

But besides the Beghards, there were still lingering in Southern Germany and Italy, remains of the Albigenses and Waldenses and Manichean Cathari,—reverers of the Abbot Joachim’s Eternal Gospel of the Holy Ghost (that was to overthrow the Gospel of the Son),—believers in the visions of the Prophetess Hildegard,—adherents of the revolutionary Oliva and Fra Dolcino. There were, indeed, many reasons why heresies and religious divisions should abound in these regions at this period. Not only was the German Empire, as we shall soon see, torn by political dissensions, which in many ways were interwoven with the religious controversies then afloat, but there was variance between the heads of the Church and its most efficient servants,—the devoted, hard-working, enthusiastic Franciscans. The two Mendicant Orders were formed to reclaim for the Papacy her empire over the human mind, which in the twelfth century was threatened on the one hand by the moral purity and elevation of the Albigenses, who almost occupied the fairest provinces of France, on the other by the learning and civilisation no less than the arms of the Mahometan infidels; and faithfully had they accomplished their vocation, by turns refuting heretics by their learning or dazzling them by miracles, outshining them in ascetic purity, crushing them by the Inquisition, or winning them by self-devoted charity. While the higher ecclesiastics, above all the Papal court, were enormously wealthy, and, with few exceptions, absorbed in secular objects and pleasures,—the parochial clergy likewise often worldly and vicious, generally ignorant and inert,—the wandering friars came among the neglected flocks, roused them from the sleep of sin, reclaimed the vicious,

¹³ In the first part of this treatise he cites authorities from the heathen authors to prove the truth of Christianity to those who rejected the Old Testament with the New. In the second, he reviews the writings of the Jews, and refutes their doctrines where they are at variance with Christianity. The third, *de Anti-Christo ac fine mundi*, contains extracts from the prophecies of Hildegard, Joachim, and other mediæval pseudo-seers, which he treats with contempt. The whole treatise exhibits a vast amount of reading in the ancient classics, as well as the Christian and Jewish writers of the Middle Ages. This work was dedicated to Pope John XXII.

114 convinced the scoffer, brought hope to the wretched, consolation to the sick and dying; and, as a natural result, the people were eager to express their gratitude by placing their property in the hands of the Order which had shown such zeal for their souls. And thus, though forbidden by their original constitution to hold property, in a few years the amount of wealth which they accumulated from the bequests of the dying was so large as to excite the jealousy of the regular clergy, already irritated by the friars' denunciation of worldliness, and the tacit censure of themselves implied in the ascetic lives and burning zeal of their rivals, and they repeatedly demanded the suppression of the two Orders.

115 But within the Orders themselves had soon sprung up the old strife and division that seems to threaten the life of all spiritual organizations in the second generation, arising from the innate antagonism between the self-indulgence, prudence, and acquisitiveness inherent in human nature, and the pure but unreasoning spiritual impulses to which they have owed their existence. The Dominicans, with their characteristic address, retained the conflicting elements within their own bosom, and equally availed themselves of fervent piety or worldly power. The Franciscans, more enthusiastic and less far-sighted, divided into two parties,—those who consented to hold property in trust for the See of Rome, and those termed Spiritual Franciscans, who adhered rigidly to the literal interpretation of their rule of absolute poverty. From the latter sprang numerous spiritual and mystical sects, differing in their tenets, but all coinciding in their fervid faith and their inculcation of poverty and asceticism, all democratic as regarded hierarchical authority, and many involving all the wealthy and noble in their hatred to wealth and power. Doctrines of this kind were indeed sure to find acceptance among the oppressed serfs and lower classes in general; and by their very essence the Franciscans had entirely cast in their lot with the people. Among these sects the Fraticelli, who flourished at the beginning of this century, foretold the overthrow of the corrupt and carnal Papacy, and the establishment of a spiritual kingdom ruled over by “the Perfect.” The eremitical Cœlestines, the charitable Beguines, who originally devoted themselves to works of mercy, the devotional Lollards, nay, probably the brethren and sisters of the Free Spirit, seem also to have been offshoots from these Spiritual Franciscans.

116 The Pope now ruling had, however, put himself in opposition with those of the Spiritual party who remained within the bounds of their Order, and were guilty of no heresy but that of asserting the absolute poverty of Christ and His Apostles. He deposed the General of the Order, and caused the inmates of many convents to be persecuted for maintaining a doctrine which struck at the root of the Papal authority. In return, they boldly denounced the Pope as a heretic, and became important auxiliaries to the Emperor Louis IV. in that long struggle which occupies the period we are considering. They found powerful coadjutors in the profoundly learned and able politicians,—William of Ockham and Marsilio of Padua, whose writings taught men to investigate the origin of the Papal power. But not only from the princes with whom the Pope interfered, and the miserable populace whose passions were at the mercy of fanatical preachers or demagogues; from the burghers in the cities there also arose a strenuous opposition to the outrageous claims and the arbitrary tyranny of the hierarchy. This class had long been rising in wealth and importance; and in the earlier half of this fourteenth century they succeeded in obtaining a share of the government in nearly all the chief cities of Germany; and the men who had emancipated themselves from the temporal rule of the Bishop and his aristocracy, and were rejoicing in the fresh air of freedom and the sense of manhood, were not inclined to follow any longer blindly and unquestioningly their spiritual masters.

With the double election of Frederic of Austria and Louis of Bavaria, who were both crowned on the 25th of November 1314, at Aix-la-Chapelle, began a desolating warfare, which lasted for eight years, till the Battle of Muehldorf in 1322 left Frederic a prisoner in the hands of Louis. Strasburg was divided between the rival Emperors. The Bishop and the important family of the Zorn were adherents of Frederic; but the no less important family of the Muellenheim declared for Louis; and the latter had the greater part of the citizens on their side. Thus, when Frederic ascended the Rhine and arrived in Strasburg in January 1315, he was not received as their sovereign by the citizens, but merely treated as an illustrious guest; while, on the contrary, the Bishop and clergy paid him regal honours, which procured them various proofs of his favour. Louis, on hearing in his camp at Spires the conduct of the citizens, confirmed the liberties and privileges of the city. When, five years later, in August 1320, Louis came with his army to Strasburg, the burghers solemnly tendered him allegiance in the cathedral, in return for which he again confirmed their privileges; but the clergy had suspended the offices of public worship, and the greater part of the nobles still sided with them. On the captivity of Frederic, most of the imperial cities of Alsace came over to Louis; but this did not restore concord to the afflicted land: for Pope John XXII., bent upon the humiliation of Louis, whose popularity and power were such as threatened to render him too independent of the Holy See, now interfered in the affairs of the Empire, and by his persistent refusal to acknowledge Louis, brought down unspeakable calamities on Europe, while he stirred up the people to a resistance which could not but in the end prove fatal to their reverence for the Papal Chair. So long as the strife lasted between Frederic and Louis, John XXII., while claiming it as his right to decide between them, had refrained from pronouncing any actual decision for either party; but as soon as the former was subdued, and there was a prospect of peace, he instituted a process against the victorious Louis for assuming the title of King of the Romans before receiving the Papal sanction, admonished him to lay down all his powers, and forbade his subjects to render further fealty to him. But when in the following year it appeared that the real object of the Pope was to depose Louis altogether, and raise the King of France to the throne, the Diet assembled at Frankfurt declared almost unanimously for their brave Emperor, in defiance of the unrighteous claims of the Romish See. The Pope in return laid all who had acknowledged Louis under interdict in July 1324, from which some places were not released for six-and-twenty years. It must not be forgotten what this sentence involved, how intimately its consequences were felt in every parish and every home, when the churches stood silent and empty for years, the lawless and wicked were left unwarned, and the pious deprived of the consolation of worship and the holy communion during all this most dark and troubled period. But, in spite of its terrors, the German people, and even the greater part of the clergy, took part with their princes, with the exception, however, of the Bishops of Passau and Strasburg. The city of Strasburg, however, remained faithful to Louis, resisting by force the officers who attempted to proclaim the Papal fulmination against the Emperor, and sending troops to his assistance. The Bishop John von Ochsenstein died in 1338; but his successor, Berthold von Bucheke, trod in his footsteps. Strasburg itself, like most of the German cities, took but little heed of the Interdict and the repeated sentences of excommunication hurled against Louis by the Pope. The internal division still continued, headed by the two families of Zorn and Muellenheim, till in 1332 a sanguinary contest took place, which resulted in the overthrow of the old constitution of the city, and the introduction of the craftsmen into the Senate. But the new magistrates and the Bishop remained as much at variance as ever. In 1338, the latter induced his Metropolitan, the Archbishop of Mayence, to convene an assembly of German Bishops at Spires, from which the

119 prelates despatched an address to the Pope Benedict XII., earnestly beseeching him to be reconciled with Louis, and put an end to this lamentable state of discord. Their petition was supported by envoys from the Estates of the Empire, moved thereto by Louis, who declared himself ready to yield all obedience to the Holy See which was consistent with God's glory, his own just right, and the weal of the Empire. But as, in spite of these and similar efforts, the Pope continued to prescribe conditions which made a reconciliation impossible, the Bishop of Strasburg continued to withstand the Emperor, and do all that lay in his power to injure the imperial cause in Alsace. Louis now resolved to resort to decisive measures against this restless adversary, and in 1329 commanded the Rhenish cities to join the Duke Rudolf of Bavaria and Conrad Lord of Kinkel, in attacking Berthold. The latter, having for allies the Duke of Austria, the Count of Wurtemberg, the Bishop of Basle, and other nobles, took the field, beleaguered several cities of Alsace, and laid waste the surrounding country: his opponents carried reprisals into his territories. Strasburg, wearied out with the misery caused by this never-ceasing contention, at length declared to the Bishop that it would no longer yield him obedience unless he made peace with the Emperor; and the Prelate, whose arms had moreover met with reverses, and whose finances were exhausted, fearing lest the other towns of his diocese should follow the example of Strasburg, resolved to do homage to Louis and receive investiture from him, under the reservation of absolute obedience to the Pope, while he sent an envoy to Benedict XII. representing his desperate condition, and requesting permission to sheathe the sword. Both Emperor and Pope conceded his requests; and from this time forward he did all that he could to maintain tranquillity within his bishopric, which was the more necessary, as the controversy between the Empire and the Papacy grew more envenomed.

120 After the famous meeting of the Electoral College at Rhense, near Coblenz, in July 1338, had declared that the King of the Romans received his dignity and power solely from the free choice of the Electors, and the Imperial Diet, held immediately after, had made it a fundamental law of the Empire, that "the imperial dignity is bestowed directly by God, and he who has been legitimately chosen by the Electoral Princes, becomes thereby King and Emperor without further confirmation by the Pope or any other,"—Louis published a Manifesto to all Christendom, refuting at full length the accusations brought against him by the previous Pope, and proving that the Pope has no authority to sit in judgment on the Emperor. He further commanded that none should observe the papal excommunication and interdict, and sentenced all those, whether individuals or whole cities and communities, who should continue to submit to the bann, to be deprived of their rights and liberties.

121 Great was the impression made by this bold Edict upon the German people, who rallied more and more universally around the Emperor who thus defended his own rights and the honour of the Empire. But concord was banished further than ever, for the clergy in many cases resisted the Emperor's command to resume the services which had been so long suspended, while the citizens, who had borne with impatience their terrible deprivation of the sacred rites, now on the strength of the Edict issued orders that all the clergy who refused to perform service should be banished. Many priests left their churches and removed into other provinces, numerous convents stood empty of their inmates; still in most places there remained a sufficient number of priests and monks to fulfil the duties of their vocation. This was the case in Strasburg; the city had already suffered all the calamities consequent on the Interdict: the clergy had split into two parties; the larger number obeyed the Pope's commands; the Augustinians especially had for many years suspended the performance of all religious services. The Dominicans and the Franciscans had availed themselves of the privilege early granted to their Orders of celebrating mass during a time of interdict. But

now, when the Emperor so openly set himself in opposition to the Pope, they too, terrified by the sentence of excommunication hanging over them, refused in many instances to say mass, on which the Senate of Strasburg proclaimed:—

“Either let them go on to sing,
Or out of the city let them spring.”

The Dominicans in general quitted the city, and Koenigshofen relates in his Chronicle, that they left their convent standing empty for more than two years; but no doubt many of the democratical Franciscans, who had always supported the Emperor, remained behind. They were, however, as we shall see, exceptions in these Orders to the general rule, which shows to how great an extent the brethren must have been guided by their individual conscience rather than their corporate organization.

Such were the scenes amidst which Tauler was called to labour as a Christian minister and Dominican monk. Of the manner in which he fulfilled his work, and the vicissitudes of his personal career, history has preserved but a small number of facts, but these, though few, are significant. All the testimonies that have come down to us respecting him, concur in bearing witness to the universal affection and esteem with which he was regarded. Even so far distant as Italy his name was known as a teacher of high repute, who insisted on inward piety. The famous Brother Venturini, of Bergamo, who was residing at that time under disgrace in a convent at Marveges, names him in a letter which he writes to another Dominican in Strasburg, Egenolph von Ehenheim, calling him his beloved John Tauler, and wishing to enter into correspondence with him, because he perceives that “through him and others the name of Christ will be spread abroad, ever more and more, throughout Germany.” Egenolph himself was one of these “others,” who were fellow-workers with Tauler. His early friend, Johann von Dambach was also here at this time.

But the most remarkable trait in this period of Tauler’s life is that he not only, unlike most of his Order, sided with the Emperor in his whole contest with the Pope, but did not suspend his activity when, in 1338, the great struggle came between the absolutely contradictory commands of his temporal and spiritual lords, and, as we have seen, his brethren quitted the town, and left their convent deserted for two years. By the departure of nearly all the clergy from Strasburg, Tauler found a still wider field of labour; and from allusions to him in letters of his contemporaries, it appears that he did not confine his exertions to that city, but preached from time to time at various places, from Cologne to Basle. Before the close of 1338 he seems to have made a somewhat lengthened visit to the latter city, where the state of things was very similar to that in Strasburg. The Bishop of Basle belonged to the opponents of Louis of Bavaria, and made common cause with the Bishop of Strasburg in attacking the adherents of the Emperor in 1339. The citizens again, like those of Strasburg, had remained faithful to Louis, and had even gone so far in their hostility to the Pope, that when, in 1330, John XXII. despatched an envoy to publish his bull against the Emperor, the incensed mob hurled him, although a priest and a dignitary, from the citadel into the river; and, when he tried to save himself by swimming, put out in boats after him and slew him. During the Interdict, however, most of the clergy, and especially the monks, had forsaken the churches, so that in many places the Sacrament had not been administered for fourteen years; and on the magistrates ordering them to resume their functions the greater part had refused to do so. About this time, however, the people of Basle by some means prevailed on the Pope to relax the severity of the Interdict for the space of a year.

In Basle, Tauler met with an old friend, Henry of Nordlingen, from whose letters most of the scanty notices of Tauler during this period are derived. He was a priest from Constance, which city he had been obliged to leave on account of his refusal to preach; for though a Bavarian by birth, and intimately connected with Tauler and others of similar views, he did not recognize Louis as the lawful Emperor. He is principally known by his correspondence with a very remarkable woman, Margaretha Ebner, a nun at the Convent of Maria Medingen, in the diocese of Augsburg. Her sister Christina was Abbess of the Convent of Engenthal, near Nuremberg. Both were distinguished by their mental endowments as well as their earnest piety, and were evidently held in great respect by Tauler, Suso, and others of that party. They seem also to have taken up a very decided position amidst the ecclesiastical commotions of their age, and were zealous partizans of Louis. Christina, famous for her visions, in one of her trances sees the Romish Church in the likeness of a magnificent Cathedral, the doors of which are, however, closed by reason of the Interdict. The singing of the priests within is heard; a crowd of people are standing round, but dare not enter. On a sudden a man in the garb of a preaching friar comes up to the nun, and tells her that he will give her words wherewith to console the forsaken multitude; and this man is Christ.

Tauler occasionally visited both these nuns, and was in correspondence with Margaretha¹⁴, whom he urges to write down her visions respecting the state of Christendom and the friends of God. For him they had a deep veneration, and constantly call him “our dear Father Tauler.” Christina learns, in one of her revelations, that he is “the holiest of God’s children now living on earth,” that “the spirit of God breathes through him, as sweet music through a lute;” Margaret speaks, too, sometimes of the joy that she has had in the presence of this great friend of God, and how hard it has been to part with him. She appears to have stood rather in the relation of a wise Christian friend and counsellor, than of a spiritual child, to Henry of Nordlingen, who from his letters seems to have been a man of gentle, pious spirit, more fitted for a quiet contemplative life than for the energetic activity required by the troublous times in which his lot was cast. He, like Tauler, was filled with anguish at the sight of the distress of those around him; but while Tauler’s grief stirred him up to vigorous efforts in their behalf, and his courage and energy rose with the emergency, the timid and hesitating Henry was unable to surmount the difficulties in which he found himself involved, and the greater the pressure of the times, the greater was his perplexity and longing for peace. Yet, when his scrupulous conscience allowed him to preach, his labours appear to have been fruitful in result. This was the case during Tauler’s visit to Basle, where he had previously been sojourning for some time in inactivity, after long wandering and much distress.¹⁵

When the Pope allowed public worship to be celebrated for a year at Basle, Henry’s friends, without his knowledge, procured him permission to preach, and give a forty days’ indulgence; and he then ventured to appear in public, encouraged by Tauler’s influence and counsel. Thus he says:—“Afterwards I came to Basle, to my and thy dear faithful Father Tauler (who was with me at thy house), and he helped me in every way he could with all fidelity.” He then writes: “The great

¹⁴ Only one short letter, however, has been preserved, from having been placed among those of Henry of Nordlingen, and it is too unimportant for insertion.

¹⁵ His letters give a lively picture of the real dangers to which his politics exposed him. Thus he says, “I have been called before the princes of this world who have proscribed me, so that there is no place of safety for me in this land, unless I would consent to perform mass.” Again, he would come to Margaretha, but “I may not as yet dare to appear openly in this land.” “If the Emperor should leave the country, perhaps I might be able to see thee, if it were God’s will.” “At Constance and in the neighbouring country the priests have been everywhere ordered to sing mass, so that I do not know where I shall be able to remain.”

126

mercy has been granted us that we may celebrate mass in public, with the Pope's permission; and now do the hungry souls come with great desire to receive the Lord's body, which they have not been able to enjoy for fourteen years in Christian obedience. And now I entreat you, with special earnestness, that you pray to God for all those whom I feed with His Body, that we may receive His Holy Sacrament in His love, and administer it to His eternal glory, and the consolation of all Christian souls." He now preached every day, and often twice a day, besides performing mass daily; and so many of all classes streamed to confess to him that he was overwhelmed with his duties, and writes to his friend: "If I could manage it, I would gladly come to you; but I am not my own. I am the property of the whole Chapter, and the most important parishes. The people at Basle are not willing that I should leave them, neither, indeed, should I have courage to travel openly about the country; for I should be at the mercy of any ruffian or thief, and if aught befell me, no complaint would be laid against him. Still I trust in the Lord that He will suffer me to see thee, my heart's true consolation." But some months later he writes: "Methought I clung too much and with too carnal feelings to the ease, the luxurious and pleasant society, and the earthly comforts that I enjoyed at Basle. In truth I knew not that I did so while I had them, but felt it fully when I forsook them. Besides, I perceived in my heart, through many suggestions and admonitions, that my labours might be more needed elsewhere than at Basle, and so I ventured my departure for the sake of Christ and his flock, and have exchanged the marvellously holy and pleasant and acceptable society there for all manner of discomfort to my inward and outward man, by night and by day; so that now I must perforce retreat into myself, and take refuge in my only consolation, Christ Jesus, if I were unwilling to do so before."

127

By the persuasion of Tauler, Henry appears now for a time to have preached even in places which still lay under the Interdict, but afterwards, terrified by the violent censure of the clergy for his conduct, to have submitted again to the papal prohibition, and resumed his wanderings. Tauler, on the contrary, waited for no papal permission to do that which he considered to be the bounden duty of a clergyman, and after his visit to Basle it appears from Henry's letters that he travelled more than once as far as Cologne. In this city, where Master Eckart had spent the latter years of his life, numerous preachers had gone forth from his school, who continued to promulgate his doctrines with more or less ability and originality. Nicolas of Strasburg, too, was at this time lecturing at Cologne, probably driven from Strasburg by the troubles to which his papal politics would expose him at this period. This was the case also with Tauler's old friend, Johann von Dambach, who had not only declared that during the Interdict it was the duty of a pious Christian to submit unconditionally to the Church, but even composed several tractates to prove the justifiableness of the Interdict from the Canon Law. Yet, as we have seen Tauler and the Ebners in undisturbed friendship with Henry of Nordlingen, in spite of differences which entered so deeply into the life of those times, so, notwithstanding Dambach's antagonistic opinions, and his removal to the distant Prague¹⁶, the connection between him and Tauler was not broken off, as is proved by the circumstance, that, after 1350 he sent his book, "*De sensibilibus deliciis paradisi*" to their Alma Mater, the College of St Jacques, in Paris, in their joint names.

128

We now arrive at the date when that great change was produced in Tauler with which the foregoing "History" has acquainted us. Till recently, little was known of the "History," beyond the fact that it was found attached to some MSS. of Tauler's sermons, and many have doubted of its

¹⁶ He was made Professor at the newly-established University there in 1347.

genuineness. Quétif and Echard, for instance, have treated it as a mere allegory. By dint of laborious researches among the old MSS. of the libraries of Strasburg and Sarnen, and ingenious combinations of the results thence obtained, Professor Schmidt has not only established, in a way that it seems to me must be satisfactory to any one who goes through the evidence, that this Tractate is a perfectly genuine and truthful production, the work of the layman who professes to have written it, but also has succeeded in identifying this layman with a mysterious personage, called the Great Friend of God, in the Oberland, the head of a secret religious association; and the latter again, with a certain Nicolas of Basle, whose name, however, only occurs twice; once in the account of his own martyrdom, once in that of one of his disciples.

The most important of the MSS. examined by Professor Schmidt is a large folio volume, only recently discovered in the archives of Strasburg, and formerly belonging to the Convent of the Knights of St John in that city, called a *Briefbuch* [book of letters], and is for the most part a collection of letters and papers left by Rulman Merswin, the founder of the convent. This Rulman Merswin was a friend of Tauler (who was for some time his confessor), and, in the latter part of his life, of the "Layman," Nicolas, by whose advice he built a house for the Brethren of St John, on an island at Strasburg called the Gruenen-Worth (*green meadow*), and with whom he was in constant correspondence up to the time of his death in 1382. Several portions of this extremely curious *Briefbuch* were carefully copied into the archives of the convent, forming what is called its *Memorial*,¹⁷ but the codex itself did not belong to the public archives of the house, being kept secret from all but a few, on account of the private letters and notes contained in it, and therefore treasured up with peculiar care. So late as the seventeenth century, this was still the case, and a reader of that period has traced on the outer covering of the Codex the words: "*liber iste religiose custodiendus.*" The documents of which it consists were arranged, and most of them copied out, by Nicolas von Laufen, who (according to a few notices of himself, which he has inserted at the close of the *Briefbuch*) seems to have accompanied Rulman Merswin as his secretary, on taking possession of the newly-built Gruenen-Worth in 1366, and a few years later to have become a priest of the order of St John. The codex contains among other less important matter, a MS called "*The Book of the Five Men*," being an account of Nicolas and his four companions, in the handwriting of Nicolas himself; twenty-two of his letters, apparently copied by Nicolas von Laufen, and the original MS. of Rulman Merswin's account of the first four years of his religious history, in his own handwriting. Thus, after a lapse of five hundred years, we are able to learn more about this extraordinary half-mythical "Friend of God in the Oberland," than his very contemporaries knew.

From these documents we are able to obtain a general idea of the character and work of Nicolas, though the actual course of his history, especially during the earlier part of his life, is still almost entirely shrouded from view. All that we can discover respecting the commencement of his career is, that about the year 1328 or 1330, he was a youth of good family at Basle¹⁸, wealthy, universally esteemed, and possessed of abilities that ensured him success in all that he undertook. Nevertheless, he was unhappy, from the consciousness of his sinfulness and ignorance of divine things. Being, as a layman, uninstructed in Holy Scripture, he sought to master religious truths by the exercise of his reason; but his efforts to obtain satisfaction were in vain. For years he struggled with his own

¹⁷ The documents relating to the founders of the house are so called. Of this *Memorial* four copies are known to exist.

¹⁸ The place of his abode is not certain, but inferred from the dialect of the Tractate found in his own handwriting. See Schmidt's *Gottesfreunde*, S. 32.

131 intellectual difficulties and the temptations of the world. One day, as he was meditating on the transitory nature of all earthly things and the rapid flight of time, the thoughtlessness, sinfulness, and thorough forgetfulness of God in all those around him were presented in such vivid colours to his mind, that it seemed inconceivable to him how man could take any delight in this vain world; and then, as the thought of his own wasted time rose to his remembrance, he was filled with such bitter remorse that he resolved from that moment to renounce the world and dedicate his life to God. To this end, as we have seen¹⁹, he read the lives of the saints and imitated their austerities. This discipline he had carried on for five years before he found peace in the way he describes in the "History." He afterwards set himself to study the Scriptures (no doubt in Latin), and says that in a space of thirty weeks he had come to be able to understand it as thoroughly, and "speak as good grammar, as if he had studied all his days in the best Universities;" which extraordinary facility of acquisition he refers to special divine assistance. We know no more of him till we find him at the head of a society of "Friends of God," who live with him in utter seclusion from the world, and form the secret centre of a wide circle of religious activity, unconnected with any recognized order, but yet not overstepping the pale of the Church.

132 The title of "Friends of God" is one which meets us continually in the writings of those who are termed mystics in the fourteenth century, and is used in various connections. Sometimes it seems to denote those who were partakers of a spiritual in opposition to a formalistic piety; sometimes to denote the members of a particular body. Among those called "Friends of God" we find the names of individuals widely differing from each other in rank, vocation, opinion, and career; for they counted among their members Dominicans, such as Eckart, Tauler, Suso of Constance, and Henry of Nordlingen, and Franciscans, such as Otto of Passau; Knights married and single; nuns like Christina and Margaretha Elmer, and a Queen, Agnes the widow of King Andrew of Hungary; the rich banker, Rulman Merswin, and Conrad, the Abbot of Kaisersheim in Bavaria, who boasts, in a letter to Henry of Nordlingen, that he has not accepted the Bishop of Augsburg's absolution either for himself or his monastery; Conrad Brunsberg, again, the Grand-Master of the Knights of St John in Germany, besides the layman, Nicolas of Basle, and the great mystical author of the Netherlands, Ruysbroek. The appellation common to all these, with numbers of less distinguished persons, would seem to have been used among themselves to denominate those who could not but feel that they were more alive to the realities of religion and its spiritual nature than was the case with the multitude around them. That those possessing common sympathies on the subjects of highest import, should instinctively seek out and cling to each other, and thus an association should spontaneously grow up, even without any definite plan, is a natural and inevitable process, where a real, deep religious life has arrived at self-consciousness; and from a comparison of the passages in which Tauler and Henry of Nordlingen use the term "Friends of God," it appears to me that in the first instance the sense of having entered into a living, personal union with God, bringing with it a yearning pity for sinners, and a fervent desire to bring them to the same blessed state, was the sole distinction and bond of the "Friends of God."

¹⁹ See p. 20.

133

It is at all events clear that their union for common action was utterly independent of the attitude they assumed towards the great conflicting questions of the day; for, as we have seen in the Abbot of Kaisersheim, and Henry of Nordlingen, those are called “Friends of God,” and treat each other as brethren, who are as far asunder in their politics as the Chartists and High Tories of our own days. Neither did they form a sect, but, on the contrary, repudiated the idea, as is shown by the following passage from Tauler’s sermon on the twenty-second Sunday after Trinity, which I think, too, confirms this view of their origin. “The prince of this world has nowadays been sowing brambles among the roses in all directions, insomuch that the roses are often choked, or sorely torn by the brambles. Children, there must needs be a flight or a distinction; some sort of a separation, whether within the cloisters or without, and it does not make them into a sect, that the ‘Friends of God’ profess to be unlike the world’s friends.” The remark that the “Friends of God” were not a sect, would seem to prove that this accusation was brought against them; but, indeed, proof of this would seem superfluous, for then, as in all other times, it would infallibly happen that the unworldly and spiritual-minded, who recognized a nobler sort of religion than that comprised in the due observance of religious rites and decent moral conduct, should be charged with sectarianism and suspected of heresy, even if they broached no new dogmas, and went no farther than to bring out in their teaching and practice the real significance of the Church’s ordinances.

134

But the greater the sinfulness and deadness to religion in a particular age, the more strongly marked must be the line of demarcation between the careless and the earnest; for the religious are thus obliged to abstain from pleasures and occupations which, innocent in themselves, have become corrupt. At the same time, too, the danger of enthusiasm, and mistaking one’s own natural emotions for direct Divine influence, will be greatest when such influences known to be real by the pious, are altogether denied by the world in general. Illustrations will instantly suggest themselves to the mind of the reader from the experience of our own Church in the times of Wesley and Whitfield; and in like manner, amidst the universal deadness of the Lutheran Church in the seventeenth century, arose the Pietistic movement of Spener and Franke. Thus the great wickedness, especially of the clergy, the contentions and dreadful catastrophes which mark the first half of the fourteenth century, would impel the pious to come out from the world, and stimulate them to specially earnest and direct efforts to enkindle the religious life of the people. And so, during the terrors of the Interdict, they seem to have formed an association with no declared boundary, yet whose boundaries would be most distinctly recognized by all who were within the line. To the name they adopted, the text John xv. 15 seems to have given occasion; for Tauler says: “Then said our Lord to His disciples, ‘From henceforth I call you not servants, but friends.’ The ‘henceforth’ that he spoke was from the time when they had forsaken all things and followed Him. Then were they his friends, and not servants; and therefore he who will be a true friend of God must leave all things and follow after Him.” From this passage, in the spirit of which many others concur, we see at once in what the right to this title consisted—namely, in the thorough self-surrender to God, the forsaking all things to follow God alone.

135

But while this principle, which surely we must recognize as that which does really constitute the friends of God in all ages, was brought out into peculiar prominence by these German *Gottesfreunde*, their views could not fail to be coloured by the modes of thought and the circumstances of their age. Thus, in order to this entire devotedness to God, we find a renunciation, so far as may be, of all earthly cares and ties recommended by them; thus, too, we see that their faith in God’s direct, personal dealings with the individual soul is apt to be accompanied by a

superstitious regarding of insignificant phenomena, or even the mere effects of an over-active fancy, as a positive intimation of His will. Some of us, too, would be inclined to think that their continual insisting on the duty of passively yielding up the soul to divine influences, and their exhortations to take all outward things as from God, would involve a danger of falling into an indolent quietism. But the fact, far from justifying our expectations, would afford another proof that when we leave off trying to do the work that God will do Himself, we shall find our energies all the more vigorous to accomplish that which He has set us to do; for instead of regarding the events around them with passive indifference, like many of the earlier ascetics, they believed themselves called to exercise a very positive influence on the course of events.

This was in a special sense the case with Nicolas of Basle and his immediate companions, whom we find, from the recently discovered documents, to have entertained plans for the extension of religion and the reform of Christendom of a wider nature than it was safe to disclose even to their brethren indiscriminately, at a time when the Dominican inquisitors (who, moreover, were of the Papal, while most of the “Friends of God” were of the Imperial party) were actively engaged in hunting out heretics, especially those who might betray any leaning to the democratic and reformatory tendencies of the Spiritual Franciscans and their cognate sects. Thus the knot of men who gathered round Nicolas as their centre, seem, as compared with the Gottesfreunde at large, to have formed a church within a church, having secret schemes into which the others were not initiated.

From hints of such private schemes scattered in the writings of Rulman Merswin and “the Layman,” it was formerly imagined that the latter at any rate was a secret Waldensian; but this idea is not confirmed by more extended research; on the contrary, the importance which he and his friends attach to the rites of the Church,—to obedience to ecclesiastical superiors,—their belief in transubstantiation and purgatory, &c., are quite inconsistent with it. Indeed, the views of Nicolas seem to have been much more in unison with the doctrine of the Church than those of Eckart and his school. The only peculiarity of his *belief*, that I can discover, is his strong confidence in the reality of the visions and miraculous revelations imparted to himself and his friends; and it must be remembered that even this peculiarity he not only shares in common with the great Luther, who lived two centuries later, and with the liberal and sagacious Wesley, almost in our own days, but that his spiritual childhood had been nurtured on the legends of the saints, with all their marvels; and that we see, from the history of his times, that miracles and revelations were of everyday occurrence, at all events among the Franciscans and sectarians. The secret of the extraordinary sway which Nicolas obtained, not only over laymen less instructed and priests less thinking than himself, but even over a man of such commanding intellect as Tauler, seems to me to lie in the intense glow of his piety, the utter self-devotion of his own life, his force of will, and his real spiritual insight. Not only did he stand immeasurably below Tauler in point of learning, but his letters, while affording many traits of spiritual wisdom and acute practical sense, exhibit neither the reflective nor imaginative power of Tauler’s writings. Yet the accomplished scholar, the experienced pastor, the fearless politician, resigns himself implicitly to the guidance of the obscure layman as his incontestable superior.

The crisis which Nicolas was the means of bringing about in Tauler’s life is commonly termed a conversion; but from all that we have read of his previous life, it seems clear that it cannot be regarded as what is ordinarily meant by that term. Before it took place Tauler was already a sincere, God-fearing, active Christian minister, and recognized as their “Father” and leader by the “Friends of God” scattered up and down Switzerland, Bavaria, and the Rhenish states. Neither can I discover

138

any conversion, properly speaking, in point of doctrinal opinions. Nicolas agrees to all he taught as very good, and blames, not his preaching, but his life. Surely, therefore, this notable change is to be regarded in the light in which Tauler himself regarded it; as the coming to a deeper, more real and practical experience of the things of God. It seems, that with all his sincere piety, and hatred of sin, and abhorrence of the evil world around him, Tauler had never come to a clear consciousness of all the depths of sin concealed in his own heart, or an apprehension of the full import of the utter self-surrender to God which he preached. Such a deficiency of self-knowledge is indeed more possible with a conscientious man of Tauler's character, pure and gentle by nature, than with one of the opposite, or more stormy type. It is true that the task which God lays upon all is the same—the unceasing surrender of their own wishes to the higher aims which He sets successively before them. But with men of passionate temperament and selfish habits, who are therefore at every turn exposed by circumstances to violent temptation, their natural wishes are, for the most part, so obviously sinful that, though the struggle of renouncing them may be hard, the duty of doing so is clear and pressing. And when such turn to God, their falls in attempting the Christian walk are often frequent enough, or at least their battles with temptation severe enough, to teach them the evil and weakness of their own heart. With men, on the other hand, of calm, pure, and affectionate disposition, and trained in conscientious habits, so many of their wishes are for things harmless, or even good in themselves, that it is less easy to see why and how they are to be given up. Such men, just, kindly, and finding much of their own happiness in that of others, live, for the most part, in harmonious relations with those around them, and have little to disturb their consciences, beyond the fear of falling short in the path of duty on which they have already entered. But they are exposed to many perils, more insidious, because less startling, than those which beset their more fiercely-tempted brethren. They are in danger of depending too much on the respect and love which others so readily yield them; of valuing themselves on a purity which, if ever one of struggle, has come to be one of taste; of prizing intellectual clearness above moral insight and vigour; of mistaking the pleasure they feel in the performance of duty, for real submission to the will of God; and above all, of shrinking from new truths which would, for the time, confuse their belief, and break up the calm symmetry of their lives. The greater danger to the Christian life arising from those hidden heart-sins, than even from sinful acts which instantly wound the conscience, is a truth which Tauler insists upon in his sermons so strongly and so often, nay, sometimes almost to exaggeration, that one could not but guess that he was speaking from his own experience, even had we not the certainty of it from the "History." For, as he often declares, different natures require and receive a very different discipline from God. Sometimes it is by outward affliction that God speaks to souls thus sinking into the lethargy of formalism; and the loss of friends, or health, or influence suddenly seems to cut off, as it were, half their means of serving Him, and to rouse long-forgotten temptations to rise up against His will. Sometimes, on the other hand, He speaks to them inwardly, by opening their eyes to heights of holiness, which they had never before steadily contemplated. They now suddenly perceive that many of the fancied duties which have till now occupied their lives, and satisfied their consciences, have long ceased to be duties, and have come to be mere habits or pleasures; and that while they have been thus living in self-love, unseen and unrepented-of, they might have been coming to the knowledge of the higher obligations to which they have been so blind, but which were all implied in their first belief, if they had but continued to read it with a single eye. Thus they are weighed down by present temptations to which they have long been strangers. For, in order to follow the new light granted to them, they must give up long-cherished aims; relinquish many

139

140

opportunities of doing good, and even, it may seem, the very faculties for using them; and sacrifice, not only the good opinion of the world, but the trust and affection of many who are dearest to them. They shrink from such renunciation; and then come doubt and perplexity to add to the bitterness of the struggle. Can it be right to abandon so much that is good and worthy in itself, can it be the voice of God that summons them to do this, or is it not rather a self-willed fancy of their own? No: for conscience cannot be mistaken when it tells us of sin, though it is insufficient to reveal to us duty—and this fierce clinging to their own wishes, what is it but the same obstinate resistance to the will of God, which they have been accustomed to blame, nay, even wonder at, in the vicious and criminal, whom they have perhaps been seeking to reclaim? Such a struggle, it seems, was that which Tauler had to pass through before he could fully apprehend or be fitted for the work which God had for him to do. And surely, without some such struggle, none can keep long in the right path. For the path to life does not stretch across the levels of habit, but winds up the heights of aspiration, and at every fresh step in the ascent a wider horizon of duty opens to the view.

I will not mar the impression of the touching narrative given by Tauler himself by translating the story it relates into any weaker words, but leave it to make its own way to the heart of those who have hearts to understand it. There may be some who are unable to find within the range of their own experience and observation any key which can make it sound to them like reality and common sense, yet considering the practical energy and clear judgment of Tauler in other parts of his life, it may surely be worth their pains to study what he considered of so much importance with reverent and self-distrustful diligence, rather than reject it at once as the mere product of a heated fancy.

It seems most likely that the attention of Nicolas had first been drawn to Tauler during the stay of the latter with Henry of Nordlingen, in Basle, in 1338; for, according to one of the best MSS. of the “History,” the Layman says, “I have heard much of your doctrine in my own country.” Considering what we know of his previous history, and the accusation of Nicolas that he relied too much on his scholarship, it seems highly probable that Tauler may hitherto have been somewhat influenced by the cast of thought derived from his master Eckart, in whose writings the power of Knowing is so highly exalted that it sometimes is made to take precedence of the faculty of Love. That Nicolas should, after hearing Tauler preach a few times, have been able to penetrate his spiritual condition and detect its great imperfection, would not appear to imply anything miraculous, but to be merely a rare, though by no means singular, instance of the fine spiritual instinct sometimes found in men themselves of extraordinary religious attainments. Tauler shows us what he considers to have been the value of Nicolas to himself when he says, “Therefore for such as desire to live for the truth, it is a great assistance to have a Friend of God, to whom they submit themselves, and who guides them by the Spirit of God. . . . It were well worth their while to go a hundred leagues to seek out an experienced Friend of God, who knows the right path and can direct them in it.”²⁰

The two years of silence, which must have been such a terrible trial to Tauler’s faith and obedience, were compensated, not only by inward growth, as is always the case with such trials, but by the evident increase of his outward usefulness, so that he found the truth of Nicolas’ assurance, that one of his sermons would bring forth more fruit now than a hundred had before. His preaching is distinguished from that of most of his brethren among the “Friends of God,” by its more searching application of religious principles to the moral questions arising in the various emergencies of

²⁰ First Sermon on the Birth of the Virgin [No. 127 of the Frankfort Edition, 1826].

inward experience and outward life. How much more widely still must it have differed from that of the ordinary preachers, who sought to captivate the educated by the refinements of scholastic logic, employed on questions of no use but to display their own ingenuity, or to entertain the vulgar by marvellous stories of wonder-working saints or demons,—when in simple earnest language he appealed to the consciences of his hearers, and then showed them the way of escape from the wretchedness of their sinful lives to the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. And when he taught them that they must forsake the creature and cleave to God alone, it was no selfish shutting up of the heart within the narrow sphere of its own emotions and experiences which he preached, for he is continually admonishing to works of love, and ever places human duties on their true level, measuring their value not by the nature of the act, but by the obedience and love involved in its performance. “One can spin,” he says, “another can make shoes; and all these are gifts of the Holy Ghost. I tell you, if I were not a priest, I would esteem it a great gift that I was able to make shoes, and would try to make them so well as to be a pattern to all.” “The measure with which we shall be measured, is the faculty of love in the soul,—the will of a man; by this shall all his words and works and life be measured. . . .”

But that which seems to me the most striking characteristic of Tauler’s sermons is his profound sympathy with the spirit of Christ’s life, especially with his infinite sorrow over the sins of others. This is, indeed, a characteristic of the “Friends of God” in general, but is expressed with greater force and beauty in Tauler than in the other writers of the same school. In this sense they specially deserve the title which they assumed; for, more than any other class of religious writers with whom I am acquainted, do they seem to have entered into that intense appreciation of the evil of sin, mingled with endless grief and compassion for its slaves, which could overwhelm the Saviour’s mind with agony.

It is true that a large proportion of his sermons are addressed to the inmates of cloisters, and have special reference to their peculiar requirements and dangers. But we must remember that he lived in an age when the social relations were in a state of disorganization; and in those times of general distress and perplexity, when the outward ministrations of the Church and the means of obtaining religious instruction were often cut off for long together, the number of those who retired into convents had become very large. There were great numbers, too, of laymen and women, who, without entering any Order, withdrew from the world and formed communities or unions (called *Sammenungen*), dwelling together without any monastic rules, yet differing little in their mode of life from the regular monks. Tauler often refers to these communities in his sermons. Their members generally chose Dominicans or Franciscans for their confessors, and a great number of this class appear to have attached themselves to Tauler. They found in him, however, a severe censor of the faults to which their recluse life rendered them peculiarly liable,—the relying on outward acts of piety, despising those who are outside, killing the body, which is God’s instrument, with austerities, or allowing themselves to waste their time and fill their minds with trivialities, while imagining the fact of their being “religious” to make them safe.

He is said by Specklin to have made the reformation of the lives of the clergy a special object of his efforts. The statutes passed for the regulation of their conduct by a synod convened by Bishop Berthold in 1335, for the purpose of removing abuses, gives a lively picture of the inordinate covetousness, and utter neglect of the duties of their vocation, which prevailed among the clergy of Strasburg at this time. It is the more remarkable, that the Bishop should have found it necessary to take such strong measures during the solemn period of the Interdict, when the very struggle in

which the clergy were engaged with the civil power, might have been expected at least to rouse them to lead a more decorous and sober life. From the statutes of this synod, we see that the clergy not unfrequently alienated the property of the Church to laymen, or borrowed money at high interest from the Jews, in order to gratify their propensity to ostentation and pleasure. There were even some who entered into trade. The younger and more wealthy especially distinguished themselves by their extreme fondness for display, and the Bishop complains that, instead of going about clad with due decorum in the proper priestly garb, they allowed their hair to grow long in order to conceal their tonsure, wore boots of red, yellow, and green, and adorned their coats with gold lace and gay ribbons; that they strutted about in the streets equipped with rapiers and swords, attended tournaments, frequented the public taverns, and were the most jovial of boon-companions at the drinking-bouts of the laymen. In some of the more wealthy nunneries, too, things had come to such a pitch, that the ladies dressed magnificently, took part in the amusements of the tournament, and even danced with laymen in their taverns. In reference to such, Tauler says: "If we look around us, we see that the greater part of the world are enemies of God; and among these we must account certain who are servants of God by constraint, who must be forced to do any services for Him, and the little that they do is not done out of love or devotion, but simply out of fear. . . . They are common hired servants of God; and such are all those priests and nuns and the like, who take up a religious life for the sake of revenues and fees, and if they were not secure of these, they would not serve God at all, but turn round altogether, and consort with the enemies of God. Thus they seek their own pleasure in dainty fare, dress, jewels, vanity, and the admiration of others, wherever they can find it. Nay, verily, at last they must have a spouse. 'Ah, dear Lord,' they say, 'it is no harm; it is a spiritual love. We must enjoy ourselves a little; we must have some recreation; we cannot do without it. See, dear Lord, we are spiritual people, we are in an Order.' But put on as many cowls and hoods as thou wilt, they will help thee nothing, if thou doest not what thou oughtest of right to do. There was once a man who fell into sin, and he put on a cowl, but did not give up his sin. The Devil came and took the man, and tore him into a hundred pieces, and left the cowl whole, but carried off the man, body and soul, to the amazement of all beholders. Therefore take heed to yourselves, knowing how full the world is of such bargainers with God, among monks and nuns."²¹

Tauler's denunciations of this class brought him, of course, many enemies among the clergy, who hated the strictness of his principles and conduct; and they strove in various ways to distort his words, in order to find grounds for accusation against him. Thus he says,—“Children, I must tell you in love, that I am unjustly accused of having declared that I would hear no one's confession unless he first promised me to do everything that I wished. That is a very unjust word: 'what I wished.' I wish no one to do anything beyond that which is written, and I beg no man to promise me more than that.”²² He had also to defend himself against more serious charges, for his enemies not only ridiculed him for making so much of the inward work, but called him and his followers unorthodox innovators. Thus he says: “But if one come and warn them of the horrible danger in which they are living, and what a fearful death they are like to die, they mock at him, and say he is a Beghard, or belongs to the New Spirit, scoffing at him and slandering him worse than ever was done to the Christians by Jews or heathens. These false Christians condemn us far more, crying out,

²¹ Sermon for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

²² Sermon on Assumption Day [No. 125 of the Frankfort Edition, 1826.]

‘Here comes one of the New Spirit;’ ‘These are they of the lofty spirits.’”²³ It is even related that the clergy, enraged at the charges he brought against them, on one occasion forbade his preaching (which undoubtedly was in itself an act of disobedience to the Interdict), but that the magistrates obliged them to rescind their prohibition.

Meanwhile, however, Tauler’s efforts for their amendment were not wholly fruitless, for it is recorded that through him “many priests became quite pious;” while by the people at large he was revered and affectionately beloved, and “whatever weighty matter the people had to do, he was called in to settle it with his wisdom . . . and whatever he counselled them was right in their eyes.” The “Friends of God” naturally attached themselves more strongly than ever to him, and about this time he seems to have been the means of adding a notable adherent to their numbers, in the banker, Rulman Merswin, who was at a later period the founder of the Gruenen-Worth, and author of the “Book of the Nine Rocks,” a very remarkable allegorical picture of the then condition and prospects of the Church. Nay, even Bishop Berthold is related to have “heard him preach often and gladly with great admiration” at this time; no doubt rejoicing in so brilliant an exception to the general disgraceful conduct of his clergy, which caused him so much uneasiness; but the Bishop’s favour was not destined to endure long, for political events soon occurred which produced an entire alteration in his views.

After the death of Benedict XII., Clement VI., the most inveterate opponent of Louis IV., was elected Pope, and he had hardly ascended the throne when he renewed hostilities against the Emperor with greater vehemence than his predecessor. The most awful anathemas were launched against Louis, which again proved themselves by no means inefficient weapons of attack. Many ecclesiastics, secular no less than regular, who had been performing divine service in the cities that acknowledged the authority of the Emperor, now turned to their bishops, humbly beseeching them for absolution for their disobedience, which petition was not rejected; for in many places they obtained it without difficulty on payment of one florin! Bishop Berthold, too, whose outward reconciliation with Louis had been merely dictated by motives of fear and self-interest, now besought pardon for it from the new Pope in an epistle dated November 9th, 1345, in which he further renounces his allegiance to the Emperor, and promises unconditional obedience to the Romish See for the future. Clement granted his petition, and released him and his diocese from ecclesiastical penalties. Shortly after (1347), Louis died, fairly worn out and broken-hearted with the long struggle in which his reign had been passed, but not until several of the Electors, under the instigation of the Pope, had elected Charles IV. King of Rome (1346). Many of the Estates refused, however, even after Louis’ death, to acknowledge the latter, commonly called the “Parson-King,” because he had been elected in defiance of their wishes. Strasburg was one of these cities, and in consequence was again laid under interdict.

To these political and ecclesiastical disturbances were added still worse miseries. The land was desolated successively by tempests, earthquakes, and famine, and at last, in 1348, the Black Death came to fill up the measure of the people’s woe. This plague continued to rage through Southern Germany and France until the following year, bringing in its train the usual accompaniments of frantic terror, and the dissolution of all social bonds. In Strasburg sixteen thousand persons fell victims to it; and it is calculated that in Southern France two-thirds of the population perished. All these convulsions of the natural and social world struck terror to men’s very hearts; bewildered

²³ Second Sermon for the Third Sunday after Trinity.

and beset, they knew not which way to turn. Then appeared the ghastly processions of the Flagellants, who traversed the country half naked by hundreds and thousands, walking two and two in white shirts often stained with blood, and holding scourges in their hands. When they entered a town, they broke out into their wild howling chant,

“Nun hebet auf eure Hände
Dass Gott dies grosse Sterben wende,
Nun hebet auf eure Arme
Dass sich Gott über uns erbarme;”

and gathering round them all who would join, after service in a church, threw themselves on the ground, confessing their sins aloud, and then scourged each other till they were exhausted. In some places the popular fanaticism accused the Jews of causing the plague by poisoning the wells; and the multitude, in their fury, setting fire to the Jews' quarter, burnt thousands of the wretched creatures in their houses. Numbers of the lower classes hoped for a Messiah in the person of the great “Priest-hater,” Frederick II., who, according to an old saying now expanded into a distinct prophecy, was in the latter days to rise again from the dead, to render justice to the widow and orphan, to punish and humble the Clergy, to constrain monks and nuns to marry, and then to sail over to the Holy Land and lay down his crown on the Mount of Olives.²⁴ This was not the only, though it was the wildest prophecy current at this time. Hermann von Fritzlar declares that the time is come that precedes the end of the world:²⁵ “This time in which we are now living, is that in which the people's hearts have waxed cold, for they have forgotten the life of our Lord. Wherefore do arson, and rape, and robbery, and treason, and strife, and envy, and hatred, rage now as they never did before; as Christ Himself foretold, that in these times the love of many should wax cold. The third, and coming age, is that of Anti-Christ.” And Tauler too, in his Sermon on Christ's stilling the Storm, warns his flock: “O that ye knew what anguish and terror shall shortly seize the hearts of all who have not cleaved to God with all their might, . . . and all the evil that shall overtake them, as has been of late revealed to the Friends of God.” In another sermon, preached before the coming of the Black Death, he thus recapitulates the judgments of God that were threatened if the people refused to repent: “horrible things have been foretold, of fire, of water, of great darkness, of hurricanes and drought.” In the midst of these calamities he declaims against the perverted lessons drawn from them by the people; the recklessness and despair of some, the craving of others after marvellous visions and supernatural revelations, finally the sinfulness of those who, seeking only to escape from the world's evils, gave themselves up to the passive indulgence of their own emotion. The last error was that against which he inveighed most frequently, being the one, no doubt, of which his hearers were most in danger. He himself was not one of those passive mystics. “Works of love,” he says, “are more acceptable to God than lofty contemplation; art thou engaged in devoutest prayer, and God wills that thou go out and preach, or carry broth to a sick brother, thou shouldst do it with joy.”

²⁴ See Wackernagel's *Beitraege zur Vaterlaendischen Geschichte*. Basle. B. ii. S. 122.

²⁵ In the Preface to his *Heiligen-Leben*.

His own life was consistent with his teachings. When the Black Death came to Strasburg, he devoted himself to administering the sacraments and carrying consolation to the sick and dying. The renewal of the ban had increased the general terror and distress, and at the same time opened a still larger field for Tauler's activity. A proclamation had been issued exhorting the people not to give way to terror, as it would increase their danger of infection; but what could a proclamation avail, when they often saw more than fifty corpses carried through the streets in a day, and there were not priests enough to perform the funeral rites? The deeper was their gratitude to Tauler for his noble act of disobedience to the Church that denied them their only remaining consolation. But he did not stand alone; there were especially two monks who shared his labours, Thomas of Strasburg, an Augustinian and the Prior-general of his Order in Strasburg, and Ludolph of Saxony, Prior of the newly-established convent of the Carthusians.²⁶ The three friends were not content with setting an example of heroic zeal, they issued in their joint names an Address to the clerical body at large, showing how iniquitous it was that the poor ignorant people should be suffered to die excommunicate for no fault of their own, and calling on the priests to visit the sick and dying, and no longer to refuse them the consolation of religion, forasmuch as Christ had died for *all* men, and the Pope had no power to close heaven against an innocent person who should die under the Interdict. In a second Letter they went further; setting forth the doctrine of two Swords and two Powers, the temporal and the spiritual, and teaching that the two are not to be confounded, though they ought not to be set in opposition to each other; that it is indeed the duty of the spiritual arm to endeavour to direct the secular in the right course, but that if a great one has made himself liable to the Interdict, that does not give the spiritual arm any authority to curse and excommunicate poor people who, perhaps, do not even know their guilty lord, still less whole cities and countries without distinction; that it cannot be proved from Holy Scripture, that a King, chosen in a legal manner by the Electors, is to be called a heretic if he resist the power of the Church; and that in any case, it is the Emperor alone who must give an account to God for his acts of insubordination, and not his poor subjects. Therefore such an unjust curse as this Interdict shall be turned into a blessing on the heads which it strikes; and, for their oppression, God shall exalt them on high. Finally, they proclaimed the principle, that he who professes the true articles of the Christian faith, and only sins against the power of the Pope, is by no means to be counted a heretic.²⁷

²⁶ Both these were also writers of some note. The former was the author of some dry but learned commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. The latter, who had been a professor in Paris, wrote a *Vita Christi*, which was much celebrated in the Middle Ages, and an *Expositio in Psalterium*.

²⁷ The following extract on this subject is given in Professor Schmidt's *Tauler* (p. 53), from Specklin's *Collectanea*:—
 "Specially were those two Articles, which were quoted, forbidden and declared to be wholly heretical. The First was, that seeing that many persons, young and old, rich and poor, men and women, innocent and wicked, when they came to their death-beds, lay under the ban on account of the Emperor Louis, they had put forth a Letter to all priests, bidding them, when they should visit the sick and dying, to comfort the sick with the bitter passion and death of Jesus Christ, who had therewith made satisfaction before God, not for their sins only, but for the sins of the whole world, and had opened heaven, and reconciled us all to God. And the Pope had no power to shut heaven against poor sinners who had innocently fallen under the ban. Therefore, when one should confess his sins and desire absolution and the holy sacrament, they ought to give it unto him and comfort him, for heed should be given rather to the Word of Christ and His Apostles than to the ban, which proceeded of envy and lust of worldly power. . . . The Second was, that they put forth a general epistle (not among the common people, but among the clergy and the learned fathers), saying that there be two swords, the spiritual sword, which is the Word of God, and the other, which is the secular government, and the one had nought to do with the other. But since they are both of God, they cannot be contrary the one to the other; but the spiritual shall be diligent in its office and in the Word of God, and defend the Government; and the Government shall defend God's laws and the pious, and punish the wicked. But since the pious who preach the Word of God ought, by God's ordinance, to be defended by the secular power against the wicked, wherefore, then, should the Government

154

155

What impression these free-spoken writings made upon the clergy is not known: it is only recorded that, through the exertions of Tauler and his friends, the people were enabled to die in peace, and no longer feared the ban, whereas before many thousands had died without shrift, in the agonies of despair; whence we must conclude that some of the other priests were brought to see the truth of the principles enunciated by the three monks. But it was not likely that such doctrine would long be suffered to work unchecked in the public mind. The Pope soon interfered, and commanded the Bishop of Strasburg to burn the books of the three friends, and forbid their perusal, whether by priests or laymen, on pain of excommunication. Berthold, anxious to prove his devotion to the Pope, without delay proceeded to take stringent measures against Tauler and the two high dignitaries who had done such good service in his diocese; their writings were everywhere searched for and destroyed, and they themselves were expelled from the city. It is not to be wondered at, that Henry of Nordlingen should write word that his “Brother Tauler is now constantly in great sorrow,” when he was thus driven from the field of faithful labours at the very moment of their greatest necessity. But he did not lose courage; with his two friends he retired into the neighbouring Carthusian convent, of which Ludolph was Prior, whence they continued to diffuse their writings.

156

During the time of their seclusion, Strasburg was visited by the Emperor Charles IV., who was making the circuit of the Rhenish cities, to induce the citizens to acknowledge him as King of Rome. Bishop Berthold had already conjured the members of the Rhenish Estates assembled at Strasburg, for the sake of the public peace, to do allegiance to the Emperor whom they despised. Charles was therefore received with royal honours, and invested the Bishop with the imperial fief, after receiving his solemn homage; but he was obliged to promise the citizens that he would procure

be condemned by the spiritual power? for then should God condemn His own work. But when a secular Head sins, it behoves the spiritual Head, with great humility, to point out unto the sinner the right way, and with the rest of the clergy to entreat God day and night with tears, that the sinner may turn again from his way, and come to a true knowledge of his sins; for God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.

“But Christ, and the Apostles, and the Church command that, if the sinner, after much admonition, will not be turned from his ways, he be excommunicated till such time as he shall be converted and turn again and amend his life; and then he shall be again received unto grace.

“Much less doth it behove a Christian shepherd, if one be deserving of excommunication, to condemn and excommunicate without distinction innocent persons, who perchance have never known or seen the guilty man,—nay, whole lands, cities, and villages; the which is not commanded by Christ, nor the Holy Apostles, nor the Councils, but Cometh of a self-usurped power. For it is the office of the Pope to point sinners unto the true way of salvation.

“But that all those are heretics who will not kiss the Pope’s foot, or that to do so should be an article of faith, and that he is an apostate from the Church who takes the name and fulfils the office of King or Emperor, on being duly appointed thereto by the Electors, or that all who render obedience to him, as to their ruler ordained by God, sin against the Church and are heretics, cannot be proved by Holy Scripture.

“The Government is a power ordained by God, unto which obedience ought to be rendered in worldly things, even by spiritual persons, be they who they may. The Emperor is the highest magistrate, wherefore obedience is due to him; if he doth not govern rightly, he, and not his poor subjects, must give account thereof to God; and even as God will not call the poor innocent subject to account for his evil ruler, so ought not man to condemn and excommunicate the poor innocent subject for the sake of his ruler. Moreover, they who hold the true Christian faith, and sin only against the Pope’s person, are no heretics; but he were a heretic who, after much admonition, should stiffneckedly disobey the Word of God, and would not amend his life; for not even a murderer, a rogue, a thief, or an adulterer, who should ask pardon through Christ with true penitence and contrition, and amend his life, can be cast out of the Church.

“Hence it is concluded, that all those who unjustly and innocently have come under the Ban, are free before God, and their curse will be turned into a blessing, and their ban and yoke of oppression will God lift off; even as Christ did not set Himself against the secular power when He said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world,’ even as He was obedient to the Government, though He was the Son of God, commanding men to render to God the things that be God’s, and to Cæsar the things that be Cæsar’s. Now our souls belong to God; our bodies and goods unto Cæsar. All this was much better set forth in more words.”

the removal of the Interdict, for only on this condition would they acknowledge him. From Strasburg Charles proceeded to Basle, where he met the Pope's Envoy bringing a commission to the Bishop of Bamberg to absolve the cities that should acknowledge the Emperor. But the terms of the Bull to this effect, in which Louis was called a heretic, and the cities were required to express their contrition for their fidelity to him, irritated the burghers to the highest degree, and they refused to swear to the formula of absolution when it was read to them. Nevertheless, as the Emperor stood in need of their services, the Interdict was removed. The Bishop of Bamberg next repaired, in his quality of Papal Legate, to Strasburg, to proclaim the Absolution there. The citizens were assembled before the Cathedral, then rising in its new glories. From the steps of the western door the Legate read the Bull in their ears, and then asked the Senate and commoners if they desired absolution? Peter Schwarber, the Mayor, replied, "Yes," in the name of all; and the Bishop immediately pronounced the Absolution. On this the Bishop Berthold, turning to the Mayor, said, "Master Schwarber, once you helped to force us to pay homage to the heretic Louis; and now that he is dead you yourself hold him to be a heretic." But the Mayor replied, "My Lord Bishop, I have never accounted the Emperor Louis a heretic." "How!" exclaimed Berthold, "have you not just declared him such?" "No," said Schwarber: "the Bishop of Bamberg asked if we desired absolution, and to this I said, 'Yes,' in the name of all. Had he asked whether we believed and would observe all the articles he read to us, we should have given him a very different answer."

During the visit of the Emperor to Strasburg he heard much talk of Tauler and his friends, and their free opinions, and sent for them to hear their defence. They read before him their confession of faith, and unshrinkingly declared their adherence to all that they had hitherto taught. Tauler, especially, was not a man to quail before a temporal sovereign after he had braved the more formidable terrors of the spiritual power; moreover, we find that he did not scruple occasionally in his sermons to rebuke the oppression of the people by their rulers²⁸; and he openly told the Emperor wherefore he was banished. The arguments of the three monks produced such an impression upon Charles, that he is said to have declared himself "sheer of their opinion," and expressed his desire that no further proceedings should be taken against them. Nevertheless the Bishops present condemned, as heretical, the doctrines we have already mentioned as contained in their writings, commanded them no longer so wickedly to withstand the Church and her Interdict, enjoined them to issue a public recantation, and for the future to write nothing more of the like nature on pain of excommunication. Specklin declares that they went on and wrote still better than before; but nothing more is known of the matter beyond this meagre statement of his.

From this time forward, Tauler disappears from the history of his native city, until a short time before his death. It is said that, since the Emperor and Bishops forbade him to write, he forsook Strasburg, after having spread much good doctrine abroad in Alsace. His name was held in grateful remembrance, not only by the "Friends of God," but by all his fellow-citizens, for whom he had faithfully laboured and suffered during the whole period of their troubles; but he needed a sphere of greater freedom, and therefore took up his residence in Cologne, a city already familiar to him, and where he found numerous brethren in spirit. Here he commonly preached in the church of St.

²⁸ Thus, he says in his Sermon on the Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity:—"Now the Apostle tells us to contend against princes and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. This means the devils; but it means also the princes of this world, who ought to be the best of all, and are nevertheless the very horses on which the devils ride to sow discord and treason, and who torment their subjects by their pride and unjust tyranny and manifold oppressions, as we now see throughout the world."

Gertrude, belonging to a convent of Dominican nuns, whose numbers were much increased by the desire of having Tauler for a preacher and confessor. Among these sisters, however, their original strictness of manners no longer prevailed, and Tauler often found occasion in his sermons to lament the decay of conventual discipline. The younger sisters too often brought with them from the world their love of society and amusements, and were strengthened in these tastes by their intercourse with the older nuns; for most of them thought more of dress and trinkets than of devout exercises and self-denial, so that Tauler tells them that all their piety is a mere outward semblance, and that many laywomen are much farther advanced in holiness than they. Tauler not only displayed his customary zeal in restoring a severer discipline, but endeavoured to substitute for these mere outward works of piety the spiritual, which he regarded as the only true service of God. He sought also, while in Cologne, to combat the pantheistic enthusiasm of the Beghards, who had been extremely numerous in this city ever since the commencement of the century, and, notwithstanding, or perhaps rather favoured by, frequent persecutions, in which many of their members were burnt at the stake, were continuing to make progress during this age of anarchy.²⁹ In the year 1357 (therefore during Tauler's residence in Cologne), the Archbishop, William of Gennepe, instituted a fresh search after

159

160

²⁹ I give the following passage from his Sermon on the First Sunday in Lent [No. 31, Frankfort Edition, 1826], as showing, more distinctly than any other I have found, the position in which he stood towards the antinomian doctrines of the Beghards, and as furnishing the most complete refutation of the charge of antinomian tendencies sometimes brought against his own preaching:—

“From these two errors proceedeth the third, which is the worst of all; the persons who are entangled therein call themselves beholders of God, and they may be known by the carnal peace which they have through their emptiness. They think that they are free from sin, and are united to God without any means whatsoever, and that they have got above all subjection to the Holy Church, and above the commandments of God, and above all works of virtue; for they think this emptiness to be so noble a thing that it may not be hindered by aught else, whatsoever it be. Hence they stand empty of all subjection, and do no works either towards them who are above or below them, even as an instrument is empty, and waiteth on the master when he shall choose to work therewith; for they deem that if they work, it hindereth the work of God, and therefore they empty themselves of all virtue. Nay, they would be so empty, that they would not give praise or thanks to God, nor have, nor confess, nor love, nor desire, nor pray for anything; for they have already, as they suppose, all that they could pray for; and think that they are poor in spirit, for that they are, as they dream, without all self-will, and have renounced all ownership wholly and without reserve. For they believe that they have risen above it, and that they possess all those things for the sake of which the ordinances and precepts of the Church were appointed and established, and that none can give or take from them, not even God Himself, since they think that they have suffered all exercises and all virtues, and have attained to pure emptiness of spirit; and they say it requireth more pains to become empty of virtue than to attain unto virtue. For the sake of this emptiness of spirit, they desire to be free, and obedient to none, neither the Pope, nor the Bishop, nor the Pastor; and though they may seem outwardly to be so at times, yet are they inwardly obedient to none, neither in will nor deed. For they would fain be free from all those things wherewith the Holy Church is concerned; and they say openly that a man, so long as he strives after virtue, is still imperfect, and knows nought of spiritual poverty and spiritual freedom. And they deem themselves exalted above the angels, and above all human merit and faith, so that they can neither increase in virtue nor commit sin; for they live, as they suppose, without will, and possess their spirits in peace and emptiness, and have become nought in themselves and one with God. They believe that they may do freely, without sin, whatsoever nature desireth, because they have attained to the highest innocence, and there is no law or commandment for them, and therefore they follow all the lusts of the flesh, that the emptiness of the spirit may remain unhindered. They care not for fasts, nor feasts, nor precepts, except so far as they may observe them for the sake of others, because they live without conscience in all things. Let each man examine himself whether he be not one of these. But a murderer, or any open sinner, is better than such spiritual men, for he confesses his misdeed that it is evil; but these confess it not. Hardly are they to be converted; and at times they are verily possessed by the Devil. They are, moreover, so ingenious that it is scarcely possible to overcome them in discourse, save by the life of Christ and Holy Scripture: through these may one well discern that they are deceived. “Now cometh the fourth error. Many be also called beholders of God who are yet different in some points from what we have just said. These also think that they are empty of all works, and are tools of God by whom God works whatsoever he will, and they merely suffer Him, without working themselves; and they say that the works wrought of God through them are more noble and of greater merit than those of a man who worketh his own works in the grace of God; and declare that they are God-suffering men, or they do

161

them, and commanded the clergy of his diocese strictly to enforce the statutes of his predecessors against them. Tauler, however, though a Dominican, never took part in any act of persecution; the profound spiritual struggles through which he had had to pass, had taught him how deep the roots of belief lay beneath those regions of the soul that can be reached by outward weapons; and when he speaks of the “Free Spirits,” it is to show the error of their doctrines, not to demand their extirpation. Indeed, his writings, and those of his disciple Rulman Merswin, exhibit in this respect a Christian largeness of heart in great contrast to the prevailing spirit of his Order. They more than once maintain the salvation of those who are in error from ignorance, and declare that their desire to believe what is true is accepted by God in place of a correct belief, and that thus many heathen and Jews are saved now as well as before the coming of Christ. Rulman Merswin ascribes the terrible persecution of the Jews, then raging, to the covetousness of the Christians.³⁰

162

but suffer the works that God worketh in them. But although they are empty of the works, and do nought, yet will they not be empty of and miss the reward; and whatever they do is no sin, for God worketh their works, as they say, and whatsoever He wills is wrought in them, and nought else, and, as we said, inwardly they are wholly passive, and live without care for anything; and they have a humble, submissive manner, and can bear well whatsoever befalls them, for they think themselves to be an instrument through which God worketh as He will. These people are, in many points, like unto the true men; but in this are they false, that they hold everything whereunto they are inwardly impelled, whether good or bad, to proceed from the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit worketh never unprofitable things in a man, such as be contrary to the life of Christ or Holy Scripture, and therefore are they deceived. These men are very hard to discover, for they can give good reasons for, and put a fair face on all they do; but they may be known by their stubborn self-will, that they would rather die than give up one tittle of their own way. These are contrary to them who say that they cannot increase in virtue; but they deserve the same measure. Behold all such errors are messengers of Antichrist, preparing the way before him unto unbelief and damnation.

“Now it concerns us somewhat to know how we may escape these cunning snares. No man may be free from keeping the commandments of God, and from the practice of virtue. No man can unite himself to God in emptiness of spirit, without loving and longing after God. No man can be or become holy without good works. No man can rest in God without the love of God. No man may empty himself of godly works that he may not hinder God in His works, but must work with Him in thankfulness. No man may serve God without praising and thanking Him; for He is the Maker of all creatures, and He alone can give and take, for of His riches and might there is no end. And a man may increase in virtue and goodness, and may exercise himself therein as long as he lives; and no man deserveth more reward, though he think that he merely suffer the works of God to be wrought in him. The works of God are eternal and unchangeable; for He worketh according to His own nature, and not otherwise; and in these works of God there can be no merit and adding thereunto of any creature, for there is none but God who cannot become more or higher; but through the power of God the creatures have their own work to perform, in nature, and in grace, and in glory.”

³⁰ The following curious passage is extracted from Rulman Merswin’s *Book of the Nine Rocks*; but many passages in Tauler’s sermons show that his sentiments were quite in harmony with those here expressed:—

“The MAN said: ‘Ah, my Beloved, have mercy upon poor Christendom, and remember how that the wicked Jewish people and the wicked heathen folk are all striving against thee with all their might, and shall all be lost.’ The ANSWER said: ‘I tell thee thou art right when thou prayest God to have mercy upon poor Christendom; for know that for many hundred years Christendom has never been so poor or so wicked as in these times; but I tell thee, whereas thou sayest that the wicked Jews and heathen are all lost, that is not true: I tell thee, in these days, there is a portion of the heathen and the Jews whom God preferreth greatly to many who bear the Christian name, and yet live contrary to all Christian order.’ The MAN: ‘ . . . What strange speech is this that I hear, and what may it mean?’ The ANSWER: ‘ . . . The meaning is, that where a Jew or heathen, in any part of the world, hath a good, God-fearing mind in him, in simplicity and honesty, and in his reason and judgment knoweth no better faith than that in which he was born, but were minded and willing to cast that off, if he were given to know any other faith that were more acceptable to God, and would obey God, if he ventured body and goods therefor;—I tell thee, where there is a Jew or heathen thus earnest in his life—say, ought he not to be much dearer to God than the evil, false Christian men who have received baptism, and act contrary to God, knowing that they do so?’ . . . The MAN: . . . ‘This seemeth to me most strange, . . . for it is written in the Scripture, and is also a part of our Christian creed, that no one can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven unless he first receive holy baptism.’ The ANSWER: ‘That is true, and the right Christian faith. . . . When God findeth such a righteous heathen or Jew, what doth He do? Of His free love and fathomless mercy, He cometh to his help: I tell thee God findeth many secret ways that such a man be not lost, wherever he may be in this wide world.’ . . . The MAN: ‘Say! how are these unbaptized men saved from perdition?’ The ANSWER: ‘God doth it by many secret ways, which are unknown to most Christians in these days. . . . One way, which Christendom may well believe and does believe, is, that when one of these good heathens or Jews cometh to his end, God

163

Tauler continued to correspond with Nicolas of Basle. In the year 1356 the latter sent him a pamphlet, in which, on the strength of a warning vision, he bewails the sinfulness of the times, and foretells the coming of fresh calamities, of which the great earthquake that destroyed Basle in the same year was regarded as the commencement. No details of Tauler's work in Cologne have been preserved to us. It is not even known whether the composition of his chief work, the "Imitation of Christ's life of Poverty," is to be referred to this period or to that of his seclusion in the Carthusian Convent at Strasburg. In this work he sets forth the theory and practice of self-renunciation in order to union with God. In point of language and composition, it is superior to his Sermons, nearly all of which seem to be derived from mere notes taken by his hearers with more or less correctness.³¹ It is interesting to compare his view of poverty with that of the Spiritual Franciscans, who taught that, to any high attainment in the Christian life, a literal renunciation of all property was absolutely necessary. Tauler, while assuming the excellence of this external poverty, as releasing the Christian from many cares and temptations to anxiety, shows that the essence of the poverty of Christ did not, as they taught, lie in this privation of earthly wealth, but in the poorness of the spirit that calls nothing its own, because itself and all that it has are God's, and held in trust for Him.

164

Of Tauler's history we know no more till we find him at Strasburg, in 1361, already labouring under the illness which closed his life. There are no indications of the date or the reason of his return to his old home. We are only told that, after a long life of toilsome yet fruitful labour, he was attacked, at seventy years of age, by a lingering disease, attended with great suffering. During his illness he caused himself to be removed to the convent where his aged sister was a nun, that she might be with him and tend him to the last,—an act which is enumerated as one of his faults, by one of the writers of his school, who calls it seeking for too much natural help and comfort.

165

After twenty weeks of pain, he sent for his mysterious friend, and begged him to visit him once more, for he perceived that his end was nigh. The man was obedient, and came to the Master, who

cometh and enlighteneth him with the Christian faith; . . . and if he may not be baptized, God baptizes him in his good desires and will, and in his miserable death. Thou shalt know that there be many of these good heathens and Jews in eternal life, who have entered thereon in this wise.' . . ."

³¹ It has been often questioned whether the Latin or the German form in which we possess Tauler's sermons be the original. On this point I transcribe Professor Schmidt's arguments, which seem to me quite conclusive:—

"There can be no question that Tauler delivered his sermons in German, and that this language is the original one of all the sermons of his which we still possess. After his connection with Nicolas of Basle, he had himself declared that he did not intend henceforward to speak so much Latin in his sermons. The greater part of those still extant are, indeed, addressed in the first instance to the brethren or sisters in whose convent-chapels he used to preach, but also have a reference to the laity, who usually assembled in great numbers in these churches to hear him; and to be intelligible to such an audience he must have spoken in the vernacular: it was only in the School attached to his own convent that he spoke in Latin. The language itself of Tauler's sermons and writings is, besides, a sufficient proof that they were composed in German; for they exhibit the most complete adaptation of the thought to the form in which it is conveyed; a form, moreover, that Tauler had to a considerable extent to create for himself. Up to his day, the German language had been little used for theological and metaphysical subjects, and was poor in terms to express any notions beyond those living in the popular mind, so that the writers of his school (in bringing the higher and more spiritual truths of religion down to the level of popular apprehension) had to frame for themselves a terminology of their own, whose constituents they borrowed partly from the Latin of the Schools, partly from figurative, mostly biblical, forms of speech. Tauler often avails himself of such German scholastic terms to express abstract notions: as, for instance, *Istckheit* (essentia), *Eigenshaftlichkeit*, *Creaturlichkeit*, *Unserheit*, *Sinsheit*, *Holtzheit*. So, too, he often speaks by images, in order to express spiritual facts or metaphysical ideas, for which the language either possessed no words as yet, or which in themselves were too vague to be expressed in a clear and distinct mode. All this indicates a laborious wrestling of the thought with the language. . . . Hence, also, the partial obscurity of Tauler's style, which is incurred by the pains he took to attain a terse purity by forming substantives made up of whole propositions: as, for instance, '*ein einvaltiges grüntlich-uf-got-sich-lossen*.' . . . Tauler and his school have, however, the merit of having given to their nation a philosophical language." (See Schmidt's *Tauler*, S. 78.)

received him full lovingly; and the man was glad that he found him yet alive, and said, “Dear Master, how fares it with thee?” Then said the Master, “Dear son, I believe the time is near when God is minded to take me from this world; therefore, dear son, it is a great comfort to me that thou shouldst be here at my departure.” On this, Tauler gave him some papers, in which he had written down the discourse which they had had together twenty years before, and begged Nicolas to make a little book of it, which the latter promised him to do. But Tauler earnestly enjoined him to conceal both their names; “for,” he says, “thou must surely know that the life and words and works which God hath wrought through me, a poor unworthy sinner, are not mine, but wrought by the power of the Almighty God, to whom they eternally belong. Therefore, dear son, if thou art minded to write them for the benefit of our fellow-Christians, do it in such a manner that neither my name nor thine be mentioned therein. Thou mayst say, ‘The Master and the Man.’ Neither shalt thou let any one in this city see the book, else people will mark that it was I; but take it with thee into thine own country, so that it do not come out during my life.” For yet eleven days, it is said that they held much discourse together; and then, under circumstances of extraordinary suffering, the faithful servant yielded up his spirit to God, on the 16th of June 1361. He was buried in his own convent. The stone which formerly covered his grave has been recently set up by the Protestants in the church in which he warned and consoled his brethren more than five hundred years ago by word of mouth, as he teaches us, who are now living, by the written record of those words.

166

Here ends our proper task; but it can hardly, I think, be without interest to the reader to learn a few more particulars about the remarkable set of men to which Tauler belonged, especially concerning the great Layman who had so powerful an influence on his career, and the disciple and bosom friend of both successively, Rulman Merswin, who appears to stand third in rank in this group of “Friends of God.” From the account of him given in the “*Memorial*” of the Gruenen-Worth Convent, it appears that he was originally a wealthy merchant and money-changer, “but always conducted his business with great fear of God before his eyes, and with scrupulous probity, and stood well with the world, and was of a very merry and pleasant temper, so that many esteemed and loved him, and sought his society, which was to himself also very agreeable in those days. And he had at the first an exceeding beautiful and sweet young wife; but when they had lived but a short time together, she died; and after that, he took another wife, the daughter of a pious knight. And when they had lived many years together according to Christian ordinances, and he was now forty years old, and God saw not fit to give him a child by either wife, he turned with his whole heart to God, and gave up his trade, and forsook the world, and led a single life henceforward, with the will and consent of his wife, who was an honourable simple-minded Christian woman.”

167

His own account of the next four years of his life, now printed for the first time from the ms. in his own handwriting, is a very curious and interesting document, in the vivid picture it gives of the inward struggles which this determination brought upon him; and however clearly we may perceive that many of his difficulties arose from the mistaken view of his social duties derived from the teachings of his church, it is impossible not to admire the simple directness of purpose and intense earnestness with which he strove to follow every indication he could perceive of the will of God. I give a few passages from it, taking the liberty to omit the perpetual repetitions, which would render an absolutely literal translation quite unreadable. Indeed, Rulman’s style, both in this and his other productions, has all the awkwardness, circumlocution, and tautology, which usually characterize the efforts of an utterly unlearned person to express himself.

 168
 “In the name of God, Amen! All ye dear Christian men, I give you truly to know that in the year of our Lord, 1347, it came to pass that I, Rulman Merswin, renounced all my traffic and gains, and moreover all natural pleasant companionship; the which I did with good courage for God’s sake, to the sole end that I might atone for my sins. Now, though I had taken this first step with good courage, and of my own free choice had given myself to God, yet it was with great sorrow to my nature afterwards; for I had enjoyed great happiness in the good things of this world.” After describing the dreadful anguish of mind he had to endure on account of his sins, and the spiritual joys with which it alternated, he continues: “And I came utterly to hate the world and all belonging to it, and also my own flesh, wherefore during this first year I chastised my body with very sore and manifold exercises, so that I more than once became so weak, that I thought I should die. But about this time I took Tauler for my confessor, who discovered somewhat of these exercises, for he perceived that I had become very sickly; and he feared for my head, and commanded me to exercise myself no more in such wise, and set me a certain time; and I must needs obey him, but my obedience went very much against the grain, for I had set my heart upon bringing my body into subjection. But as soon as the term was out, I said nothing, but began again to do as I had done before. . . . But our Lord was pleased, during this first year, to give me a true discernment in many things, so that whenever I commended any matter with great earnestness to God, He gave me to perceive what I must do and leave undone. Moreover, our Lord also suffered me to be oftentimes tormented with grievous and horrible temptations, both by day and night; but it was given to me, by the grace of God, to receive them with humble and cheerful submission, so that I could say with heart and mouth, ‘My Lord and my God, my nature hates and loathes this suffering; wherefore I pray thee to take no account thereof, and do not as my poor nature would desire and entreat of thee, but fulfil thy most blessed will, whether it be sweet or bitter to my weak nature.’ . . . And when God saw that it was the proper time, He came to my help with his merciful grace. . . . Now, during the second and the third years (this last was the jubilee, when all men went on pilgrimage to Rome), did God work many great and supernatural works with me, a poor sinner, through great sorrow and spiritual assaults, and withal unspeakable temptations, of which it were a sin to write. But one which I may write is, that God suffered me to be assailed with unbelief: to wit, that the devil put it into my head to ask: ‘How may it be, that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit may consist in one nature?’ And this unbelief remained upon me for a long space, and all that time I thought nothing else but that I must certainly burn for ever in hell; and yet I felt within myself that nevertheless my will was set to love God. And after a good while, I grew so infirm, through this continual pain, that it was all I could do, when Assumption day came, to venture to go and sit down to hear a sermon. And as I put my hat before my eyes, I fell into a swoon from very weakness; but while I was thus in a trance, there appeared unto me a great stone, wherein were carved the likeness of three men’s countenances. . . . And it was as though a voice said to me, ‘Now mayest thou well believe, since thou hast seen how in one stone may be three persons, and yet it is one stone, and the three persons have the nature of one rock.’ And hereupon I came to myself, and was seized with fear when I found myself sitting among the crowd. . . . So I rose up and went out into the aisle, and found that my faith had been enlightened, insomuch that I never again was assailed with unbelief; but the other terrible temptations I had to endure for two years longer . . . insomuch that I often thought I knew the pains of hell. And I was so ill that my friends would not suffer me to go on pilgrimage to Rome; neither could I scourge myself nor wear a hair shirt, nor a sharp crucifix, nor endure any other hardship . . . but feared that I should die, and was somewhat troubled thereat,

 169

 170

for I could not but love my natural life. . . . And in all those two years God would not suffer me to speak of my pain to any man, however great it might be . . . I must bear and endure to the end alone, that I might have no help or consolation. . . . But in the fourth year, my Lord and God showed his great mercy upon me, and looked upon my affliction, and came to my help with such great and superhuman joy, that in that moment I forgot all my woe and pain that ever I had suffered, and became also in all my natural powers quite strong and lively, as though I had never known what sickness was. . . . And he gave me, moreover, much gracious discernment, so that, when I looked narrowly at a man, I could oftentimes perceive pretty well how it stood with him inwardly. And I was further constrained, however unwilling, to write a little book for the benefit of my fellow Christians.” From a comparison of dates, it appears that this “little book” must be the *Book of the Nine Rocks*, already mentioned. In the opening of this work, Rulman, under the allegorical form of visions, gives a much more detailed account of the mental conflicts he passed through, arising partly from reluctance to contemplate the wretchedness around him, partly from the dread of being condemned by the church as unauthorized to teach and heretical,—before he could resolve to write. Finally, seeing no escape from what appeared to him a positive duty, he sets to work. The first part contains a description of the terrible condition of Christendom; all classes are passed under review, and their particular sins exposed,—those of the clergy with especial freedom.³² The second part is a description of nine rocks which symbolize nine stages in the progress of the soul towards a higher life; each more difficult of ascent, and more glorious than the preceding. From the summit, he obtains a momentary glimpse into the abyss of Deity; then, looking back to earth, sees two men, the one bright and shining as an angel, the other black as Satan. The latter was one who, having reached the summit of the nine rocks, had desired to be somewhat for himself, and had thereupon fallen step by step back into the abyss; the former, one who having gazed at the Godhead, filled with love and compassion, descended voluntarily to save his brethren from their sins.

171

In his autobiography, Rulman further tells us, among other things: “In this fourth year, the three powers of faith, hope, and love were greatly strengthened in me. . . . Moreover, nothing in time or eternity could give me content but God Himself; but when He came to my soul, I knew not whether I were in time or eternity. . . . And in my heart I felt a great yearning, and wished it were the will of God that I might go to the heathen and tell them of the Christian faith. . . . And I would gladly have suffered death and martyrdom at their hands, in honour of our Lord’s sufferings and bitter death. But of all this I was not suffered to speak a word to any, until there came a time when God gave a man in the Oberland to understand that he should come down to me. And when he came, God gave me to tell him of all these things. And this man was altogether unknown to the world, but he became my secret friend, and I gave myself up to his guiding in God’s stead, and told him all my hidden life in these four years. . . . Then he said to me: ‘Behold, dear friend, here is a book in which stand written the first five years of my life in God; give me the history of thy first four

172

³² Thus, in speaking of the Popes, he says, “Look around thee, and see what sort of lives the Popes have led and do lead in these our times; we may not name any one in particular. Look . . . if they have not taken more thought for themselves and for the maintenance of their own dignity than for the promotion of God’s glory. . . . Look around thee, and behold the lives of the bishops in these days, whether they are not more busied in scraping together earthly wealth for the enriching of their relatives than in seeing to it that men are taught to walk in righteous, godly ways. . . . Behold and see how many doctors and teachers are to be found in these days, who utter God’s word from their chairs, and dare publicly to proclaim the real truth, and publicly to speak of the great and murderous crimes that prevail in the Christian world, and to warn men; and are willing by so doing to risk their lives for God’s honour.”

years in exchange for it.' But I answered: 'It would grieve me much if my history should come to the knowledge of any.' Then he said: 'Now see, I have given thee my book, and I know full well that thou wilt tell none of it. No more will I tell any of thee. I will take thy book up into my own land far away, where thou art as unknown as I am in Strasburg. And so begin to write thy history in two books, and the one I will take and the other thou shalt keep, and shalt hang thy seal thereto, and lock it up where none shall find it during thy lifetime.' . . .

173

"Now, notwithstanding all the gifts and enlightenment that God bestowed on me in this fourth year, there was yet a secret spot in my soul, the which was altogether unknown to myself. . . . And it was, that, when I looked upon my fellow-men, I esteemed them as they were in this present time, and stood before God in their sins; and this was a hidden spot, for I ought, through grace, to have regarded them, not as they now were, but as they might well become. . . ." In seeing a waste piece of ground cumbered with rubbish, and giving it as his judgment that it might be reclaimed and made a garden of, an inward voice reveals his sin to him, and rebukes him, saying: "O thou poor miserable creature! how strange art thou . . . how darest thou, then, to esteem, according to what he now is, thy fellow-man, who is made in the image of God, and whom Christ has made his brother in his human nature, and not rather deem that God may make of him a comely and excellent garden, wherein He himself may dwell? . . ." The rest of Rulman's narrative refers to his views of the condition of the Christian world, and he tells us: "It was revealed to me that I should no longer be so greatly exercised by the temptations from which I had hitherto suffered . . . but that my affliction henceforth should be to behold how the sheep were wandering abroad among the proud, unclean, ravening wolves . . . this should be my trial and my cross. . . ."

174

Rulman, however, not only sought "to benefit his fellow-Christians" by his writings, but also by his deeds of active benevolence. His name occurs about this time as one of the managers of a hospital; he is mentioned as Provost of the convent of St. Argobast, and in the 16th century a house of Beguines in Strasburg still bears his name; but he is best known as the founder of the convent belonging to the Knights of St. John at Strasburg. After long deliberation with Nicolas, whether it would not be better to "devote the money to the help of poor people, that they might not die of hunger," Rulman, with some pecuniary assistance from Nicolas, bought and repaired the half-ruined convent of Gruenen-Worth, which he then endowed and made over to the Order of St. John, on condition that its worldly affairs should be managed by three lay trustees, and that it should be a refuge for any good men, whether priests or laymen, rich or poor, who might wish to retire there for their spiritual benefit, and were willing, during their stay, to conform to the customs of the house. His principal motive seems indeed to have been the desire to provide a permanent asylum for pious persons like himself, whose free opinions might at any moment bring them into trouble. He entered on possession of it in 1366, and continued to live there till his death in July 1382, having, however, two years before, built himself a solitary cell close to the church, because he thought that he took too much earthly delight in the society of his brethren of the convent. He was buried, with his wife, who had also retired to a convent, and had died twelve years before, in the choir of the church he built.

It is much to be regretted that the autobiography of Nicolas should not have been preserved, like that of his disciple, or at least has not as yet been found. Though, however, we are thus deprived

175

of the secret history of his mind, we are able to learn a good deal respecting his work and mode of life from his Story of the Four Men who lived with him, and the recently discovered letters. Still these notices are very fragmentary, and his history is mixed up with so much of a marvellous and half-legendary character, that in many cases it is difficult to make out the actual facts. He appears at all events to have been the leader and centre of a distinct association of "Friends of God." That, even before the date at which he began to collect associates round him, he was regarded as a remarkably holy and enlightened man, is proved by the circumstance that two of the four men whose inward history he relates, having known him in their youth, came to him for help when they found themselves in spiritual perplexity. At an early period he began to cast his eye upon those whom he thought he could influence for good. In 1340, when, as he lived till the beginning of the following century, he must have been still comparatively a young man, he went on his mission to Tauler: about 1350, when the latter had left Strasburg, began his connexion with Rulman Merswin and probably with Berthold von Rohrbach, who was burnt at Spire, in 1356, for preaching that a layman enlightened by God was as competent to teach others as the most learned priest. About the same time he was in Hungary, and appears also to have sojourned in Italy. The four men already mentioned joined themselves to him one after the other. The second of them had been an intimate friend of Nicolas from his youth; he was a man of large property, and early married to a beautiful wife, by whom he had two children. After a few years of happiness, however, he began to suffer from the scruples by which pious Catholics have been so often tormented, and to doubt whether he ought not to renounce his domestic joys in order to do penance for his sins; but Nicolas, to whom he came for counsel, enjoined him to remain true to his duties as a husband and father; and it was not until after the death of his wife and both his children that he took up his abode with his friend, and became a priest. The two brothers who seem to have stood next to Nicolas in consideration, were a learned jurist, who had been also a lay-prebend, and a converted Jew, named John, who both afterwards became priests.

176

The little company lived together on equal terms. Nicolas tells the priest, when deliberating whether or not to enter a monastic Order, and enquiring as to his brethren's mode of life; "They observe no rules but such as are common to secular priests, as indeed they are, but we live together in common as simply as we can, and have as little to do with the world as we may." The priests among them seem to have had no peculiar vocation, except that of celebrating mass; the laymen never took part in the administration of the sacraments, but in all other respects there was no distinction between them. As all stood in a direct and individual relation to God, they required no priestly mediation; nay, the priests themselves submitted to the layman Nicolas, because they regarded him as the most enlightened of their number. Not counsel from men ought we to seek after, writes Nicolas in 1356, but that which proceeds from the Holy Spirit; and, so long as we have it from that source, it is indifferent whether it flow to us through priest or layman. In their religious services and fasts they did not strictly observe stated hours, for they regarded external observances as unimportant in themselves, and only excellent as a means of improvement, or a sign of obedience. Thus, while they admitted ascetic exercises and painful penances to be useful in the commencement of a religious life, in order to mortify the sensual inclinations, they declared them to be afterwards a matter of indifference, nay, sometimes positively contrary to the Divine will. According to Nicolas, if a man have attained to a certain degree of mastery over nature, then fasting, scourging, the wearing of iron girdles, &c., is a self-sought pain, and as such a sign that he does not yet allow God to work alone. Moreover, such tormentings may be very detrimental to the body; for though it must needs

177

be brought into subjection to the spirit, yet it ought not to be robbed of its strength; for how else should a man support the fatigue of the labours and travels that the “Friends of God” are so often called to undertake?

Their doctrine on this point would seem to us more judicious than their practice, for it is evident from their writings that they frequently, in fact, carried their austerities so far as to endanger life or reason. But Nicolas admirably draws the line between suffering that is self-imposed, and that which God lays upon us. The latter, whether it consist in outward affliction or inward temptation, we are to take joyfully, for it is a proof that God’s grace is at work within us; Christ, who has endured to the last extremity for man, loves pain, and will not spare it to his friends. The main thing is that we should find all things good in God, and look at things not as they appear to the world, but as they are in God’s sight. When some of the Strasburg brethren of St. John argue that singing and reading in the chapel at fixed hours will hinder them in contemplation, they are censured for it by Nicolas, who tells them that these acts are prescribed by the rules of their Order, and though they have in themselves no merit, yet, if done from obedience, they cannot hinder the motions of grace; even while outwardly busy, God may be worshipped by us in spirit and in truth, if we put no selfish, carnal thoughts between our souls and Him. And when Nicolas von Laufen takes umbrage at the secular manners of some of his brethren who ride about on horseback clad in short coats, the Layman remarks that he has not yet learnt to find all things right in God, but clings too much to outward distinctions. So, again, the renunciation of the world does not in his opinion involve the absolute giving up of earthly possessions, as was taught in his day by the Franciscan Spiritualists and others, nor the violent rending asunder of social ties. Let him who is in an Order that makes poverty a rule, obey that rule; but he who can rightfully hold property is at liberty to retain it, if only he do not seek his own ends in the use thereof, but God alone. Thus these “Friends of God” do not appear to have renounced all control over their property, but merely to have thrown what they regarded as superfluous into a common stock, which was applied to the building of their house and church, to purposes of charity, to defray the expenses of their missionary journeys, &c. This common stock was managed by their trustworthy steward Ruprecht, who was the chief if not sole medium of communication between Nicolas and his Strasburg friends.

From their seclusion, however, they kept a watchful eye upon all that was passing in the world around them, went out to those whom there seemed a prospect of winning over, and exercised no inconsiderable influence upon those who had put themselves under their spiritual guidance. This was the case with many who did not even know Nicolas by name. Thus, Henry von Wolfach, the Master of the Brethren of St. John in Strasburg, and even the Grand Master of the Order in Germany, Conrad von Brunsberg, and many others, desire his counsel to solve their doubts and direct their proceedings. Messengers from Nicolas seem to have been perpetually travelling about, who brought him letters from the “Friends of God,” so that he kept up a constant communication, not only with those in the neighbouring regions but also with the brethren on the Rhine, in Lorraine, in Italy, and in Hungary. In this manner he became acquainted both with public events and likewise with the private affairs of individuals; so, for instance, he made very remarkable revelations to an Augustinian monk in Strasburg respecting one of his penitents. These messengers had certain secret signs by which they recognized each other. Thus, Rulman Merswin was made aware of the presence of Ruprecht, by hearing a peculiar cough when he was in church. Nicolas himself took extraordinary precautions to remain undiscovered, and with such success, that, after Rulman’s death, the brethren at the Gruenen-Worth, who had previously received many letters from him, were never able to

180

discover his retreat. When those with whom he corresponded desired to enter into personal communication with him, he usually refused it, simply saying that it could not be. This was the case with the vicar of the Bishop of Strasburg, John von Schaftolsheim, with the Master of the Brethren of St. John, in Strasburg, and even with Conrad von Brunsberg. In 1363, he writes that for twenty years he had only been able to reveal himself to one person, and not until God should take this one from him would he seek another; which probably signifies that in each city he had but one confidential person, through whom he corresponded with all who desired his counsel. Meanwhile he was active by means of his pen: in 1356, as we have seen, Tauler received from him a tractate on the decay of true religion. The alphabetical list of rules which he had given to Tauler in 1340, he sent in 1369 to the priests at Gruenen-Worth, and in 1371 to Rulman's secretary, Nicolas von Laufen; to the same priests he sent the History of Tauler; and in 1377, to the Brethren of St. John, he sends the book containing the History of the Five Brethren. It is to these circumstances that we owe the proof of the authenticity of Tauler's life, and the possibility of identifying the "man" there mentioned with "the secret friend," who meets us in the writings relating to Rulman Merswin.

181

Up to 1367, Nicolas and his companions dwelt in a "city in the Oberland," most likely Basle; but in that year, finding it "not helpful" "to live among the common people," they determined on retiring into utter seclusion; principally, no doubt, in order to carry on their work unwatched and undisturbed. In accordance with a dream, as they tell us, which commanded them to take their black dog for a guide, they fixed on a site high up on a mountain, far away from any human habitation. This mountain was situated in the dominions of the Duke of Austria, and for two leagues round there was no town. A messenger whom they sent to the Duke, to request his permission to settle here, was taken prisoner in the wars then raging in those countries, and a year had elapsed before they were able to obtain his release. He, however, then brought back the required permission, and they began to build their house, in which each was to have his own spacious apartment, and there were also to be chambers for the reception of foreign brethren as guests; but they were prevented from finishing the edifice, by the political disturbances in the neighbourhood, so that it remained at a standstill for seven years, and the "Friends" gave up all idea of completing it.

182

The political and ecclesiastical feuds by which the Papal court was distracted excited a lively but melancholy interest in Nicolas, who constantly predicts in his letters that they must bring down still heavier judgments at God's hand than even those which had already visited the world; but when, after his long residence in Avignon, Gregory XI. returned to Rome in 1376, a ray of hope that it might yet be possible to restore unity and concord to the afflicted Church seems to have dawned upon his mind, and he felt called on to make a personal effort to influence the Pope himself. Accordingly, as we learn from a letter to Henry von Wolfach, in the February of 1377 it was resolved by the "Friends" that Nicolas and the Jurist should repair to Rome; the Jew, John, offered to raise funds to defray the expenses of the journey from among his relatives,—Jews who harboured a secret inclination towards Christianity. The severity of the Alpine winter and an attack of illness which befell Nicolas, now above seventy years of age, caused the journey to be postponed till the end of March. I extract from the account of the "Friends of God" given in Rulman Merswin's *Briefbuch*³³ the following narrative of their mission and its results: "And when they came to Rome,

³³ The account itself says, "As the Layman wrote to Rulman Merswin and Brother Nicolas von Laufen;" but these letters are not among those preserved.

the Layman (Rulman's secret friend)³⁴ made inquiry after a Roman whom he had known a long time before, and found him yet living. And this Roman received the two 'Friends of God' in a very friendly fashion, and would take no denial, but they, with their servants, and horses, and carriages, must lodge with him so long as their affairs kept them in Rome; and he entertained them most courteously with all manner of good cheer. Then he said to the Layman: 'Methinks it is somewhat strange that thou in thine old age shouldst come to court from such a distant land, unless it be upon some urgent occasion.' Then the Layman answered: 'So it is: we must speak to our Holy Father upon very weighty affairs.' Then said the Roman: 'I shall be able to bring you into his presence, for I am very familiar with him, and often dine at his table.' And he procured that the Pope should give them a privy hearing on the third day after. . . So they came into the presence of Pope Gregory, and the Jurist spoke to him in Latin, and the Layman in Italian, since he could not speak Latin, and said, among much other discourse: 'Holy Father, there be many grievous and heinous crimes wrought throughout Christendom by all degrees of men, whereby God's anger is greatly provoked; thou oughtest to consider how to put an end to these evils.' But he answered: 'I have no power to amend matters.' Then they told him of his own secret faults, which had been revealed to them of God by certain evident tokens, and said, 'Holy Father, know of a truth, that if you do not put away your evil doings and utterly amend your ways, you shall die within a year,' as also came to pass. When the Pope heard these words of rebuke, he was enraged beyond measure; but they answered and said: 'Holy Father, take us captive, and if we cannot give you evident tokens, then kill us and do what you will with us.' . . . And when they declared to him these tokens, he rose up from his throne, and embraced them and kissed them on the mouth, and said to the Layman, 'Let us talk together in Italian, since thou canst not speak Latin.' And they had much loving discourse together; and among other things the Pope said, 'Could you tell the Emperor as much as you have told me, you would indeed do a good service to Christendom.' And afterwards the Pope prayed the two 'Friends of God' that they should stay with him in Rome, and he offered to provide them all things needful, and also to follow their counsel. But they answered, 'Holy Father, suffer us to return home; and we will be at all times obedient to come if you send for us. For we seek no earthly gain, nor have we come hither for the sake of such; we seek only God's glory and the welfare of Christendom above all the perishable gifts of this present time.' Then he inquired of them where their home might be; and when they said, 'We have long dwelt in such a town,' he marvelled that such 'Friends of God' should dwell among the common people. Thereupon they told him [all that had happened], and how they had been hindered in their building. Then the Pope would have given them a bishopric and other revenues and grants, but they would not have them. . . . [But the Pope gave them letters recommending their cause to the Bishop and clergy of their diocese.] Now when these two dear 'Friends of God' had settled their affairs with the Pope, and desired to depart from Rome, their host would not suffer them to pay for anything that they had had in his house . . . and moreover gave the layman a good ambling horse instead of the heavy carriage in which he had come, saying that a soft-paced horse would be much easier for him to ride over the high mountains than the carriage, seeing that he was old and weakly. Now afterward the Pope was unmindful of God's message, and obeyed it not, and died that same year as they had prophesied—to wit, about the fourth week in Lent, 1378."

183

184

³⁴ The name by which Nicolas is always designated, except where he is called "the Dear Friend of God in the Oberland."

On returning to their mountain, they found that the Bishop of their diocese was sojourning in a city thirteen leagues distant. It was resolved that the two who had been with the Pope should ride with his letter to the Bishop to entreat aid for the completion of their house. The prelate received them favourably, and gave them letters to the clergy of the town that lay nearest to their estate. On this, all the five brethren repaired thither, where the priests read from the pulpit the letters of recommendation which they had brought from the Pope and the Bishop. The magistrates also took up their cause, promising to send them armed men to protect their settlement in time of disturbance, and offering them besides a house in the town for a temporary abode, and in which they could also take refuge if necessary; and further sent them on leaving a complimentary present of fish and wine by the hand of their officers. Three foreign brethren, who had for some time cherished the wish to be received into their society, made over to them the whole of their property, in order to finish the house and erect the church. Thus aided, the little band were at length able to settle down in the home they had chosen. But, as far as we can gather from the obscure traces of their subsequent history, it does not appear that they were allowed to enjoy for more than a few years the retreat for which they had sighed so long.

185

In the same year (1377), Nicolas learns from several foreign “Friends of God” that the Church is on the point of falling into great peril, doubtless from the growing discord which threatened all the convulsions of anarchy; and he foresees that things may come to pass which would constrain the “Friends of God” to separate and divide themselves over the world; but in the meantime their part is to remain in concealment till “God shall do something, we know not what as yet.” Meanwhile he entreats the prayers of his friends, for they are greatly troubled in mind, and know not what will come of it. It is evident from such dark hints as these that Nicolas and his friends now began to contemplate the possibility of their duty calling them to use more public means of influence than the private, though by no means inactive or inefficient, line of conduct they had hitherto pursued. They must have foreseen the painful collision that was impending between their deep reverence for the outward authority of the Church and the inward authority of the indwelling light. Neither can they have been without forebodings of the martyr’s doom, which actually befell all those of whose fate any traces are left; though we may well believe, from all we know of them, that this would occasion them far less anxiety and distress than the question whether they were acting most for the interests of the Church by continuing their present silent and therefore undisturbed efforts to influence the spiritual leaders of the people; or by going out among the people themselves, to call them to repentance, and proclaim doctrines which, however true, might unsettle the foundations of their traditional belief;—the difficulty and perplexity which in many ages meets and torments minds of the prophetic order.

186

In the following year, the great schism that had been dimly foretold, broke out, and for forty years the church was divided between two heads; Urban VI. was elected at Rome, under the influence of terror at the violence of the insurgent mob; and soon after, in subservience to the French party, Clement VII. et Fondi, who immediately hastened to Avignon. When these tidings reached the “Friends of God,” it seemed to them that the time was come when the threatened judgments of God were about to burst over the world. It was, indeed, intelligence fitted to shake all hearts, for, as the brethren of Gruenen-Worth write: “After God has been warning the world for these forty years past, by deadly diseases and earthquakes, famines, and a wild, masterless folk,³⁵ laying waste many lands, He is now sending us a plague that is worse than all the rest, because it attacks our faith;

187

³⁵ The hordes known by the name of “Englishmen,” who for several years after 1361 ravaged France, Lorraine, and Alsace.

namely, the dissensions of Christendom, in which all the wisdom of nature, of Scripture, and of the grace of the Holy Spirit is so utterly dried up and extinct, that all our learned doctors and wise priests have lost their way, and know not which to choose of these two Popes, that they may help to bring back unity to Christendom, and peace to the See of Rome.” Their Master wished in this perplexity to repair for counsel to the “Friends of God,” but Nicolas forbade him, saying: “Have you not the Holy Scripture? Are you not a professor in the chair? Why should you ask counsel from the creature? Stop, and wait till God Himself shall constrain you to come to us. It is not yet time for us to reveal ourselves; but it may soon come to pass that we slip from our covert, to be scattered abroad over the world, and if so, I shall come to Strasburg and make myself known to you.”

It is, however, evident that the “Friends of God,” though concealed, were by no means passive at this time; what special plans they cherished are unknown, but that they had such is clear from all their proceedings. So early as November 1377, Nicolas had been with the priest, John, in Metz, on some business with which we are not acquainted. During 1378, much consultation by means of messengers and letters must have taken place, for on the 17th of March, in the following year, Nicolas (as he relates in a letter to Henry von Wolfach), with seven other brethren, met in some wild place high up among the mountains, near a chapel hewn out in a rock, close to which a priest dwelt with two young brethren in a little hermitage. Four out of the seven were laymen, the other three ordained priests. Nicolas, whether from humility or not, speaks of himself as one of the least among them. From his letter it would seem that the chief purpose of this meeting was united prayer to God, to avert the “dreadful storm” that was menacing the Christian world, that there might be space left for amendment. A week was devoted to these supplications; every afternoon the brethren went out into the forest, and sat down “beside a fair brook,” to converse upon the matters on which they had come hither. At length, on the last day, while thus assembled, a storm of wind came on, followed by a thick darkness, which they took for a work of the evil spirits. After the storm had lasted an hour, there came a pleasant light, and the sweet voice of an invisible angel announced to them that God had heard their prayer, and stayed his chastisements for a year; but when this was ended, they should entreat Him no more, for the Father would no longer delay to take vengeance on the despisers of His Son. After this the “Friends of God” returned back again each to his own place. Respecting the course they resolved to pursue, all that we can make out from the vague hints in the letters of Nicolas is, that they interpreted the promise of the angel to mean that they were to wait a year longer before quitting their concealment and taking an open and active part in the affairs of the world; the only thing that is distinctly stated is, that it was resolved once more to try the effect of personal remonstrances with the Pope. Nicolas himself was entrusted with this mission, which, however, from some unknown cause, was not carried out. Meanwhile, according to the intelligence received from the brethren in foreign parts respecting the progress of the schism, affairs were assuming a more and more gloomy aspect; the confusion and perplexity occasioned by the presence of two Popes was continually increasing; the Christian world was splitting into two parties; even the secular authority was in danger of disruption and subversion. The time drew nearer and nearer when Nicolas believed himself called on to begin to work among the common people; already, in June 1379, he calls on the Strasburg Master to warn the people in his sermons, and hold up before them the testimonies of Scripture concerning their duties in such a crisis.

As the end of the year approached, during which the “Friends of God” were to wait, they agreed to hold another meeting. All the accounts relating to this conference (the latest distinctly recorded intelligence we have respecting this extraordinary band of associates), are so mixed up with the

symbolical and the marvellous, that it is extremely difficult to make out the real facts of the case. According to the narrative given by Nicolas to Rulman Merswin, he, with twelve other “Friends of God,” were at Christmas 1379 warned by dreams to assemble together on the following Holy Thursday, at the same place where the seven brethren had met the year before. So early as February some of the foreign brethren arrived at the abode of Nicolas: one from the country of the “Lords of Meiglon,” (probably Milan); two from Hungary, whom he had known thirty years before; one from Genoa, a rich burgher, with whom Nicolas was not previously acquainted. On Holy Thursday, the 22nd of March, they met at the little chapel in the rock, and, after receiving the sacrament on Good Friday morning, repaired, as before, to the wood, and sat down beside the stream to begin their deliberations. What passed during these conferences is only related in the form of marvellous visions and fantastic occurrences. After tempests and diabolical apparitions, a bright light surrounds the place, and an invisible speaker tells them that the impending plagues shall be stayed for three years longer, on condition of their obeying the injunctions contained in a letter which thereupon drops down in their midst. These commands are somewhat mysterious: the “Friends of God” are to withdraw from their ordinary communications with the world, except in the case of those who desire their counsel; to receive the sacrament three times a week, &c.; and after three years they shall receive further commands from God. After they have declared their readiness to obey the letter, they are told by the same voice to light a fire, and throw it in. Instead of burning, it rises up in the fire, a flash of lightning meets the flame, and catches up fire and letter together to heaven, after which there is nothing more to be seen; and the brethren depart to their respective homes. The brethren in the Oberland commence their period of retreat at Whitsuntide, after a high mass has been performed by the priest John in their newly-finished church. Nicolas writes beforehand to Rulman Merswin releasing him from his obedience, and recommending him to take the Master Henry von Wolfach for a confessor in his stead. To the latter, who had again applied to know what course the “Friends of God” meant to take with regard to the rival Popes, Nicolas replies with his usual caution, that the Brethren of St. John could not regulate their conduct in these matters by that of the “Friends of God;” for they were bound to obey the dictates of their superiors in the Order, while the latter had received many privileges from Pope Gregory, and were, moreover, only subject to their Bishop, who did not press them for a decision.

It is certainly very difficult to know in what light to regard the marvellous accounts that meet us in the writings of Rulman and Nicolas. Some of them seem to be simply symbolical; for it is clear that they were in the habit of presenting their views of human affairs under the form of an allegory, supposed to be seen in a vision or dream, just as Bunyan does in his “Pilgrim’s Progress.” This is the case with Rulman’s Book of the Nine Rocks, Christiana Ebner’s vision of the Closed Cathedral, and some unimportant visions occurring in the letters of Nicolas.³⁶ But the case is different when wonders are related, as far as we can see, as simple matters of fact. That, however, the “Friends of God” expected, and so were ready to receive without much hesitation as to their reality, not only direct spiritual communications from the Divine Being, but also miraculous interpositions in physical things, is perfectly clear; and thus they were undoubtedly open to all the self-deception in these matters which may arise from intense emotion and mental excitement acting on frames disordered by asceticism. Swoons under the pressure of religious emotion are with them, as with the Methodists of the last century, a matter of continual occurrence; and with them, as with the early Methodists,

³⁶ See, for instance, his vision of the Three Birds. (Schmidt’s *Gottesfreunde*, S. 147.)

seem to have been not unfrequently the crisis of a state of overwrought physical and mental excitement, after which they regained a calmer and healthier condition both of body and mind, with an addition of spiritual experience and enlightenment. Such an occurrence as a letter falling from heaven presents much greater difficulties. It is possible that Nicolas may have intended the whole story rather as an allegory than as matter of fact; if he regarded it in the latter light, it must have been the result either of a terribly over-strained imagination, or of fraud on the part of some unknown person. But to suppose that a man of so much simple holiness and practical wisdom as Nicolas appears to us, should have taken part in juggling tricks of such dreadful impiety in order to persuade his associates that the course he judged best was prescribed to them by Heaven, is, I confess, a larger demand upon my powers of credence than they are able to meet. Moreover, we must judge these accounts by the age in which they were produced,—an age when the mental food of the pious laity was the life of St. Francis with his five wounds and blasphemous “conformities” to the life of our Lord, and other works of a similar nature. And it must be remembered that the leaders of this party—Nicolas, Rulman, John,—were laymen whose not large stock of erudition was self-acquired, comparatively late in life. In the writings of the scholar Tauler (though, in common with all his contemporaries, he believes in ghosts and heavenly visions) we find scarcely a trace of the fanatical credulity that meets us in the letters of these lay friends of his, if we are to take their statements as literal and not symbolical representations of fact. Even so doing, however, if we compare them with the stories contained in the staple religious literature of the day, or even in the life of Suso, Tauler’s companion and friend, Nicolas and his friends, wild as they may seem to us rational Protestants, will appear scarcely to leave the regions of sober common sense;³⁷ and it is remarkable that, in most of the practical questions that arise with regard to self-discipline, he takes the moderate and judicious side.

193

Whatever interpretation, however, we may be inclined to put upon the marvellous circumstances attending the above-mentioned conference, it seems tolerably clear that the three years’ so-called seclusion of the “Friends of God” was regarded by them as a time of preparation for their public work, when they should be “scattered abroad over Christendom;” and that by their retirement, they were breaking the ties that bound them to those who had hitherto depended on them for guidance, and accustoming them to act for themselves against a time when they should no longer have their wonted counsellors at hand. Probably, too, the brethren took this course partly from the desire that their spiritual children should not be involved in the persecutions which they could not but perceive to threaten themselves, but might continue to work for the cause of true religion in their respective spheres, unhindered by the suspicions of heresy, which any known connexion with the “Friends of God” would have brought upon them. Not that there is any sign of the “Friends of God” having been heretical in point of dogma; it was rather the remarkable freedom with which they criticized the conduct both of the spiritual and temporal authorities that was likely to bring them into trouble. Thus, in one of their meetings just before their retreat, the brother who had been a Jurist says, that if offices in Church and State were conferred in accordance with God’s law, neither Urban nor Clement deserved to be Pope; the former had been appointed by the Roman mob through violent

194

³⁷ This will, I think, seem no exaggerated expression to any reader who will take the pains to consult only Diepenbrock’s *Life of Suso* (Ratisbon, 1829), with Gorres’ Introduction to it, and so see for himself the space that separates the Romish from our Protestant point of view in these matters; not forgetting, meanwhile, that the Editor Diepenbrock was the secretary of the learned Bishop Sailer, the leader of the most liberal party among the Catholics of almost our own day.

means, and the latter was now defending himself by similar acts of violence, which was contrary to justice and God's order. So likewise, the King of Rome had obtained the crown after a shameful fashion (1376), for his father had bought the votes of the electors with gold; how the electors could reconcile it with their oath to choose an inexperienced boy for their king, God only knew; with the subjects matters did not stand much better: they obeyed their rulers only so long as it served their own interests to do so; a godly life was almost extinct, everywhere prevailed nought but the striving after riches and pleasures.³⁸ This passage throws much light on the views and aims of the "Friends of God," and enables us to form an idea of what must have been the frequent topics of discussion among them. With the cessation of the correspondence between Nicolas and Rulman Merswin, ceases our only source of information about the "Friends of God." Their term of waiting expired on the 25th March 1383; and since we know, from contemporary history, that the course of events, instead of bringing brighter prospects, grew ever darker and more threatening, we seem justified in concluding that they now believed the time to have arrived for them "to go out into the five ends of the world," and work for Christ. Most likely they went forth as preachers of repentance, for there occur in the letters of Nicolas frequent comparisons of the present state of the world to that of Nineveh, and hints that they may have to act the part of Jonah. But where, and how long they did so, is wrapt in utter darkness. As far as we can learn, Providence did not see fit to bless their preaching like that of Jonah, and, to human eyes, their enterprise was a failure. For all we actually know respecting their subsequent history is, that in 1393 a certain Martin von Mayence, a Benedictine monk of Reichenau, in the diocese of Constance, who is called in the acts of his trial a disciple of Nicolas of Basle and a "Friend of God," was burnt at Cologne, after the same fate had befallen some other "Friends of God," a short time before, at Heidelberg. Active researches were made after Nicolas, but as he had concealed himself from his friends, so for a long time he was able to elude the efforts of his persecutors. At length, on a journey which he had undertaken into France, in order to diffuse his doctrines, accompanied by two of his disciples, James and John (the latter most likely the converted Jew who always appears as his bosom friend), he fell into the hands of the Inquisitors at Vienne, in the diocese of Poitiers. He was brought to trial, and persisted firmly and publicly in his heresies, the most "audacious" of which seems to have been that he pretended to "know that he was in Christ, and Christ in him." He was therefore delivered over to the secular power, and perished in the flames, together with his two disciples, who refused to be parted from him.³⁹

Since, in the trial of Martin of Mayence, Nicolas is spoken of as still living, his death most likely occurred subsequently to that date, but cannot have taken place much later, as he must then have been near ninety years of age. Even before this time, the Strasburg brethren had lost all trace

³⁸ See Schmidt's *Gottesfreunde*, S. 170.

³⁹ The following note, inserted by Schmidt in his *Tauler*, S. 205, is, I believe, the only source of information we have respecting the end of the Layman:—

"Johan Niederus, fornicarius, Arg. 1517, 4to. F. 40, &c.: Vivebat paulo ante [the Council of Pisa] quidam purum laicus, Nycholaus nomine. Hic in linea Rheni circa Basiliam et infra, primum velut Beghardus ambulans, a multis qui persequerantur hereticos, de eorundem hereticorum numero quasi unus habebatur suspectissimus. Acutissimus enim erat, et verbis errores coloratissime velare novit. Ideireo etiam manus inquisitorum dudum evaserat et multo tempore. Discipulos igitur quosdam in suam sectam collegit. Fuit enim professione et habitu de damnatis Beghardis unus, qui visiones et revelationes in praedicto damnato habitu multas habuit quas infallibiles esse creditit. Se scire affirmabat audacter quod Christus in eo esset actu, et ipse in Christo, et plura alia, quae omnia, captus tandem Wiennae in Pictaviensi diocesi, inquisitus fatebatur publice. Sed cum Jacobum et Joannem suspectos in fide, et sibi consocios suos speciales discipulos, ad jussum ecclesiae eum inquirenti nollet dimittere nisi per ignem, et reportis in multis a vera fide devius et impersuasibilis, secularium potestati juste traditus est qui eum incinerarunt.



of the “Friends of God,” and their frequent attempts to discover them had proved utterly unavailing;⁴⁰ no doubt, because the convent which they sought to find was already deserted, and its inmates, whose names they had never known, were scattered abroad in fulfilment of their vocation. That which appears to have formed the chief ground of their persecution, was their effort to free the people from the tyranny of the clergy, and their claiming for every one enlightened by God the right to teach,—a claim antagonistic to the inmost essence of the Romish Church. And if their teaching failed to effect a wide reformation because it was mingled with some of the great errors of Rome, and in place of priestly authority over men’s consciences set up that of their brethren, whose inspiration was often not less doubtful, yet we cannot but recognize in it the germs of the true freedom of the Gospel, as well as the great and all-essential truth that the Christian life does not consist in outward works, but in the inward union of the spirit with God.



⁴⁰ A detailed account of these attempts is given in Schmidt’s *Gottesfreunde*, S. 29.



SERMONS

OF THE

Reverend Doctor John Tauler

I

Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent

(From the Epistle for the day)

How that we are called upon to arise from our sins, and to conquer our foes, looking for the glorious coming of Our Lord in our souls.

Rom. xiii. 11.—“Now it is high time to awake out of sleep.”

THIS day we celebrate the beginning of the season of Advent, that is to say, the coming of our Lord; and now, indeed, we enter on an exceeding sweet and blessed time, concerning which very devout and joyful words are read and sung by the holy Church. For as May excels all other months in gladness and delights, so is this season specially dear to our hearts, and sacred above all other festivals. For these are the days which the prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament for five thousand years have longed and sighed for, crying out—“Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, to enlighten those who are sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.” And, indeed, all the histories and symbols of the Old Testament are designed to shadow forth the greatness of Him who should come, and who now has come. O let us, therefore, give thanks and praise to God without ceasing, that He has made us to live in this His time of grace, and is ready to bestow all His gifts and riches upon us if we are but willing to receive them.

And now, as at this time, does the holy Apostle call upon us to arise from the sleep of sin, “for the night is far spent, and the day is at hand; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light, and let us walk honestly as in the day.”

Now to this end, let us mark diligently, first, how it is that we have fallen; and, secondly, how we are to arise from all our sins and infirmities into our first state of innocence.

God created man to the intent that he should possess those mansions in the kingdom of heaven from which Lucifer and his angels were thrust out. The same Lucifer, for his deadly hatred towards man, hath seduced him likewise into disobedience against God, by the which he lost all the graces and endowments that were intended to make him like unto God and the angels, and poisoned his own pure nature, so that it became corrupt. And through this poison man has wounded himself



mortally with blindness in his reason, with perverseness or malice in his will, with shameful lusts in his appetites, and with loss of his just indignation at sin. Man, being in honour, understood it not, and is become like unto the beasts that perish.

201

And hence it has come to pass that three foes have risen up against him, who, alas! on all sides have got the upper hand, and are ruling in the hearts of the people: these are, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Where these three have their will, that noble thing, the Soul, is lost, on which God hath looked with such great love; for those in whom they obtain the mastery do most surely walk in a way that leadeth unto eternal death. How cruelly and perilously these three enemies now reign in numbers of men, both in the Church and in the world, standing in God's place, is bewailed with bitter tears by the friends of God, who love Him and seek His glory. For the everlasting injury of their fellow-creatures is a sore grief to such men, insomuch that their heart is ready to dry up within their body for anguish, when they see self-love so rooted in men's hearts, that there be few left who wholly love God and have a single eye to His glory.

The World rules through pride, outward or inward. How many are members of this Devil's Order! They desire to be and appear to be somewhat; while their sins and infirmities are not to be numbered.

The Devil's government leads to bitterness, to hatred and anger, to suspicion, to judging others, to revenge, to ill-will, to discord. All his disciples are quarrelsome, unloving, envious of their neighbours.

The will of our own Flesh is set upon earthly pleasures and sensual delights, and it craveth to have the best of everything, and continually to find enjoyment in all things. How great is the mischief that springs from this fountain, people do not know, especially those who are themselves blinded through it. By these three foes are nearly all men led astray to their eternal loss.

202

Now he who desires to rise again to his first honour and dignity, which Adam at the beginning, and we after him, have lost through sin, and to make way for the coming of Our Lord in his soul, must flee the world, overcome the Devil, bring his flesh under dominion to his reason, and exercise himself diligently in these six points following:—

Man fell in Paradise through two things,—lust and pride; so likewise we must return by means of two things, for nature to win back again her original powers. We must resist and die to all irregular desires, after a manly and reasonable sort. In the second place, we must humble ourselves, and bow our nature down to the earth in deep humility before God and all men against whom it had lifted itself with pride. Take always the lowest place, and so shalt thou rise to the highest. By these two things nature recovers her original powers.

Next, in two things man must become like unto the angels. He must pardon and forgive all those who do him wrong, and be from his heart the friend of his enemies, like the angels, whom we oftentimes vex with our sins. Further, he must serve his neighbour with a willing spirit, as the holy angels are ever ministering to us for God's sake.

Lastly, in two things man must become like unto our Lord Jesus Christ. First, in perfect obedience, as our Lord was obedient to His Heavenly Father, even unto death; secondly, he must persevere and grow in obedience and in all virtues, unto his life's end.

203

By these means the heart is made pure and heavenly, and the man becomes of one mind with God through deep humility, free self-surrender, patient long-suffering, true poorness of spirit, and fervent love to God. And all who do verily seek the kingdom of God (of whom, alas! how few is the number), do prevail against their foes, and God delivers them from their heavy burdens, and

helps them to bear all their afflictions. For He lays upon them much suffering of many kinds; but the righteous God does this to the intent that four ends may be accomplished in them. The first, that they may come to themselves, and see whence their trouble cometh, and that their thoughts may be turned upon themselves by reason of the pain, and so be fixed. The second, that they may examine why God has laid the burden of pain upon them; and when they perceive God's purpose in their sufferings, let them strive to fulfil that, and resign themselves wholly to His divine will. The third, that they may come out from themselves, and from all creatures. The fourth, that they may learn true patience under diverse afflictions. But what is true patience under affliction? Is it to remain unmoved by outward things? No. True patience is that a man should feel in his inmost soul, and in utter sincerity thus judge, that no one could or might do him a real injustice, but always remember that he is receiving no worse than his deserts, for he might justly have far more to suffer and endure; insomuch that he may feel nothing but gentleness and compassion towards all who do him wrong. Such men are followers of Christ, our humble Master, in whom He reigns, and to whom He said: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

204

Now there are two sorts of men who follow after the word of Christ. The one sort hear it with joy, and follow after it as far as they are able with their reason to perceive its truth, and take it in just in the same way as their reason takes in what is concerned with the world of sense; and all this they do by means of their natural light, but they make no account of anything that they themselves do not feel or enter into; but with these natural powers of theirs, they are ever running out to catch up and understand some new thing. They have not learnt by experience that they ought to die to this restlessness; but if they are ever to grow better men, they must try another road.

But the other sort turn their thoughts inward, and remain resting on the inmost foundation of their souls, simply looking to see the hand of God with the eyes of their enlightened reason, and await from within their summons and their call to go whither God would have them. And this they receive from God without any means; but what is given through means, such as other mortal men, for instance, is as it were tasteless; moreover, it is seen as through a veil, and split up into fragments, and bears within it a certain sting of bitterness. It always retains the savour of that which is of the creature, which it must needs lose and be purified from, if it is to become in truth food for the spirit, and to enter into the very substance of the soul. For those who perceive God's gifts and leadings from within, whether by the help of means or without means, do receive them from their fountain-head, and carry them back again unto their fountain-head in the Divine goodness. These are they who draw and drink from the true well, of which Christ said: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." But the first of whom we spoke are seeking their own things; wherever they are, and whatever they do, they are always standing upon their own foundation. Yet, in truth, they can never find their own good so certain and so unmixed, as in its inward source, without the aid of means.

205

Now you may ask, How can we come to perceive this direct leading of God? By a careful looking at home, and abiding within the gates of thy own soul. Therefore, let a man be at home in his own heart, and cease from his restless chase of and search after outward things. If he is thus at home while on earth, he will surely come to see what there is to do at home,—what God commands him inwardly without means, and also outwardly by the help of means; and then let him surrender himself, and follow God along whatever path his loving Lord thinks fit to lead him: whether it be to contemplation or action, to usefulness or enjoyment; whether in sorrow or in joy, let him follow

on. And if God do not give him thus to feel His hand in all things, let him still simply yield himself up, and go without for God's sake, out of love, and still press forward, setting ever before him the lovely example of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ; who did all his works for three ends:



The first was, that in all His doings He sought the glory of His Heavenly Father only, and not His own in any matter, whether great or small, and committed all things into His hands again.

The second was, that with His whole heart He purposed and sought the salvation and blessedness of men, that He might lay hold on all men, and bring them to the acknowledgment of His Name, according to the words of St. Paul: "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

The third end which He kept in view, in all His words, and works, and life, was, that He might give us a true example and model of a perfect life in its highest form.

The men who thus tread in His steps do become, in very truth, the noblest and most glorious of their race; and those who are thus born again into His life, are the rich and costly jewels of the Holy Christian Church, and in all ages they work out the highest good, while they look not to the greatness or meanness of their work, nor to their success or failure, but look only to the will of God in all things; and for this cause all their works are the best that may be. Neither do they look whether God will place them high or low, for the only thing they care for is, that in all things alike God's will may be done. God grant that it may be thus with each of us. Amen.

II



Sermon for the Second Sunday in Advent

(From the Gospel for the day)

How that God is very near to us, and how we must seek and find the Kingdom of God within us, without respect to time and place.⁴¹

Luke xxi. 31.—"Know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

OUR Lord says here that the kingdom of God is nigh to us. Yea, the kingdom of God is in us; and St. Paul says, that now is our salvation nearer to us than we believe.

Now ye ought to know, first, *how* the kingdom of God is nigh at hand; secondly, *when* the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.

Now we must give earnest heed to take note of all that is contained in these words, "The kingdom of God is nigh at hand." For if I were a king, and did not know it, I should be no king; but if I were fully convinced that I was a king, and if all men deemed me so likewise, and further, if I knew that all men deemed me such, I should be a king, and all the riches of the king would be mine. But if

⁴¹ This Sermon is believed to be by Master Eckart.

208

any of these three things were wanting, I could be no king. In like manner does our blessedness depend upon our perceiving and knowing the Highest Good, which is God Himself. I have a power in my soul which enables me to perceive God: I am as certain as that I live that nothing is so near to me as God. He is nearer to me than I am to myself. It is a part of His very essence that He should be nigh and present to me. He is also nigh to a stone or a tree, but they do not know it. If a tree could know God, and perceive His presence as the highest of the angels perceives it, the tree would be as blessed as the highest angel. And it is because man is capable of perceiving God, and knowing how nigh God is to him, that he is better off than a tree. And he is more blessed or less blessed in the same measure as he is aware of the presence of God. It is not because God is in him, and so close to him, and he hath God, that he is blessed, but because he perceives God's presence, and knows and loves Him; and such an one will feel that God's kingdom is nigh at hand.

Often, when I meditate on the kingdom of God, I cannot speak for the greatness thereof. For the kingdom of God, what is it but God Himself with all His riches? The kingdom of God is no small thing. If we think of all the worlds that God could create, that is not the kingdom of God. When the kingdom of God is manifested in a soul, and she knows it, you need not to preach or to teach; for that soul is taught of God, and assured of eternal life. He who knows and perceives how nigh God's kingdom is, may say with Jacob; "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

209

God is alike near in all creatures. The wise man says; "God hath spread out His nets and snares over all creatures, so that he who desireth to perceive Him, may find Him in every one of them."

A Master has said: "He knoweth God aright who knoweth him in all things alike." He who serveth God with fear, it is good; he who serveth Him with love, it is better; but he who in fear can love, that is the best of all. That a man should have a life of quiet or rest in God is good; that a man should lead a painful life in patience is better; but that a man should have rest in a painful life is best of all. Whether a man walk out in the fields and say his prayers, and feel God's presence, or whether he be in the church and feel God's presence, does he perceive Him any the better because he is in a place of rest? If he do, it comes from his own infirmity; the difference is not on God's side, for God is in all things and places alike, and is ever alike ready to give Himself to us, in so far as we are able to receive Him; and he knows God aright who sees Him in all things.

St. Bernard says: "Why does my eye perceive the heavens, and not my feet? Because my eye is more like the heavens than my feet." Thus, if my soul is to perceive God, it must be heavenly. Now what will bring the soul to see God in herself, and know how nigh God is to her? Consider! The heavens cannot take any imprint from other things, neither can they, by any violence or force, be turned from their order. In like manner, the soul that would know God must be so grounded and built up in Him, that neither hope, nor fear, nor joy, nor sorrow, nor weal or woe, nor anything else, can so move it as to force it from its place in Him.

210

The heavens are everywhere alike far from the earth: thus shall the soul be alike far from all earthly things, that she be not nearer to one than to another, but keep herself alike far from all, in joy and sorrow, in prosperity and adversity, for she must be utterly dead to all that is of the earth, earthly, and altogether raised above it.

The heavens are pure and bright, without a speck; they have nought to do with time or space; no bodies have a fixed place therein; neither are the heavens subject to time: their circuit is swift beyond belief; their course is without time, yet from their course cometh time.

Nothing hinders the soul so much in its knowledge of God as time and place. Time and place are parts, and God is one; therefore, if our soul is to know God, it must know Him above time and place, for God is neither this nor that, like these complex things around us, for God is one.

If the soul is to see, she must not look at the things that exist in time, for so long as she is looking at time and place, or at the phenomena dependent thereon, she can never perceive God Himself: just as, if mine eye is to perceive colour, it must first be cleared of all tint in itself. If the soul is to know God, she must have no fellowship with that which is Nought. He who sees God, knows that all creatures are nought; for when you compare one creature with another, it indeed appears beautiful and is somewhat, but when you compare it with God it is nothing. I say more: if the soul is to know God, she must forget herself and lose herself, for while she is looking at and thinking about herself, she is not looking at or thinking about God; but when she loses herself in God, and lets go of all things, then she finds herself again in God. When she comes to know God, then does she know to perfection in Him, both herself and all the things from which she has separated herself. If I am truly to know the Highest Good, or the Eternal Goodness, I must know it in that wherein it is good, namely, in itself,—not in those things in which it is only in part. If I am to know real Being, I must know it in that where it is self-existent, that is, in God. In God alone is the true Divine Substance: in one man you have not all humanity, for one man is not all men; but in God the soul knows all humanity, and all things in their Ideal, for she knows them in their Substance. When a man has been within a beautifully-painted house, he knows much more about it than another who has never been inside it, and is able to tell much about it. So I am as certain as that I live and God lives, that if the soul is to know God, she must know Him above time and space; and such a soul knows God, and knows how nigh God's kingdom is; that is, God with all His riches.

The Masters have set forth many questions in the Schools as to how it be possible for the soul to know God. It is not of God's severity that He requires much from man; it is of His great kindness that He will have the soul to open herself wider, to be able to receive much, that He may bestow much upon her. Let no one think that it is hard to attain thereunto. Although it sound hard, and is hard at first, as touching the forsaking and dying to all things, yet, when one has reached this state, no life can be easier or sweeter, or fuller of pleasures; for God is right diligent to be with us at all seasons, and to teach us, that He may bring us to Himself when we are like to go astray. None of us ever desired anything more ardently than God desires to bring men to the knowledge of Himself.

God is ever ready, but we are very unready; God is nigh to us, but we are far from Him; God is within, we are without; God is at home, we are strangers. The Prophet says: "God leadeth the righteous by a narrow path into a broad highway, till they come unto a wide and open place;"⁴² that is, unto the true freedom of that spirit which hath become one spirit with God. God help us all to follow Him, that He may bring us unto Himself! Amen.

III

⁴² The Translator has not been able to determine what is the passage referred to in the original, which runs thus: *Gott führet die Gerechten durch einen engen Weg in die breite Strasse, dass sie kommen in die Weite und in die Breite.*

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Advent

(From the Gospel for the day)

How that we must wholly come out from ourselves, that we may go into the wilderness and behold God.

Matt. xi. 7.—“What went ye out into the wilderness for to see?”

OUR Lord Jesus Christ said unto the Jews, “What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?” In these words let us consider three things: First, the going out; secondly, the wilderness; thirdly, what we are to see there.

First, let us consider the going out. This blessed going out takes place in four ways:—

The first way is to come out from the world, that is, from the craving after worldly advantages, and to despise them, according to that precept of St. John, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Those who thus forsake the love of the world, may be fitly said to come out of Egypt, leaving King Pharaoh behind; that is, they purpose to forsake pride, vain-glory, presumption, and all other sins. And those who are thus minded do greatly need a Moses to be their leader and commander; for he was very gentle and merciful, and in their coming out they require to be treated with great gentleness, and kindness, and forbearance. But such as come out from Sodom and Gomorrah, that is, those who have to depart from covetousness, intemperance, and unchastity, and are hard beset by these foes, do need an angel for their leader and guide; that is to say, a man who can have compassion on them, but who is himself temperate, pure, and strict in life. Now those who do thus suffer themselves to be led and guided, shall be verily delivered from all their pride and sensuality, as Isaiah says: “Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace;” and as Christ also says: “In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace.”

The second kind of coming out is to loose thy hold on outward things, to cease from thy vain anxieties, thy selfish wishing and planning, and to turn thy thoughts inward, that thou mayest learn to know thyself, and to see what thou art, how thou art, and in what it standeth amiss with thee. He who is too full of his own joys or sorrows to get beyond himself can never come to know himself. So St. Bernard says: “It were better to know thyself, and to see how sick and full of infirmities thou art, than to be master of all the sciences in the world.” Therefore says Solomon in his Song: “If thou know not [thyself], O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock [of thy companions]:” which signifies, consider the lives of God’s saints, and look at thyself in that mirror; that is to say, follow their example, and walk not after thine own will.

The third kind of going out is to give up thine own ease and thine own way, and to devote thyself, so far as thou art able, to thy neighbour, to help him by counsel and deed, and by thine own good example, to the utmost of thy power and the best of thy knowledge, in a constant spirit of hearty love, that he may be brought to the things that make for his eternal peace. For this is the commandment of the Lord, “That ye love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” So likewise St. Paul says: “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” Just as it is said in the Book of Genesis:

“Except ye bring your youngest brother with you, ye shall see my face no more.” This is also plainly meant in the Book of Canticles, where we read, “Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us get up early to the vineyards, and let us lodge in the villages, and let us see if the vine flourish.”

The fourth kind of going out is to forsake everything but God, so that our love towards God should be the strongest love we have; and we should indeed love Him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength. As it was said unto Abraham: “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house:” that is to say, “Set not your affections on the things that perish, but on God only; and whatever you possess, thank God for it, and use it for Him.” Thus had the woman of Canaan come out, as her words indeed testify: “True, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master’s table;” and therefore she obtained her request. Thus it is said to the loving soul and her companions: “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion.” Well may it be said “ye daughters,” and not sons; for they are still feeble in understanding, and troubled with many womanish fears, and not yet strong in renunciation, but are still tender and weak, like maidens or daughters.

216

The second subject for our consideration is “the wilderness.” When men have forsaken sins and worldly ambition, they come into the wilderness, which signifies a spiritual life, or the life of one who is dead to the world. Now there are two kinds of wilderness, a good and a bad. It is an evil wilderness when a man’s heart is filled with vanity, and barren of good deeds, of love and of heavenly aspiration, and far and wide in the Church, or in the temple of the soul, there rises no incense of praise to God; when the sheep of the house of Israel, that is to say all good thoughts, are scattered, each to his own way. But that is a wilderness which is very fruitful and good, when the whirlwinds of earthly cares or passions are laid to rest, and the billows of worldly desire and creature aims cease to swell up in the depths of the heart. And then, even though the first sharp dart of pain pierce through every nerve of body and mind, yet in the deep sources of his will, the man remains undaunted. That is a good wilderness when without there are storms, yet within there is peace; the wilderness of which God said by the prophet: “I will bring you into the wilderness, and there will I plead with you face to face;” for no one does hear or understand what is in him, and what God says in his soul, until he is brought into this wilderness.

217

There are three reasons why a spiritual life is called a wilderness, or a life in the desert. The first is on account of the small number who do turn from the world and go forth into it, and because the common way of the world is for each man to follow his own earthly objects. But it is the wisest course to drive out the world from the heart, by banishing the very thoughts and images thereof, and, with Moses, go into the depths of the wilderness and dwell therein, that so we may the better watch over and guard our sheep; that is to say, escape the assaults of inward temptation, and the wanderings of the imagination into forbidden fields. And as, when Moses drove his sheep into the farthest corners of the wilderness, God revealed Himself to him there in a burning bush, so likewise shalt thou be filled with burning love and holy longing, and follow on to know God.

This is the beauteous wilderness of which Solomon speaks when he says: “Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like a pillar of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense?” St. Gregory says: “It is the nature and property of love to rise up unceasingly from itself to God with holy aspiration, never resting till it hath reached and embraced the Highest Good; for nothing on earth can draw it down or imprison its flame, but it soars ever upwards to God above itself.” And so it is with good men; and the closer they cling to Him whom they love, the more do they turn from and despise all the smiles of the world. They cleave with steadfast desire unto God, as

218

Job says; “Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! Then should I yet have comfort.” Of this wilderness say the angels: “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” and the loving soul answers: “I have found him whom my soul loveth, I have laid hold on him and will not let him go.” For those who come into this wilderness are able to taste and tell of secret and inward matters. Moreover, in the exercise of love all virtues do spring up and grow. So Christ, on Mount Tabor, took to Himself all His glory, for an image to us of that fruit of the wilderness which shall be ours also if we give ourselves unto God. For St. Paul says: “But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

219

Again, a spiritual life may be fitly called a wilderness, by reason of the many sweet flowers which spring up and flourish where they are not trodden under foot by man. In this respect the life of one dead to the world may well be likened to a wilderness, seeing that so many virtues may be learned by continual and earnest striving; but because the effort needed is toilsome and painful at the first, few are willing to make it. In this wilderness are found the lilies of chastity, and the white roses of innocence; and therein are found too the red roses of sacrifice, when flesh and blood are consumed in the struggle with sin, and the man is ready, if need be, to suffer martyrdom,—the which is not easily to be learned in the world. In this wilderness, too, are found the violets of humility, and many other fair flowers and wholesome roots, in the examples of holy men of God. And in this wilderness shalt thou choose for thyself a pleasant spot wherein to dwell; that is, a holy life, in which thou mayest follow the example of God’s saints in pureness of heart, poverty of spirit, true obedience, and all other virtues; so that it may be said, as it is in the Canticles: “Many flowers have appeared in our land;” for many have died full of holiness and good works.

220

A third likeness between a spiritual life and the wilderness is that we find in the wilderness so little provision for the flesh, and therefore the lovers of this world cannot live there. Thus did the children of Israel complain against Moses because they lacked many things. By this we are to understand a life of moderation, girding up the loins with manly vigour. And every man is bound to lead such a life; for had he the whole world wherewith to supply his wants, he would still be bound scrupulously to take no more than sufficient for his real necessities. Moreover by such a life all the powers of the soul are braced up. And although there is little to delight the senses in this wilderness, there is much of the comfort of the spirit, which far excels the pleasures of the world. Isaiah says: “For the Lord shall comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord.” And again: “I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.” Thus the solitary soul bears many more children of good works than she that is married to the world. So Pharaoh was commanded by God to let His people go forth into the desert, that they might sacrifice unto the Lord, and receive spiritual manna instead of the carnal pleasures of Egypt.

The third thing for our consideration is what we are to see in the wilderness. When a man has gone out into the wilderness, he is bidden to look with his inward eye upon “the king and his bride,” which is the soul, with all her hidden treasures of loveliness. It is written, “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold the king;” that is, Solomon, who is a type of Christ, of whom Isaiah says: “To us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful.” And now behold how wonderful God is in His deity, that He has become man for the sake of His bride. This is the miracle that Moses saw, and said: “I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” The thorn-bush is Christ’s human

nature; the flame is His soul filled with burning love; the light is His deity shining through His mortal body. Now, consider this Christ and Solomon, upon whom is poured out without measure that wisdom which comprehends all things in its grasp: He is the Truth who hath taught us the way to heaven; let the soul look upon Him, that she may follow Him, to live after His spirit, and not after her own inclination, and her nature shall be greatly strengthened to fight the good fight when she considers the nature of her King, how He fulfilled His pilgrimage. For it shall greatly refresh the living soul to remember from time to time His human infirmities, and from time to time to rejoice in His life in the spirit.

A master has said: "Excess in pleasures enfeebles the powers, and overflowing spiritual emotions consume the spirit. Great joy cannot last always, but while here we have need of variableness in our joys; for it is not yet given to the soul to serve God in the holy of holies." Therefore shall the soul sometimes contemplate the divine greatness of Christ, and sometimes His holy humanity. A soul that is as yet inexperienced and strange in the things of God shall be bidden to believe in God; but a fervent, tried, and experienced soul shall be invited to behold the King in his beauty. And hence the loving soul shall see with her inward eye in what wise she ought to yield to or withstand her fellow-Christians of mankind. St. Bernard says: "O Lord, come quickly and reign on Thy throne, for now oftentimes something rises up within me, and tried to take possession of Thy throne; pride, covetousness, uncleanness, and sloth want to be my kings; and then evil-speaking, anger, hatred, and the whole train of vices join with me in warring against myself, and try to reign over me. I resist them, I cry out against them, and say, 'I have no other king than Christ.' O King of Peace, come and reign in me, for I will have no king but Thee!" And Gilbert says: "O Lord, I endure Thy hand upon me, and press forward with straining eyes, with knocking, with prayers, and through many heights and depths of joy and sorrow." But O, who can faint and grow weary in making himself ready for such a king, when he remembers how God has made our little nature able to receive His divine Substance, and has even taken upon Himself our nature, and invested Himself with the colours of our humanity, and so revealed His beauty unto us, and loveth us much more than we love Him! I were in truth worthy of all condemnation, if I did not love Him above all things, when He asketh nothing from me but to love Him!

Therefore let us in the first place come out wholly from ourselves, that we may, in the next place, enter into this blessed wilderness, and, in the third place, desire to know and behold the true King and bridegroom of the soul. And to this end the Moses of a holy Will must lead us into the Mount of God. But the people whom Moses led up out of Egypt are an image of those who, having newly laid aside their evil customs, do easily return to their old ways, and make to themselves in the wilderness a golden calf of their old fleshly lusts, of unchaste or worldly thoughts, to live after the flesh, and serve their own bellies and not God, but have their delight in the creature. And hence we have need of the true Moses, even Christ Jesus, that He may at all times guide us and lead us, and draw us to Himself, so that we may go out after Him into the wilderness of our own hearts, wherein God lies hidden to us. May God help us all to attain thereunto! Amen!

IV

Sermon for Christmas Day

(From the Gospel for the day)

*Of the things by which we become children of God.*⁴³

John i. 12.—“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.”

THIS day, dear children, hath God wrought a great wonder, and manifested the greatness of His love towards us, in that He hath looked down upon us, who were His enemies, aliens and afar off from Him, with such mercy as to give us power to become His sons and children; therefore it behoves us not to show ourselves unthankful for such kindness, but to put on the true marks and qualities of the elect, beloved children of God. And hereby we may know what these are.

He who would be a son of our Father in Heaven must be a stranger among the children of this world, and separate himself from them, and must have an earnest mind and a single eye, with a heart inclined towards God. Now such a one is made a son of God when he is born again in God, and this takes place with every fresh revelation of God to his soul. A man is born of the Spirit when he suffers God's work to be wrought in his soul; yet it is not this which makes the soul to be perfectly blessed, but that revelation, of which we have spoken already, makes the soul to follow after Him who has revealed Himself to her, and in whom she is born anew, with love and praise. Thus she returns again to her first source, and is made, of God's grace, a child of God, united to Him in rightful love. And let him who would attain hereunto, copy Christ in his human nature, and God Himself will verily come unto him in His superhuman Godhead.

The beloved children of God renounce themselves, and hence they do right without effort, and mount up to the highest point of goodness; while he who will not let go of himself, but does right by labour and toil, will never reach the highest that he might. In other words: he whose works proceed from himself, does little good service to God; while he who suffers himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, does great works even in small actions. But he who will attain to this must beware of men, so far as is consistent with reason. A heathen teacher has declared: “I never mingled with men, but I came home less of a man than I went out.” Men who live on the outside of things are a great hindrance in the way of goodness by their many idle words. Therefore those who wish to foster the inner life of their souls, are in great danger of receiving hurt from things which are said without thought, especially when many are together. He who repents what he has said as soon as the words are out of his mouth, is one of the careless speakers.

He only is a good son who has cast off his old sins and evil habits; for without this it is impossible that he should be created anew in Christ Jesus. It is not until the thoughts can find rest in nothing but God, that the man is drawn close to God Himself, and becomes His. He is happy who is always in the full use of his collective powers; and this is the case when God is present to his spirit, and he gladly obeys all the motions of God's Spirit, and gives his whole diligence to act and live agreeable thereunto. He hath a right spirit who is free from all craving after temporal things, and like a good son is united by love to his God, without any earthly desires.

⁴³ It has been conjectured that this sermon is by Eckart, junior; but it cannot be decidedly ascertained whether it is by him or Tauler.

The child of God should so order his life as always to promote his own steadfastness in virtue. When a man always keeps his body in due subjection, it is an outward pledge of the strength of his virtuous intents. Then is God in the man, when there is nothing in him which is contrary to the will of God. For God makes a man's body the temple of the Holy Ghost when He finds nothing in the man which grieves His Spirit, but He reigns with Jesus Christ over the body. That is to say: when a man knows of nothing in himself which is displeasing to God, then God dwells in him, and he is set free from the things that perish. He who most hates and comes out from himself has the greatest share in God, and possesses his earthly heritage in peace.

Master Eckart says; "That which kindles the warmest devotion in a man's heart, and knits him most closely to God, is the greatest benefit he can receive in this present time; and hence the greatest good work a man can do, is to draw other men to God, so that they enter into a union with Him. And this is the best work of love to our neighbour while we are in this world."

Further: it is a mark of the children of God that they see their own little faults and shortcomings to be great sins. Now he who entangles himself with a multitude of matters, outward or inward, and will meddle with every thing that is going forward, will also have a share in the evil thereof. We must let all things be to us merely the supply of our wants, and possess them in their nothingness. The great work and aim of the beloved children of God is to shun all sin, deadly or trifling, that they may not grieve God's spirit; for they know, as St. Augustine says, that for the smallest habitual sin which is not punished and laid aside in this present life, they will have to suffer more than all the pains of this world. Hence Anselm says, that he would rather die, and that this world should be destroyed, than commit one sin a day knowingly. And Augustine says: "The soul is created eternal, and therefore she cannot rest but in God." And again: "He who prays for anything except for God's sake, does not ask aright, and will not be answered with a blessing."

Again: the child of God must have exercise in good works; but when he comes to possess the very substance of virtue, then virtue is no longer an exercise to him; for he practises it without an effort, and when virtue is practised without labour or pain, we have got beyond exercises. But none may get so far before body and soul are separated from each other; unless, indeed, the soul were drawn out of herself, and it were possible in this present state for God to dwell in the soul, acting and suffering. Ah, Lord, did we all we should, God would do to us all we would. If any wish to become such that God can love him, and look upon him with complacency, let him forsake all that he loves in the world, and love nothing but God alone. He who desires to receive with the Son of God a man's reward, must suffer from and with the wicked of this world; and if he hunger after his salvation as one who is perishing for lack of food, it will avail him nothing, until he cast off sin and work the works of righteousness which are befitting [a child of grace], and endure all wrong and injustice patiently for God's sake. For without this, his hunger and thirst after salvation can neither be satisfied here nor hereafter. For it is of the very essence of salvation to love God, to depart from sin, and to work righteousness; not to be able to find happiness in all the pleasures of earth, but to be willing to suffer willingly all manner of pain and contradiction, and not seek to avoid them: when a man has come to this state all is well with him, and not otherwise. And whatever such a child of God beholds, it works for his good. If he sees sin, he thanks God for having kept him from it, and prays for the conversion of the sinners; if he sees goodness, he desires to fulfil it in his own practice. We ought always to keep two ends in view,—to put away from us all that is hurtful, and to put on all that is yet lacking to us of good works. But those who vainly think to be made God's children by their much watching, and fasting, and labour, by keeping silence, by singing

hymns, by wearing bad and inconvenient clothing, or again by great deeds and pious works, while they do not dive into the bottom of their hearts, and spy out all their secret inclinations, to lesser as well as to greater faults; such as an inclination to think too well of themselves and too ill of their neighbours, or to harshness, to trespass on the rights of others, to moroseness, to a bitter spirit, to contradiction, to obstinacy, to caprice, and the like, and do not perceive these things in themselves, nor wish to learn how to get rid of their old bad dispositions nor yet of their outward bad habits, such as evil speaking, lightness of manners, unkind ridicule of others, and refuse to give ear to those who teach and exhort them to what is right, or to probe their own motives;—these are all the children of the Devil. Alas! how many are martyrs for the Devil! To such as these Isaiah says: “Bring no more vain oblations: cease to do evil; learn to do well; wash you, make you clean.” Yea, if a man were to suffer himself to be torn to pieces, and did not learn to cleanse himself thoroughly from his sins, to behave towards his fellow-creatures in a spirit of generous love, and to love God above all things, it would all be useless and in vain.

Dionysius says: “To be converted to the truth means nothing else but a turning from the love of created things, and a coming into union with the uncreated Highest Good. And in one who is thus converted there is a joy beyond conception, and his understanding is unclouded and unperverted by the love of earthly things, and is mirrored in his conscience, in the mirror of God’s mind. Love is the noblest of all virtues, for it makes man divine, and makes God man.” And again: “Cleanse your hearts and make yourselves at one with God, for one glimpse of Him brings the soul closer to Him than all the outward works of all Christendom. He who wishes to attain to this union must get beyond all that may be conquered and grasped by the understanding, for God hath nothing so hidden that it cannot be revealed unto the soul. O that she were but wise enough to seek after it with all earnestness!”

A certain teacher has said, that if a man will give his heart and life to God, God will give him in return greater gifts than if he were to suffer death over again for him.

Now that man shall attain unto the Highest Good who is ready to descend into the lowest depths of poverty. And this comes to pass when he is cast into utter wretchedness, and forsaken of all creatures and all comfort. And let him ask help of none; let him be as knowing nothing, and as though he had never been aught but a fool; let him have none to take compassion on him, even so much as to give him a cup of cold water to drink; yet let him never forget God in his heart, and never shrink from God’s searching eye of judgment, though he knows not what its verdict will be; but with a cheerful and thankful spirit yield himself up to suffer whatever God shall appoint unto him, and to fulfil according to his power, by the grace of God, all His holy will to the utmost that he can discern it, and never complain of his distresses but to God alone with entire and humble resignation, praying that he may be strong to endure all his sufferings according to the will of God;—Ah, dear children, what glorious sons of God would such men be! what wonders would God work through them to the magnifying of His glory! These are the true and righteous men who trust in God, and cleave to Him in spirit and in truth! That we may thus become His sons, may God help us by His grace! Amen.

V



Sermon for Epiphany

(From the Gospel for the day)

This Sermon on the Gospel for the day, from St. Matthew, showeth how God, of His great faithfulness hath foreseen and ordained all sufferings for the eternal good of each man, in whatever wise they befall us, and whether they be great or small.

Matt. ii. 11.—“And they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh.”

NOW consider first the myrrh. It is bitter; and this is a type of the bitterness which must be tasted before a man can find God, when he first turns from the world to God, and all his likings and desires have to be utterly changed. For it is necessary that all which a man has hitherto taken pleasure in possessing should be given up, and this is at first very bitter and very hard work to him. All things must become as bitter to thee as their enjoyment was sweet unto thee. But to this work thou hast need of a full purpose of heart and never-failing diligence. For the greater thy delight in anything has been, the more bitter will it be to give it up, yea the very gall of bitterness.



Now, it may be asked, “How can a man be without appetites and enjoyment so long as he is in this present state? I am hungry, and I eat; I am thirsty, I drink; I am weary, I sleep; I am cold, I warm myself; and I cannot possibly find that to be bitter nor barren of natural enjoyment which is the satisfaction of my natural desires. This I cannot alter, so long as nature is nature.” True; but this pleasure, ease, satisfaction, enjoyment, or delight, must not penetrate into the depths of thy heart, nor make up a portion of thy inner life. It must pass away with the things that caused it, and have no abiding place in thee. We must not set our affections thereon, but allow it to come and go, and not repose upon the sense of possession with content or delight in the world or the creature. We must mortify and subdue nature with nature, and the love thereof within us, yea, even the delight that we have in the children of God and good men. These and all other inclinations must be brought under dominion to a higher power; for till this is accomplished, Herod and his servants, which seek after the young child’s life, are not altogether and of a surety dead within thee. Therefore beware that thou do not deceive thyself, but look narrowly to it, how it stands with thee, and do not be too secure, nor live without fear.



But there is yet another myrrh, which far surpasses the first. This is the myrrh which God gives us in the cup of trouble and sorrow, of whatever kind it may be, outward or inward. Ah, if thou couldst but receive this myrrh as from its true source, and drink it with the same love with which God puts it to thy lips, what blessedness would it work in thee! Ah, what a joy and peace and an excellent thing were that! Yes, the very least and the very greatest sorrows that God ever suffers to befall thee, proceed from the depths of His unspeakable love; and such great love were better for thee than the highest and best gifts besides that He has given thee or ever could give thee, if thou couldst but see it in this light; yea, however small a suffering light on thee, God—who, as our Lord says, counts the smallest hair that ever fell from thy head, without thy knowing it—God has foreseen it from eternity, and chosen, and purposed, and appointed that it should befall thee. So

that if your little finger only aches, if you are cold, if you are hungry or thirsty, if others vex you by their words or deeds, or whatever happens to you that causes you distress or pain, it will all help to fit you for a noble and blessed state; and it has been foreseen and fore-appointed by God that such and such things should happen and come upon you; for all is measured, weighed, and numbered, and cannot be less nor otherwise than it is. That my eyes are now in my head, is as God our Heavenly Father has seen it from eternity; now let them be put out, and let me become blind, or deaf, this also has our Heavenly Father foreseen from eternity, that it ought to come to pass, and had His eternal counsel with respect unto it, and determined it from eternity within Himself. Ought I not, then, to open my inward eyes and ears, and thank my God that His eternal counsel is fulfilled in me? Ought I to grieve at it? I ought to be wonderfully thankful for it! And so also with loss of friends, or property, or reputation, or comfort, or whatever it be that God allots to us, it will all serve to prepare thee, and help thee forward to true peace, if thou canst only take it so. Now, sometimes people have said to me: "Master, it is ill with me: I have much suffering and tribulation"; and when I have answered: "It is all as it should be," they have said, "No, Master, I have deserved it; I have cherished an evil thing in my heart." Then take blame to thyself; but whether thy pain be deserved or not, believe that it comes from God, and thank Him, and bear it, and resign thyself to it.

233

All the myrrhs of bitterness that God gives, are ordered aright, that He may by this means raise men to true greatness. It is for the wholesome exercise of suffering that He has set the forces of nature as it were at war with man. He could just as well and as easily have caused bread to grow as corn, but that it is necessary for man to have his powers exercised in every way. And He has bestowed as much care and thought in the arrangement of each single thing, as the artist does when he is painting a picture, who never draws a single stroke with his pencil without considering how long, how short, and how broad it ought to be; and it must be so and no otherwise, if the picture is to be a perfect masterpiece, and all its bright red and blue colours are to come out. But God takes a thousand times more pains with us than the artist with his picture, by many touches of sorrow, and by many colours of circumstance, to bring man into the form which is the highest and noblest in His sight, if only we received His gifts and myrrh in the right spirit.

There are some, however, who are not content with the myrrh that God gives them, but think fit to give themselves some, and create evils for themselves and sick fancies, and have indeed suffered long and much, for they take hold of all things by the wrong end. And they gain little grace from all their pain, because they are building upon stones of their own laying, whether it be penances or abstinence, or prayer or meditation. According to them, God must wait their leisure, and let them do their part first, else no good will come of the work. God hath fixed it in His purpose that He will reward nothing but His own works. In the kingdom of Heaven He will crown nothing to all eternity but His works, and not thine. What He has not wrought in thee, He takes no account of.

234

In the third place, there is an exceeding bitter myrrh which God gives; namely, inward assaults and inward darkness. When a man is willing to taste this myrrh, and does not put it from him, it wears down flesh and blood, yea, the whole nature; for these inward exercises make the cheek grow pale far sooner than great outward hardships, for God appoints unto his servants cruel fightings and strange dread, and unheard of distresses, which none can understand but he who has felt them. And these men are beset with such a variety of difficulties, so many cups of bitterness are presented to them, that they hardly know which way to turn, or what they ought to do; but God knows right well what He is about. But when the cup is put away, and these feelings are stifled or unheeded, a

greater injury is done to the soul than can ever be amended. For no heart can conceive in what surpassing love God giveth us this myrrh; yet this which we ought to receive to our soul's good, we suffer to pass by us in our sleepy indifference, and nothing comes of it. Then we come and complain: "Alas, Lord! I am so dry, and it is so dark within me!" I tell you, dear child, open thy heart to the pain, and it will do thee more good than if thou wert full of feeling and devoutness.

235

Now men receive this bitter myrrh in two ways; they try to meet it as with their practical sense or with their intellectual subtilty. When it springs from outward circumstances, men wish they had known better, and they would have averted it with their wisdom, and attribute it to outward accidents, to fate, or misfortune, and think they might have taken steps to prevent what has happened, and if they had done so, the means would have succeeded, and the calamity would have been turned aside. They would fain be too wise for God, and teach Him, and master Him, and cannot take things from His hand. The sufferings of such are very sore, and their myrrh is exceeding bitter.

There are others, who having tasted the cup of that bitterness which springs from within, do start back and forthwith seek to break away from it by the exercise of their natural wit and subtilty, and think to quell the strife by dint of reasoning and arguing with themselves. And this kind of trouble often passes away more quickly with simple minds than with those whose reason is more active; for the former follow God more simply, they feel they do not know what to do, and so they trust. But if those of higher powers follow God's leading, and surrender themselves wholly to Him, their career is far nobler and more blessed, for their reason serves them in all things more freely and excellently.

Now from this myrrh springs a noble branch, which beareth costly frankincense. The frankincense gum sends forth a sweet-smelling smoke; so when the fire catches the rod, it curls round it and seeks to set loose the perfume that is contained therein, that it may go forth and spread a fragrant incense around. The fire is nothing else than burning love to God, which is as it were latent in prayer; and love is the frankincense which sends forth the true fragrance of holy devotion. For, as a writer has said: "Prayer is nothing but the going up of the spirit unto God." And just as the straw exists for the sake of the corn, and is good for nothing in itself but to make a bed whereon to lie, or to manure the earth, so outward prayer is of no profit except in so far as it stirs up the noble flame of devotion in the heart, and when that sweet incense breaks forth and rises up, then it matters little whether the prayer of the lips be uttered or not. In saying this, I except those persons who are bound by the ordinances of the Holy Church to offer up prayers, and those who have vowed to perform acts of devotion, or have been advised thereunto by their spiritual directors.

236

May Jesus Christ, the King of Glory, help us to make the right use of all the myrrh that God sends us, and to offer up to Him the true incense of devout hearts. Amen!⁴⁴

VI

237

Second Sermon for Epiphany

⁴⁴ In the later editions here follows an exposition of the gold, but it is wanting in the four earliest editions and the best mss.

Showeth on what wise a man shall arise from himself and from all creatures, to the end that God may find the ground of his soul prepared, and may begin and perfect his work therein.

Isaiah lx. 1.—“Arise, O Jerusalem, and be enlightened.”⁴⁵

IN all this world God covets and requires but one thing only, and that He desires so exceeding greatly that He gives His whole might and energy thereto. This one thing is, that He may find that good ground which He has laid in the noble mind of man made fit and ready for Him to exercise His divine agency thereon. For God has all power in heaven and on earth, and the only thing that is lacking unto Him is that He is hindered from accomplishing the most glorious of all His works in man.

Now what must we do that God may shine in on this innermost ground of the soul, and work there? We must arise, says our text. Arise! this sounds as if we could do something towards this work. We must arise from all that is not God, from ourselves and from all creatures. And by this act of arising, the ground of the soul is stirred, and a strong craving springs up in it; and the more this deepest ground of the soul is laid bare, and all that occupied and cumbered it is cleared away, the keener grows this craving after something higher than itself, so that oftentimes with God’s lightest touch upon the naked soul, the longing pierces through flesh and blood and marrow.

But there are two sorts of over-bold men who are driven by this stirring up of their souls into two rash courses. The first come with their natural quickness of parts, and with the conceptions of their own minds, and try therewith to touch the principle of their souls, and seek to still the craving within them by hearing and learning of lofty matters. And in this they find great delight, and ween that they are a Jerusalem,—a city of peace, by the exercise of their intellect. There is another class who think to prepare the ground of their souls for God and to obtain peace by means of self-chosen good works, or by religious exercises, such as prayer, meditation, or whatever they see other people do for the same end; and then they fancy they are verily children of Zion, and their works of piety and charity do yield them great peace, and they delight in nothing so much as in religious exercises and the fulfilling of the tasks they have set themselves. But that their peace is a false one, may be perceived by this, that they do not cure themselves of their former faults, such as pride, sensuality, self-indulgence, love of the creature, proneness to suspect or to judge others; and if any offend them, resentment forthwith flames up within them, and an angry word escapes them, or hatred smoulders in their heart; and such like faults they indulge in with their own consent. By this we may know that they wish to manage their souls after their own fashion, and work in them; while God cannot accomplish His work in such a foul and unswept chamber. Therefore, their peace is false, and they have not yet arisen in truth. Let not such claim to be children of Zion, nor dare to think they have found true peace; but let them seriously set themselves to work to conquer their faults, exercising themselves, after the pattern of our Lord, in humility and works of love, dying unto themselves in all things, and thus learn how to rise on high.

But those others, that is to say those noble men who do truly arise and receive divine light, these allow God to prepare their souls for Himself, and renounce themselves in all things without

⁴⁵ According to our authorized version: “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” The German version of the text has been retained, because the argument of the Sermon is based upon it.

any reserve, either as regards their words or their daily habits, or what they do or refrain from, or anything else, whether things go smoothly or crossly with them. Both in framing their purposes, and in meeting what arises, they refer all to God in humble fear, and give themselves wholly up to Him, in utter poorness of spirit, in willing self-surrender, acquiescing in the divine will. They are content to say in all matters, "As God will": in quiet or in disquiet; for their sole delight is the holy and excellent will of God. To these we may apply what Christ said unto His disciples when they bade Him to go up unto the feast: "Go ye up; your time is always ready, but my time is not yet come." These men's time is always ready for them to endure and submit; all time is fitting for them; but God's time is not always ready, when He deigns or sees fit to work, or to send forth His light. This they submissively leave to His divine will, and are willing to wait as long as He pleases.

240

Now the distinguishing mark of this better sort of men is that they suffer God to order their souls' affairs, and do not hinder Him. Yet they are not raised above the shocks of temptation, nor even the liability to fall for a moment (for no one is entirely delivered from this danger); but afterwards, as soon as the first onset of passion is over, and their fault is held up before them, whether it be pride, or self-indulgence, or anger, or hatred, or whatever is their special temptation, they come to God in self-abasement, and submit themselves to Him, and bear without murmuring what He sees fit to appoint unto them. And such do in truth arise, for they rise above themselves in all things, and they do become in truth a Jerusalem or stronghold of peace, for they have quiet in disquietude and prosperity in adversity, and rejoice in the will of God amidst all circumstances. Therefore no power in this world can take away their peace, nor could all the devils in hell, nor all the men on earth banded together. All their affections centre in God, and they are enlightened by Him of a truth; for He shines into their souls with a strong and clear light that reveals all things unto them; and He shineth as truly, nay far more brightly, in the blackest darkness than in the seeming light. Ah! these are sweet and lovely children of God, raised above nature by their likeness to Him; and such neither undertake nor bring to pass any of their works without God. Nay, if we may dare to use such language, they are, so to speak, nothing, but God is in them; as St Paul says: "I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me." Ah! these are highly-favoured men; they bear the world upon, their shoulders and are the noble pillars of society. To make one of their number, what a blessed and glorious thing were that!

241

Now, the distinguishing mark of those two classes of presumptuous men whom we first spoke of, is that they choose to govern their souls for themselves, instead of submitting themselves to the direction of God; and hence their powers are kept under bondage to sin, so that they cannot fully conquer their evil habits; nay, they even continue therein with content, or at least with the consent of their own will. But those other noble, blessed, self-renouncing men, who have given themselves over to God, are exalted above themselves; and hence, if they are overtaken in a fault, so soon as they are aware of it, they flee unto God with it, and straightway the sin is no more, and they are in a state of godlike freedom. Shall they not then with reason desire that God may prepare their souls?

There is no need for these men to perform outward works, in addition, as if they were a matter of necessity. No! Now the text itself in this one word, "Arise!" bids them to lift themselves up: and is not that a work? Yes, one work it does behove them to fulfil without ceasing, if they are ever to come to perfectness. They must continually arise, and have their minds directed upwards towards God, and their hearts free from entanglement, ever asking, "Where is He who is born a king?" and watching with humble fear and quick eye to discern what God desires of them, that they may do



His pleasure. If God gives them to suffer, they suffer; if He gives them to work they work: if He them to enjoy Him in contemplation, they contemplate. The ground of their own souls bears witness that God has cleansed them and created them anew.

And this ground and substance of the soul will God possess alone, and will not that any creature should enter therein. In this chamber of the heart God works through means in the one class of men, and without means in the other and more blessed sort. But what he works in the souls of these last with whom He holds direct converse, none can say, nor can one man give account of it to another, but he only who has felt it knows what it is; and even he can tell thee nothing of it, save only that God in very truth hath possessed the ground of his soul. And where this comes to pass, outward works become of no moment, but the inward perceiving of God greatly increases. But when a man reaches the highest point that he may attain unto by his most earnest endeavour and the help of God's grace, let him ascribe nothing whatever unto himself; as our blessed Lord said: "When ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which it was our duty to do." Therefore, let a man be never so perfect, he shall always stand in humble fear, at his highest glory; and shall always say and feel, "Father, thy will be done!" and shall at all times keep a watch upon himself, looking narrowly lest he should cleave unto one single thing that is amiss, and God should find anything in the secret chambers of his heart that hinders His accomplishing His glorious work therein without the help of means.

May God help us all so to arise that He may accomplish His work in our souls! Amen.

VII



Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

(From the Gospel for the day; and from Hosea xiv. 1, 2.)

Of the great wonders which God has wrought, and still works for us Christian men; wherefore it is just and reasonable that we should turn unto Him and follow Him, and whereby we may discern between true and false conversion.

Matt. viii. 23.—"Jesus went into a ship, and His disciples followed Him." And Hosea xiv. 1, 2.—"O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; take with you words, and turn to the Lord."

WE read in the Gospel for this day that Jesus went into a ship, and His disciples followed Him. In like manner must all pious Christians turn from sin and follow Christ, as He commands us by the mouth of the Prophet Hosea, saying: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God."

Out of all the tribes of mankind the Lord chose one, to whom He showed great kindness, and promised to do yet greater things for them, if they would turn with their whole heart unto Him, and not follow after the ways of the other nations who lived according to their sinful lusts in the darkness

244

and blindness of their hearts, and went astray with wicked lives and perverse minds after the vanities of the world and the deceits of the Devil. And to this end, God led His people out bodily by the hand of His servants and prophets, and also gave them His law to teach them, that they might behold His great power which he had glorified against their enemies, and His great love which He had manifested by numberless acts and unspeakable benefits towards themselves, being minded to do yet greater things for them hereafter, if they would truly turn to Him with their whole heart, and love Him, and keep His commandments. And he commanded them that they should never forget the day on which they had been delivered out of the hands of their enemies, and from their cruel bondage and toil, but should set themselves with earnestness and diligence to consider His commandments, to keep them and do them. But this people was stiff-necked, heedless, and unthankful, and did not do as God had commanded by the mouth of His servants, but was continually self-willed, perverse, and bent on sin; and therefore the Lord suffered them all to die in the wilderness, and slew many of them. And afterwards He sent again other servants unto them, saying: "O my chosen people, if ye will be converted and turn unto me with your whole heart, and not go astray halting between two opinions, but follow after me only, and forsake the way of the Egyptians, the way of darkness, of sin, and of death, I will bring you into a land of righteousness, where all good things shall be given you."

245

Now all these things came to pass under the old dispensation in past ages, with many signs and in hidden mysterious covenants sealed by oaths. But they also foreshadowed all that should come to pass in future ages after the incarnation of the Son of God, in the which we now live. Now He purposes to draw us likewise to Himself, by the help of these same words and teachings, if only we will turn unto Him; and therefore does He give us so many reasons, exhortations, instructions or motives, that we should turn unto Him with our whole hearts. He works now-a-days quite as many miracles and mighty deeds as then, among the Egyptians of this world and Pharaoh its king, spiritually and also visibly, in the conversion of each one among us, if we give heed thereto with thankful hearts. But alas! it is with too many of us as it was with the Israelites, we are only changed outwardly with the body, but our heart is yet in Egypt. We all pass under good names, and make a fair show, but in reality our whole affections and endeavours are turned towards the pleasures and advantages of the flesh and the world. And we are all the time so very careful and diligent to keep strictly to all that is commanded respecting outward observances, such as vestments, chanting, kneeling, and the like, and are satisfied if all these matters are scrupulously observed, and sit down contented, fancying that all is well with us, and that we are far enough from Egypt. Nay, verily, dear children, we are very wide of the mark; this is all a mere semblance and shadow, the leaves of the fig-tree which could not satisfy our Lord's hunger; He must find fruit on the tree, else it is nigh to be cursed by Him, that no man taste fruit thereof to all eternity. Ah! how often have you been taught that you ought not to cleave unto mere shadows and outward forms. Although these be wholesome and needful for beginners, still they are but a long way off from the real truth and substance, for the sake of which all these outward acts are performed. If you do not look to it betimes, you will have the outward shape remaining, while within there is all manner of sin and wickedness cherished in your hearts, as much as with those who have not the show of religion; and alas! men often fall into deeper vice under this cloak, than if they were yet in the Egypt of worldliness. It would be better for them if they had never quitted the world, for now is there damnation greater while they wear the garb of holiness, not acting conformably to it, and yet claim and make use of all the privileges of their religious profession.

246

Children, I know of nothing so greatly needed as that those who are entering on a religious life should be instructed with all care, that they may know what things they ought first to learn, and then afterwards, when the outward practice of good works and piety has become a habit to them, that they may also know how to advance farther, and not content themselves or be satisfied with outward habits; for these do not in themselves make a perfect life, but are only a good preparation and a slight furtherance thereto. If this be early instilled into beginners, while they are yet young, docile, and quick of apprehension, and also hot and earnest, it may be that some of them will study betimes to press onwards to what is higher. But, alas! and worse than alas! we have so often to behold the sorrowful spectacle of some who began in the spirit with great zeal; who at first were so fervid that they would hardly turn their eyes upon any who might lead their thoughts astray; and who now can hardly be persuaded to quit men's company for an hour's meditation; some who at first could not bear to listen to a worldly word, and now, early and late, you can scarcely get a respite from their gossiping, and unprofitable questions and answers; at first they wanted to withdraw into silence and solitude, that they might by prayer and work sustain their devoutness; and now, the more earthly care they can encumber themselves with, the better they are pleased. Ah! this and the like is a certain sign that they are held captive by the flesh, that they have wandered into darkness, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt. Children! for the love of Christ, look to yourselves each of you, and see how it stands with you. However well you may begin in virtue, do not rely upon your good beginning, for all your piety may pass away if you are not watchful. Our hearts are more unstable than we can believe.

Some are at first so zealous for all righteousness, that if they hear an idle word, or witness any other little failing, it makes them angry; but when they are a little older, they indulge without any rebuke of conscience in such levity, evil-speaking, and often malicious and scornful speeches, that they not only cause others vexation, but even serious trouble and sorrow, and never even give it a thought whether they may have done so, but behave as if they had done perfectly right.

Some are at first so strong, and ready to withstand temptation and assaults, that they are not even afraid of the Devil: yea, they would fain be great and holy martyrs; yet afterwards, when they have lived for a while among holy, pious people, you would hardly meet with more perverse, cross-grained, self-willed persons. Some are at first so eager to take upon themselves all manner of hardships and indignities, that the severities and self-humiliation of those with whom they live are too light and few for them; but after they have travelled this road for a while, they are not only able to submit to the ordinary habits of others, but it is hardly possible to make things comfortable and easy enough for them to prevent their complaining, and every little inconvenience annoys them. Ah! what would not be needed to stop their murmuring!

Very different from these are many pious, warmhearted, spiritual-minded men, who find the cross very hard to bear at first, but in a short time make great progress, and become a most edifying and useful pattern to others, while those from whom too much was expected have come to nothing. Hence we must be very much upon our guard because of our instability; we know not what may overtake us in time to come.

Dear children, that each of you may be able in some measure to mark whether he be converted or not, I will lay open to you a little, whereby we may perceive the sincerity of our own conversion, and redemption from all the evil which our Enemy may try to lead us into by his various incitements to sin. In our baptism we promised before God and the Church to withstand all sin, and to serve God in all holy living. But afterwards our wicked adversary led us astray again, so that we fell

249

afresh, and lost the grace which had been given us; but God of his unspeakable mercy calls us again to a new repentance, that all which we have lost may be restored unto us. But herein many are beguiled by the Evil One into deadly error, so that they miss this opportunity of amendment; for he knows how, with his cunning wiles, to cover our old sins under the mantle of conversion, and thus to frustrate all a man's labour and toil. That we may be the better able to escape him, I will give you some tokens to mark which man is truly converted and which is not.

A truly converted Christian man abides in a sincere and humble confession of his nothingness; all his desire is that none should set him above others, nor yet to rule over others, but rather to be subject in all meekness to another, according to whose will he may fulfil all his works. He thinks lightly of himself and his own wisdom, and desires in all things to take the lowest place; and is willing to take advice, and interprets everything for the best; and simply in the fear of God, with a thankful heart, fulfils all that which he is bidden or counselled, or that others beg of him to do. But, on the other hand, those who are not truly converted think much of themselves, and deem all their works and services of great value, and it is not at all to their taste to be subject to others, or that any should have a right to command them, and are fond of reproving others unnecessarily, and of discoursing on lofty matters, and boast themselves proudly of all that belongs to them, and yet cover all this under a specious show of piety and humility, that men may not take it amiss of them. If any seem to put a slight upon them, they are contentious, and defend and justify themselves to the utmost that they can. They are arrogant and ambitious, and unyielding in their hardness of spirit. These are all still in the hands of the Enemy, yea, did they wear the Pope's tiara.

250

Those who are truly converted are kind-hearted to their neighbours, indulgent from brotherly love, praising the works of their neighbours as far as they can, and with great sincerity of heart rejoice in the well-being of their neighbour, and lend him a helping hand wherever they can, and have great sympathy with him in his troubles; but the falsely converted are spiteful, and look with an evil eye on the usefulness or piety of others, are ready to breed mischief with a taunt, and are revengeful, sneering, and puffed up in their own conceits.

The right sort of men are patient under all the annoyance and injustice that God suffers to befall them, and bear it long with peaceable tempers. They speak mildly, using soft words, and are wont meekly to seek reconciliation with those who have done them wrong; but the false burn with anger, are envious of others' good fortune, slanderous, quarrelsome, and censorious, not orderly in all their affairs, and full of murmuring against all, above and below them, who do not conform to their wishes.

251

The truly righteous are ever gentle and merciful, ready to give and to assist as far as they are able, without regard to their own advantage; for they despise the perishable things of time, and maintain their love, enjoyment, and cheerfulness under distress, poverty, and contempt, being easily contented and cheerful, and thankful to Almighty God, in spirit looking up constantly to God who preserves and sustains them, and casting behind them all unprofitable earthly anxieties, that they may give the more heed to the things of God and eternity. But the false burn like a furnace with the desire of temporal things, and seek their own pleasure and ease when and how they may, and often steal time and other things for it, that they may not be discovered by their superiors; or if they can no longer conceal their practices, then they indulge in them with an obstinate bold face, and steal time for themselves shamelessly in the teeth of their masters. They want to have praise and earthly reward for all that they do, and if they are not honoured and thought highly of, they become like one possessed, and openly or secretly do all the harm they can for spite and vexation. They are

always hoping to receive a worldly and corruptible reward for their religious professions, and are often seduced into actual deceit and lying, in their struggle to get honour or to save their reputation.

The upright are careful to fill up their time industriously, with good and useful undertakings to the glory of God and the good of their neighbours, rejoicing in spirit as they exercise themselves in good works, endeavouring to do all things well, and continue with hearty trust in God, steadfast in goodness. The false converts are constantly indolent and half-hearted in their work, wavering, ill-mannered, easily disheartened, and altogether drowsy, their minds lying waste and their hearts undisciplined.

The true converts are moderate and decorous in the satisfying of their natural wants, shunning all excess, and if they by accident transgress, avoiding it for the future. By moderation in eating, they keep their faculties clear and under control; and above all, they most earnestly guard against any excess in drinking. But false professors are given to eating and drinking, yet they can never fully satisfy their desires, and are unthankful to God for the food He gives them. Without restraint or good manners, they cram their bodies, whereby they often bring on grievous sicknesses, and they seek their pleasure without shame wherever they can. And after excess at table, some give way to unseemly levity in words and gestures, and inconvenient jesting, and telling and hearing all manner of tales. Others become quarrelsome, brawling, and so noisy, that to hear their senseless cries you would think them asses, not men. Some become so sleepy and lazy after dinner, that they could scarcely repeat the Lord's Prayer without a blunder; and in general, sloth and the like commonly proceed from strong drinks and over-feeding. Hence it is that all holy men have insisted so strongly upon simplicity in food and drink, that they might give no cause in themselves or others to such infirmities. But now, alas! it has gone so far, that even the clergy, for the most part, cannot, or rather will not, content themselves even with rich men's fare; and from this cause their blindness has grown so great that it is rare now-a-days to find one who is really aware of the dangers from this source to which he is exposed by the assaults or suggestions of the Devil. For the adversary is apt to bring these men sooner than they think for into an inclination towards, or even to commit acts of foul uncleanness, by defiling their heart with obscene thoughts and evil lusts; and in this way they often sin grossly, and provoke God more than they believe. And then the tumult of evil desires within makes them to be unfit for good works, and displeasing to God and holy men; and they are so tossed, and driven, and blinded by passion, that they actually try to quench it in riotous company, and in eating and drinking. This leads to inordinate merriment and light discourse, which are generally wont to estrange a man so much from all godly thoughts, that afterwards he can hardly read a verse with devotion; and in his very prayers the Devil brings the scenes he has witnessed and the language he has heard so vividly before him, that he can scarce hold in his tittering and laughing.

The righteous and truly converted men are so shamefaced and chaste of heart before God and the angels, that they would rather die than conceive an impure image in their hearts, and with all watchfulness they preserve their mind pure and unsullied, and they diligently keep all their senses and members under strict and constant control, insomuch that they will hardly pay any attention to their own bodies, except for safety and cleanliness; and for the better preserving of their pureness of mind, they chastise their bodies with fasting, and watching, and toil, exercising constant prayerfulness and trust in God, in whom all their help lies. But the false of heart do not see much harm in looking at and dwelling on evil, sinful thoughts and images in their hearts; hence they often come into such perturbation of soul and body, that they stand, as it were, in the very gate of hell;

254

yea, they often fall so deep, as to give consent to sin with their heart, and would actually fulfil all wickedness if the opportunity arose. So unthinkingly do they fall through love of themselves, in seeking the pleasure of the body! Some of these become so hardened, and restless, and maddened with the sense of restraint, that they come to hate God for having forbidden the lusts of the flesh, and wish He did not know of their sins, or was not able to punish them, which is as much as to wish that there were no God.

And now, dear children, consider how you stand; and, seeing the perils which beset us all, let no one be too secure or too bold, but let each look to himself in fear; and however well it may be with him now, let him not trust in his goodness; and however deeply he may have fallen, or however far he may have wandered, let him now turn and be converted of a truth, for the path to all goodness stands yet open to him so long as God spares him in life. That we may all enter therein, may God help us! Amen.

VIII

255

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

(From the Gospel for St. Matthias' -day, 24th February)

Of the proper marks of true humility.

Matt. xi. 29.—“Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

CHRIST, our blessed Lord, the true master and teacher of all art and virtue, and a pattern of all perfection, when He came down from Heaven to instruct us poor ignorant men, did not see fit to make use of great subtleties, or mysterious and ingenious statements of truth; but in short, plain, simple words He delivered to us a maxim, and gave us a very short, easy lesson, which we were well able to learn. Now this stood written in the book of His holy humanity, in large, distinct letters, easy to be read, and runs thus: “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

What shorter, easier, more intelligible lesson could be set us? but we must give our minds with willing industry to read it over and over again attentively, and practise it in our life, ever looking to the admirable model of the divine humanity of Christ, whose whole life was not only meek and humble, but whose words, ways, walk, and all that ever He did, are simply the illustration of this doctrine. Hence He chose at the beginning such scholars and disciples as were specially fitted to learn this doctrine, and these were the holy apostles, and His blessed mother, who said when she had conceived Him: “He hath regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden.” Thus He says, in the Gospel for this day, “I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent” (that is from the proud), “and hath revealed them unto babes” (that is to the humble). From this we gather that none but the humble are able to receive the hidden things of God. Therefore, dear children, that we may obtain this grace, and the better learn this

256

lesson, we shall now consider some tokens of true lowliness which is never without meekness, and these are the following:

He who sincerely desires to become lowly of heart, must not be ashamed of performing any outward office such as the worldly heart thinks mean and humiliating; for as it is a sure token of conversion from sin that it becomes hateful to the man, so it is a sign of true repentance, when he is ready in all things to take the meanest place, if that he may attain to that true lowliness of heart which is seated inwardly in the soul. And he who will go forward in this blessed path must faithfully examine himself, and to this end God also will bestow on him such great grace as he has never had before.

He must always be ready to acknowledge himself in fault towards whomsoever it may be, and esteem others better than himself; for by so doing the loving heart can best soften the dispositions of men and touch their hearts, and win them over to meekness. And although he be sometimes not justly to be reckoned as in fault at all, yet knowing that he might have done the wrong, he shall always behave himself humbly, for the sake of love, to the glory of God, seeing that God has forgiven him sins ere he committed them; for it is equally an act of mercy to forgive sins, or to preserve us from sinning.

In the third place, it belongs to a lowly heart to be kindly affected towards all, not with a partial love; that is, not to show more kindness to one than another, to friends more than strangers, but to do good to all for God's sake, as our neighbours, not from mere natural affection, but to bestow on all a free, generous love (like our Father in Heaven, "who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"), and also to love each according to his worthiness.

In the fourth place, it is necessary to lowliness of heart that we divest and disencumber ourselves of all things, that we may cleave only to our merciful God, and become one with Him; for God will not and cannot unite Himself or dwell with a worldly heart. Therefore let a man bow himself to the earth beneath God and his creatures, in self-annihilation inward and outward; and this is what is meant by forsaking all things, and putting away the creature. The fifth token of true lowliness of heart is to know how to suffer to the glory of God, for sincere love of God, simply hoping, believing, and trusting in Him.

Thus a lowly walk consists in three things; in patient endurance, in giving up out of love and faith, and in hope towards God. And from these flows the sense of our own wretchedness, the knowledge of our Creator, and a will wholly resigned to God, not for our own sake, but for the glory of God. May God help us to learn thus to be meek and lowly of heart. Amen!

IX

Sermon for Septuagesima Sunday

(From the Gospel for the day)

In this Sermon following we are taught how we must perpetually press forward towards our highest good, without pause or rest; and how we must labour in the spiritual vineyard that it may bring forth good fruit.

Matt. xx. 1.—“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.”

THIS householder went out early at the first hour, and again at the third and at the sixth hours, and hired labourers for a penny a day. But when it was quite late in the evening he went out again, and still found men standing idle. Then he said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.

Dear children, this householder signifies our Lord Jesus Christ; His house is the heavens, and this earth, and purgatory, and hell. He saw that all nature had gone astray, insomuch that His lovely vineyard lay a barren waste; and man, whom He had made to possess this fair and fruitful vineyard, had wandered far away from Him, and left this excellent vineyard to be untilld. But the Lord of the vineyard determined to invite men to return into this vineyard for which He had created him, and went out early to that end.

Dear children, in one sense Jesus Christ went out early from the divine bosom of the Father, and yet evermore dwells there. But in another sense, He went out early in human nature, that He might hire us into His service, and bring us back again into His noble vineyard, and so there might be labourers to till it. And He went out at the first hour, and also at the third, and sixth, and ninth hours. And at the eleventh hour He went out once more, and again found men standing idle, to whom he spoke roughly, saying, Why stand ye here all the day idle? Then they answered, No man hath hired us, Lord. These idle men whom no man hath hired are those who are still in their original, uncorrupt, and innocent state, and hence they are rightly called blessed; for God saw as He looked on them, that they were unhired; that is, not held in servitude to the world and the creatures. There are some who are God's hired labourers, and these are in a higher sense free, and at large, and not held in servitude to the world or the creature. But these of whom we are now speaking are still standing idle, which ought not to be; that is, they are standing in apathy, cold, loveless, and devoid of grace; for so long as a man is not standing in the grace of God, he is standing alone in nature. And if such a man (were it possible, which it is not) were to fulfil all the good works which have ever been done in this world, he would still, nevertheless, be living altogether idly, unprofitably, and in vain, and it would avail him nothing. Again, this going out early in the morning is a type of the dawning of the grace of God in the soul; for the morning is the end of the night, when the darkness vanishes, and the day-spring of grace arises in the soul of man, and God says, Wherefore stand ye here idle? Go ye into my vineyard, and what is right, that will I give you.

But the men entered after a very unequal manner into the vineyard. One class are those who are mere beginners; these work in God's vineyard with outward acts, and bodily exercises, and self-imposed tasks, and are persuaded that they are accomplishing great good works with their fasting, watching, and praying; while they never look to the purity of their motives, but retain their love of earthly enjoyments, and their own likes and dislikes. And therefrom do spring up injustice, false judgment, and many faults; such as pride, earthly or spiritual, bitterness or enmity, and more of the like, that greatly hinder the outpouring of divine grace, if we allow these untoward dispositions to break forth in words or actions. Let one who has thus been building upon a false foundation give

heed to himself, and watch how he may best condemn and destroy this inward falsehood, that it lead not to his own ruin, nor cause harm to those with whom he may hold converse.

A second class of men who have likewise entered into God's vineyard, are those who are above living for mere temporal things, and have also overcome their grosser sins, and have turned their minds towards higher things. Their life is spent in the rational practice of virtue; and in this they find such pleasure and delight, that they are contented with their condition, and miss the highest and sublimest truth; for they abide in the present sense of satisfaction, and do not pant to reach upward through and above this enjoyment to the eternal God Himself. For our delight ought to be in God Himself, not in these gifts of His.

262

But the third class of those who go into God's vineyard are truly noble and highly-favoured men, who in deed and truth rise above all creature things in God's vineyard; for they seek and love nothing but simply God in Himself. They neither look to pleasure, nor to any selfish end, nor to that which is a mere outflow from God; for their inner man is wholly plunged in God, and they have no end but the praise and glory of God, that His good pleasure alone may be fulfilled in and through them and in all creatures. Hence they are able to bear all things and to resign all things, for they receive all things as from God's hand, and offer up to Him again in simplicity of heart all that they have received from Him, and do not lay claim to any of His mercies. They are like a river that flows out with every tide, and then again hastens back to its source. So do these men refer all their gifts back to the source whence they proceed, and flow back again unto it themselves likewise. For inasmuch as they carry all the gifts of God back unto their divine fountain, and do not claim any ownership in them, either for pleasure or advantage, and do not purpose this or that, but simply God alone, God must of necessity be their only refuge and stay, outward or inward.

263

But although this aim carry a man so completely out of himself, and be perfectly simple and directed to nothing but God, yet nature has some regard to herself, of which a man cannot be wholly bereft. Whether he choose it or no (this is a simple fact), he cannot but always desire to feel God's presence; and so too it is a natural instinct to wish to be happy. But this desire should be far from his strongest, and the least part of what he takes into the account in his purposes. ^{[46} And here I wish to rebuke all those religious persons who are leaning on their good works, and as it were keep a right of property in them, thinking themselves free to do or not to do them. For whenever they see or imagine any new undertaking or religious practice which can afford them inward or outward satisfaction, they give themselves to it with prayer, and striving, and weeping, and watching. And as long as they find pleasure in it, they cannot have enough of it; but if this sense of pleasure and interest passes away, their devotion passes away likewise, and they come to dislike their good and holy work, and then they grow lukewarm and careless, performing all they do without devotion. All this is owing to their not having had a single eye to God's glory. They have been prompted and sustained in their labour by the pleasure it has yielded them, and now this has fled. For we must not seek enjoyment and sweetness in the gifts of God, either in holy exercises, or in words or works; but we must take delight in God alone, and not in his gifts.

⁴⁶ The parts enclosed between brackets are wanting in the Strasburg mss.; but, according to the Frankfort Edition of 1826, exist in the edition of 1498.

264

There are, however, some religious persons who will not be left without solace or stay. For rather than be left simply and truly without a solace, destitute and bare, they set up for themselves heavenly beings, such as the saints and angels, and claim a sort of right to them as a source of spiritual enjoyment, and look to them as a consolation. Thus they will say: "Such a saint or angel is dear to me before all others;" and if you throw down this prop of their own raising, and say that they ought not to speak thus, you leave them little peace; nay, they are greatly disquieted; and this is worst of all, and doing God a great wrong. Thou must not place thy reliance on any creature in heaven or on earth, nor repose nor lean on any save God alone. If thou didst trust Him really and truly, all His saints would be truly and rightly honoured and revered by thee; for the departed saints are always absorbed in the divine, fatherly abyss of the Holy Trinity. For I tell thee by that Truth, which is God Himself, if thou art ever to become a man after the will of God, everything must die in thee to which thou art cleaving, whether it be God's gifts, or the saints, or the angels, or even all that would afford thee consolation for thy spiritual wants: all must be given up. If God is to shine in on thy soul brightly, without a cloud, and accomplish His noble and glorious will in thee, thou must be free and unencumbered by all that affords thee comfort out of God.

265

We are not, therefore, forbidden to honour the blessed saints, but only to claim any property in their merits for the sake of our own delight in them; for I tell thee, that if thou hadst all manner of heavenly grace from God, and didst possess the good works of all mankind, so soon as thou shouldst claim it as thine own, for the sake of thine own delight therein, that moment all this goodness would be sullied and defaced with thine own evil. For a true and faithful servant of God shall be always pressing upward to what is before him, not suffering himself to be held back by comfort or pleasure, joy or sorrow, wealth or poverty. Through all this he shall urge onward, till he come unto the infinite ocean of the Godhead. And therein he shall be lost without his own knowledge, and dazzled by excess of light and love. There it shall be given him to know all that belongs to true perfection.]

266

A good and devout man shall be like the labourer in the vineyard, who works all the day long, and nevertheless he must take food. But the labour is long and the meal barely lasts an hour, and he only takes it for the sake of the work. He must eat that he may work, and the nourishment he takes diffuses itself through every part of his body, continually supplying it with fresh strength, which again is consumed in his labour; and when it has been consumed with labour he eats again a little, that he may again consume it by working in the Lord's vineyard. So is it with a noble-minded man. When he feels an inclination in himself to enjoy God or His heavenly grace and what is thereof, let him for a little while seek and purpose his own good, but not longer than is needful for the nourishing of his soul, that he may consume his spiritual strength again in labour; and when it has thus been spent in the noblest of all ways, from a love flowing back unto God who has inspired it, then the man must go for refreshment again into the river of life that floweth out from the throne of God, that it may again bring forth in him the fruit of good works. All these spiritual men who thus know how to resign or to return again unto God, with their body and their spirits, the gifts that He has mercifully bestowed on them, with deep, humble self-renunciation, these do continually grow more able and more worthy to receive blessing from God. Where such admirable, god-like men are to be found, they are worthy, as none else are, to be fed with gold and silver and fine pearls, and the best that the world contains as their heritage. But there is many a poor noble man of God, who has none of all these things; let such an one humbly cast himself on the all-powerful God and trust him utterly; without doubt thy heavenly Father will and must provide thee well, yea, wert thou hidden in a rock.

These exalted and most noble men are just like the wood of the vine, which is outwardly hard and black and dry, and good for no purpose whatever; and if we had never seen it before, we should think it of no use at all, and good for nothing but to be thrown into the fire, and burned. But in this dry wood of the vine, there lie concealed the living veins of sap, and power of yielding the noblest of all juices, and of bringing forth a greater abundance of fruit than any other sort of wood that grows. And thus it is with these beloved and lowly children, who are at all times and seasons plunged in God; they are outwardly in appearance like unto black rotten wood, seeming unto men dry and unprofitable. For there are many of these who are humble, noways remarkable for their gifts, outward or inward, nor for any extraordinary works or sayings or exercises of devotion, and who move in the narrowest sphere; but living veins from the fountain of truth lie hidden within them, forasmuch as they have asked for no earthly heritage, but God is their lot and their portion, their life and their being.

267

Now the vine-dresser goes out and prunes the vine, lopping off the wild shoots; for if he neglected this, and suffered them to remain on the good stem, the whole would yield bad, sour wine. So likewise shall good men do: they shall cut off from themselves ill that is not according to God's order in their conduct or dispositions, likings or dislikings, and destroy it to the very root; thou shalt cut away all evil failings from thy heart, and it will do thee no harm, either in head or in hand, or any member. But hold thy knife still, till thou hast really seen what ought to be cut off. If a vine dresser be not skilled in his art, he is as likely to crop off the good branches which bear the grapes as the wild shoots, and thus spoil the vineyard. So it is with those who do not understand this spiritual art; they leave the roots of vice and evil dispositions alive in the heart, and hew and lop at poor nature, and thereby destroy this noble vineyard. Nature is in itself good and noble, why shouldst thou hew away aught that belongs to it? For I tell thee that when the time is come for it to yield fruit in a godly, blessed, devout life, then it will be seen that thou hast spoiled thy nature.

268

After this the labourer binds up the vine, putting in stakes; he bends the upper branches down towards the earth, and fastens the vine to a strong framework, that it may have a support. This is a type of the sweet and holy life, the sacred example and sufferings of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, for these and nothing of our own should be a man's stay. For the higher powers of his reason shall be drawn down into due control, and he shall sink low in deep submissive humility before Our Lord, in truth and not with hypocrisy, with all his powers, outward and inward. For when both the appetites of the body, and the highest intellectual powers of the soul are thus trained and bound down, each in its own place, so that neither the senses nor the will, nor any faculty, is left too free and too proud, but they are at all times controlled and trained into due rightful order under the Divine will, and man's desire at all times, and in all things, is to be by the help and grace of God, to the utmost of his power, outwardly and inwardly obedient to the Divine will, without contradiction, in all that the Eternal God, our Heavenly Father, has determined in His eternal divine counsels;—[and when all the powers humbly act in this way, in dependence upon God, whether they are exercised or kept in check,—were it within the bounds of reasonable possibility that a man could be conscious of possessing all the good works, and all the heavenly graces of all mankind, and yet took none of all this unto himself, but, calling nothing his own, stood up destitute and bare, in free, simple love to God, as if all this goodness belonged to another, and not himself;—Children, wherever such noble men may exist or live in this age of grace, in them may the Father of Heaven truly and absolutely accomplish His divine and mysterious work without any hindrance. And in him whose

heart is not sincerely standing thus toward God, as to the guiding principle of his life, in him doubt not that this holy, divine birth cannot be truly brought to pass or be made fruitful.]

269

Afterward the vine-dresser digs about the stems of the vine, and roots out all noxious weeds. Thus shall a devout man dig about the soil of his own heart by close observation and testing of his own principles, to see whether there be aught for him to root out. And if he find anything, let him that moment pluck it up, however trifling or unimportant it may be, that the beams of the eternal and divine sun may penetrate the farther into his very midst, shining with unobscured force, and fructifying his noblest powers. For thus the glorious sun draws the juices outward into the living vessels which lie hidden in the bark, and then the fair clusters begin to appear. Ah! children, if man knew how so to tend his vine, that God's sun might shine in on and vivify his soul, what sweet, excellent, delicious fruit would the eternal sun draw forth from him! For the lovely sun shines with all its fulness into him, and works within these precious clusters, and makes them flourish in sweetness and beauty. Their blossoms send forth a sweet and delicate fragrance, which dispels all poisonous vapours; neither serpent nor toad can endure their perfume, when the eternal divine sun shines direct among the branches, and through the clusters. The fruit is so entirely of God's producing, and flourishes in such beauty and richness, in pure looking up to God, whose rays draw forth from it such wondrous and delicious favour and perfume, that it needs must destroy the venom of the old serpent; yea, had all the devils in hell, and all the men on earth conspired together, they would not be able in the least to injure a thoroughly godly-minded and God-loving man, but the more they strive to injure him, the deeper he is rooted and the higher he is built up in God with all his powers. And if such an admirable man, bearing his precious fruit, were to be cast down to the depths of hell, he must needs turn it into a kingdom of heaven, and God and eternal blessedness would exist in hell. And a man who should bear such fruit would not need to fear in anywise all the reproach that could be heaped upon him. When we have no aim but God, nothing can part us from Him, or lead us astray.

270

Now after that the vine has been well pruned, and its stem cleared of all weeds, the glorious sun shineth yet more brightly, and casteth his heat on the precious clusters, and these grow more and more transparent, and the sweetness begins to disclose itself more and more. And to such a man as we have described, all means of communication between God and his soul begin after a time to grow so transparent that the rays and glances of the divine sun reach him without ceasing, that is, as often and as soon as he turns himself towards them in feeling and thought. This divine sun shines much more brightly than all the suns in the firmament ever shone; and in its light all the man's ways, and works, and doings are so changed into its image, that he feels nothing to be so true as God, with a certainty that is rooted in the very midst of his being, yet is far above the sphere of his reason, and which he can never fully express, for it is too deep and too high above all human reason to be explored and understood.

271

After this the vine-dresser loves to strip off the leaves, that thus the sun may have nothing to hinder its rays from pouring on the grapes. In like manner do all means of grace fall away from this man, such as images of the saints, teachings, holy exercises, set prayers, and the like. Yet let none cast these things aside before they fall away of themselves through divine grace: that is to say, when a man is drawn up above all that he can comprehend, then do these precious and divine fruits grow more sweet and delightful than either sense or reason may conceive, and it is possible for him to be carried so far that his spirit is as it were sunk and lost in the abyss of the Deity, and loses the consciousness of all creature distinctions. All things are gathered together in one with the

Divine sweetness, and the man's being is so penetrated with the Divine substance, that he loses himself therein, as a drop of water is lost in a cask of strong wine. And thus the man's spirit is so sunk in God in divine union, that he loses all sense of distinction; and all that has brought him to this point, such as humility, the seeking God's glory,—nay, his very self,—loses its name, and there remains a secret, still union, without cloud or colour. And all good purposes are fused into a true and pure oneness, and a real but silent mystery, such as human powers can scarce apprehend. [Children, could we but truly stand in this holy of holies for an hour or a moment, it were a thousand times better and more profitable for us, and more pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of the Eternal God, than forty years spent in our own self-imposed tasks.]

That we may thus give place to God, [for Him to do His work in us, and die to all to which we ought to die, that we may live truly and only to that to which we ought to live, if this exalted work of God is to be accomplished in us and through us,] may He help us. Amen!

X



Sermon for Ash Wednesday

Gal. ii. 20—"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

THE holy Apostle Paul, whose endeavours towards a perfect life were all founded upon endurance and true resignation, shows us in himself how a righteous, spiritual man, being nailed with Christ to the cross, and whose sufferings bring forth in him the living fruits of the Spirit, now no longer liveth through himself, but Christ liveth in him, as is taught in the words which he writes to the Galatians, saying: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Again he continues; "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." In these words we have a wholesome admonition to strive after such a life as that Christ may be glorified in us, and His bitter grief and cross may be manifested in our mortal body, to the bettering of our neighbour and ourselves. Wherefore we ought to observe here, that though there be many kinds of cross and suffering, of which each has its own length, and depth, and breadth, and height, yet there is only one on which our eternal redemption was accomplished; that is, the cross of Christ's humanity, which again points us to a still higher cross (yet, so to speak, without cross and pain), of His divine nature. So likewise there were two crosses which stood beside the cross of Christ; the one bearing the malefactor on His right hand, and the other on His left. From all which we purpose to gather some spiritual emblems that may help us to discern what sort of cross and grief it is that we are bearing, and to which of these three crosses it may be compared. This we may tell by the following tokens.



By the cross of the malefactor on Christ's left hand may be understood those who have made a religious profession, and are hanging on the cross of continual exercises and outward austerities which they have bound themselves to practise; they have well-deserved this cross, but it brings them no profit, because they have not died on it to self-will and other sinful failings. It is possible

for them after this crucifixion to go down to eternal torment with the unjust malefactor; so that, to use a common proverb, they drag the barrow here and the waggon in the world to come. The height of this cross is the spiritual pride and self-complacency which they have in the strictness of their life, on account of which they set themselves up above others; for none can be good enough for them, and they lay great stress on such austerities, despising all who do not lead such a life as themselves.

St. Augustine said to his brethren: “Dear brethren, rather than you should say or think yourselves to be different from or better than other men, I would that you should return to the world. You ought to say, as Christ did by the mouth of his Prophet David: ‘I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people;’ and with the publican: ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’”

The depth of this cross is a type of the depth of sin into which such men fall; and that comes hence, that their inward principle is false through and through, and they have never taken pains to look within and examine their evil unchanged hearts, and amend them; they lean altogether on outward exercises, which at the same time they hate, and perform with backward hearts. They know nothing of a union with God, or of His mysteries; nay, they no more reach after anything of this kind by questioning, or inquiring, or seeking, than they think of the Sultan over the sea, and take no more thought about it than if it in no wise concerned them. If they hear talk of divine things, they understand as much of them as a German does of Italian. They say their prayers and read their Bibles, and perform their dry works of obedience with the outward man and their senses; and with this they are well satisfied. Let God unite Himself with whom He will, what does that concern them? But if it were a question of outward advantage in respect of gain, or honour, or other things that might be turned to account, which any one had obtained thereby, then we should see whether it concerned them or not. Hence, in spite of their pious acts, it comes to this, that when they are called on to renounce their own way and will, they behave as if they were deaf or senseless. Thus St. Augustine writes: “I do not know wickeder, more utterly corrupt men than those who fall away while maintaining a religious profession; for not seldom they fall so deeply into sin, that they come to err from the faith and the things touching the Holy Scriptures, and thus sink under the cross to which they are bound and fastened.”

The width or breadth of this cross is that they go the wide, broad, well-trodden way that leadeth unto hell; for they live after the flesh, and therefore they do not seek after the sweetness of the spirit; for he who liveth to the flesh cannot please God. He who will not seek the narrow path that leadeth unto eternal life, must needs often be delayed and lose the way, by which means he is made too late to find the way that leadeth unto life. This is the case with those who seek and intend themselves in all things, and are always wanting to get some ease and to gain some indulgence from the Lord, now for this, now for that forbidden thing; in a word, to have nothing to bear is what would suit them best. For this very reason they are obliged to bear a heavy cross in their conscience whether they like it or no, and have no confidence towards God whom they have set at nought, nor yet any consolation from the world which despises them. Ah! dear children, what a hard life and cross is theirs! They would fain be without pain, and have the very bitterest pain; which will, moreover, be followed by eternal pain, unless they repent and turn to God.

The length of this cross is, that they remain and persevere impenitent and without virtue unto the end; and this comes from their great ingratitude, inasmuch as God has bestowed on them such great grace before other worldly people who would have made better use of it, and has visited them in so many good influences and admonitions, inward and outward, as often even to raise their own

276

wonder; and for all that they do not turn from evil. Of these says Paul: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.” And He gives us a likeness for them: “For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing: whose end is to be burned.” As much as to say, Of these men who have received great grace from God, and to whom He has showed special tokens of His secret favour, when they are notwithstanding obstinately perverse and unfruitful, it is to be feared, if they persevere in such a course, that they will fall under the eternal curse of God. Therefore beware that you be not hanged on this cross of condemnation, and meet your last end thus.

277

The second kind of cross is good, and is that of the malefactor on Christ’s right hand, who had indeed well deserved his punishment, but it became unto him fruitful and profitable. This cross we may take as a type of the hardship and sufferings needful to be borne by those who have turned with their whole heart from this world and sin to a life of repentance; who have indeed well deserved to suffer much for their sins, because they have wasted their time so unprofitably in fleshly and natural pleasures, doing their own will; but now they wish to forsake all these things for God’s sake, and on the contrary to suffer whatever God shall appoint for them. To these the cross is not only profitable and fruitful, but also consoling, sweet, and lovely. For to them it brings, as it did to this malefactor, a strong faith with a firm hope in the unspeakable love and mercy of God. Ah! children, what greater good could befall this criminal hanging on the cross, in this short space of time, than to hear those comfortable words: “Verily I say unto thee, this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” And what can better comfort these rightly disposed converts of whom we are speaking, than for Christ to exclaim unto them: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” That is, I will receive you into my favour, and help you to bear your burdens, and after a short season of travail most sweetly quicken and refresh you.

The depth of this cross is boundless humility, not deeming ourselves higher than other men, but having our eyes always open to our own shortcomings; like this malefactor, who acknowledged that he was suffering the just reward of his misdeeds. So let it be with all these converts; in all their sorrows let them remember that they might justly have suffered more, and that no suffering on earth or in hell would be a sufficient retribution for their sins. This makes them not to despise, nor judge, nor condemn any but themselves; and when they are brought to this point, then their cross begins to blossom and bear fruit.

278

The height of this cross is a mind directed upwards to the contemplation of divine and heavenly things, and a forsaking of outward things; that is, they shall learn to look upward toward eternal things, without letting their eyes wander after earthly things, and fix their looks on the admirable life and walk of our dear Lord, his sufferings, his bitter death, his resurrection, ascension, and everlasting reign. This makes a man’s suffering and cross light unto him, as it did to this malefactor when he said: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Behold, dear children, how his mind and thoughts were filled with the eternal world.

The breadth of this cross signifies a hearty, all-embracing love to God, men, and all creatures; for those who are on this cross pray with lip and heart, not alone for themselves, but also for all men, even for their enemies: thus their prayer extends unto all, and they are ever ready to devote

themselves, body and soul to their fellow-creatures; and thus they do what in them lies to make amends to God, whom they have aforetime dishonoured and provoked in his creatures. Thus love, as St. Peter saith, covereth a multitude of sins; and, as Christ said of Mary Magdalene: many sins are forgiven her, for she loved much.

The length of this cross is perseverance and growth in good works; for these men never cease from their kind and virtuous labours, but undertake one after another with just discrimination, and give all diligence to put off their old man, and to put on a new man created after God in righteousness and holiness of life. And hence their inward man is renewed day by day, and groweth up amidst all their sorrow, pain, and temptation, so that they may well feel how truly Paul has said, that “this light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

279

The third cross is the cross of Christ, and is a type of the perfect men, on whom their Heavenly Father has bestowed peculiar glory and honour, and fellowship with His only begotten Son, in that He sends them, after a special sort, all manner of contradiction, pain, assaults, tribulation, and crosses of every kind; and gives them to drink of the cup of which Christ, His only begotten Son, has drunk. As it was with the holy Apostles James and John, to whom Christ said: “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink off? and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” As much as to say, If ye desire to be the chiefest, dearest friends of God, ye must, like me, suffer the greatest contradiction beforehand; for the disciple is not above his master. If Christ must needs suffer and enter by the cross into the kingdom of His Father, without doubt so must every friend of God have somewhat likewise to endure.

The depth of this cross is that they have at all times a childlike fear, and allow God to move them as He will, and keep a constant care not to offend God. Its height is the well-grounded hope which they have of eternal blessedness, not founded on their own merit or good life, but on a firm faith, in a humble principle of entire self-surrender to the perfectly holy will of God. And this hope maketh not ashamed; but, as St. Paul says, “the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them.” The width or breadth of this cross is that they love God with their whole hearts, and themselves and all men through God; and endeavour with all their might “to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” They shun all giving of offence and scandal, and are useful to all and hurtful to none. And therefore they suffer gladly all that befalls them in their work of love, that they may bring many souls unto God. The length of their cross stretches out into eternity: for they are ready to suffer gladly all that God shall appoint unto them in time or in eternity; it is their highest happiness to forward all that God chooses to do through them; however and whenever He will, they simply follow His leading, without murmuring or questioning. They are those who are able to say in sincerity with Christ: “Not my will, but thine be done.” Nothing grieves them more than that they cannot utterly give up their own will, by reason of human infirmity and weakness. O, how blessed are these men, and how fruitful is their cross, not only to themselves, but also to all Christendom!

280

This cross leads and brings them to the ineffable cross of the divine nature, of which Paul was thinking when he prayed for his friends that they might “be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length, and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.” The length is His never-ending eternity; the breadth His boundless goodness and mercy, which has been shed abroad, and is yet



poured out over the whole creation and mankind; the height is His omnipotence, and the depth of His unfathomable wisdom. Now he who will reach up unto the cross of Christ's divine nature, must first be fashioned into the likeness of His crucifixion in the flesh. And all those who truly lead a life in the spirit, such as we have described, are thus crucified with Christ; for they shall keep themselves from all the works of the flesh, which God hates, and shall have an earnest love to all righteousness, so that they are united with the bonds of their soul unto His divine nature. They shall, moreover, be ever striving to fulfil God's will, continually fixing their thoughts on Him, and keeping themselves from all that would be displeasing in His sight, and thus be nailed with the right foot to the cross of the divine nature; and they shall further learn to hold themselves between these two, that they be neither carried away by unblessed happiness, nor yet shrink from blessed unhappiness, nor be led astray between these two; and thus are they bound with the left foot to the cross of the divine nature. Furthermore, they shall have an inward sympathy with God, for the dishonour that has been done Him from the beginning of the world, and will yet be done Him by men in the Church and in the world until the last day, and for the shame and dishonour of His dearest friends, who have yielded themselves to suffer on this cross with Christ, that His divine glory may be magnified through them; for God will guard them as the apple of His eye, insomuch that whoso entreateth them evil hath done it unto God.

That we may thus be nailed with Christ to the cross of his humanity,—that we may be admitted to the eternal beholding of the brightness of His godhead, may the Almighty Trinity grant and help us. Amen!

XI



Sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent

(From the Gospel for the day)

Tells us how God drives forward some of His children by the struggle between the inward and outward man.

Matt. xv. 21-28.—“Jesus went thence and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

THE gospel for this day points us to a guiding principle which is of all others the noblest, surest, most useful and most essential principle that we can have while here on earth. For be assured, that unless your conversion have within it this kernel, all your efforts to perform good works and to abstain from transgression will avail you little or nothing.

283

Now let us in the first place consider these words: “Jesus went out from thence.” Whence was it that He departed? From the Scribes and Pharisees. Now give heed to the principle herein contained: the Scribes were the wise men who prided themselves upon their knowledge; and the Pharisees were those who prided themselves upon their spirituality, and trusted in their religious practices and set talks. These two classes of men are types of two of the most dangerous principles which can exist among religious people; and those who remain in their way of thinking are lost, for these two principles do ruin the soul like a worm at the root, so that men come to nothing. And yet there are few but what are in some measure under the influence of one or both of them, though some much more than others. By the Scribes we may understand men of a reasoning turn of mind, who try all things by the light of their reason, or as they appear to them through their senses. They receive ideas by means of their senses, and then exercise upon them their powers of reflection that they may attain to the comprehension of high questions. And they glory therein, and make very lofty discourses; but in the inward parts, where pure truth should gush forth from its fount, they are empty and dry, yielding nothing.

284

The second class are the Pharisees. These are the religious people who look upon themselves as the excellent of the earth, and think highly of themselves, and take their stand upon prescribed customs and ways, and regard these usages as of more importance than anything else, and desire to be respected on this account and to have praise of men; but their hearts are full of judging thoughts of other men who do not observe or approve of their ways. From these our Lord went out. The Scribes had asked him to pronounce a judgment, saying: Why do thy disciples transgress the good customs of our forefathers, by eating with unwashed hands? And He answered them: Why do ye transgress the commandments of God? Just so do those of the present day who regard their own ordinances and practices of devotion as the commandments and will of God, and condemn and think slightly of the friends of God who refuse to follow usages of man’s prescribing, because they are constrained to follow God’s secret motions in their hearts. In thus saying, we do not mean that open evil-livers or despisers of godliness are not to be judged by the congregation, for else there would be an end of all ecclesiastical discipline; but let each beware of this pharisaical temper in himself, looking to see if any false piety lurk within him that has some other origin or end than God. For Jesus departs when that is so, and assuredly will not stay where that exists.

285

Thus we find many people who never look to anything beyond their outward conduct; they perform good works and behave with decorum, and then think they have done all; while their inward part is altogether overgrown and choked up with the creature, by which they are held fast to their great hurt. And while in this state, they pray much and read their Bible. So likewise did the blind Jews, they read much in the Scriptures; and yet God was an utter stranger to them, and hidden from them in spirit and in truth. So it is with this sort of religious people: they submit to Church discipline, they pray, they fast, they watch; and for all this, God is not really and truly the principle of their life, but poor, miserable nature, toward which all their love, and striving, and aspiration is directed, notwithstanding the abundance and the fervour of their religious exercises. No, children, the eternal God will have nothing to do with these Pharisees; for they are not plants which our Heavenly Father has planted, but weeds which must be plucked up by the roots, as our Lord Himself has said: “He who is not with me is against me;” and, “He who gathereth not with me, scattereth.” When the time of harvest is come, and the eternal God will gather His wheat into the garner, these will be found to be the called who have not gathered with Him, and He will not know them; and where He does not find His planting in the ground of the heart, He will cast the men out into outer darkness. I have

shown you two false principles; I beseech you, for God's sake, beware of them, if you would be kept unto eternal life. For this zealous activity of the natural man, after the fashion of the Scribes or Pharisees, in outward show or prescribed usages, prevails greatly, alas! at this day among all ranks. Men's minds are now-a-days so subtle and quick, after the fashion of these Scribes [raising doubts and questions of conscience], that a conscientious confessor scarcely knows how to direct their souls by reason of their subtlety or their scrupulousness. From such men Jesus departed, as He does still to this day.

But whither did the Lord Jesus go? He went into the land of Tyre and Sidon. Now Tyre signifies a state of apprehension, and Sidon signifies the state of one driven by the hunters. Ah, children! few, alas! are willing to experience in themselves what it is to go thither; and yet it is a wondrously ennobling and profitable thing that these two trials should be laid upon a man together; and if under them he can act rightly and well, what nobleness, growth in grace, and good fruit will be born of this sharp tribulation! Now what is this being hard pressed by the hunters? Nothing else but that the inward man would always fain be with God (who is his proper resting-place); and thus it ever drives the outward man towards and after God; but the outward man strives in the contrary direction, always going outwards after lower things, where indeed is his proper place; and thus there is a division in the man. The inward man's own place is God, and towards this centre all his desire, and free will, and endeavours are turned, and he is continually called and drawn this way by God his Lord. But this is contrary to the outward man, by his very nature, which wars against it every day and hour. As St. Paul says: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Wherefore, "the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." Thus the flesh and the spirit strive and fight against each other; and then cometh God from above, and pursues after them both with His grace. And where this is rightly and duly understood, it stands well with the man; for all who are thus led by God's spirit, are the children of God.

Now this conflict causes to the man sharp and bitter pain and tribulation. But while he is plunged in the thick of the strife, perceiving nothing beyond it, and destitute of consolation, then comes Jesus and enters in of a surety. And to the man who does not obey the strivings of God's spirit, nor experience this inward conflict, Jesus does not enter in. For all those who have never felt this inward strife, nor God's hand heavy on their soul, and truly yielded to it in their life, these will never bring any good to pass so long as they live. Moreover, they never come to themselves, and therefore know nothing of all that is lying hidden within them. For many assaults come upon us, both carnal and spiritual, which we can best withstand by meeting them with a spirit of humility and gratitude; and if we await these trials with a cheerful spirit, we may be assured that God will stand by us with His grace. And then, when the world comes with its raging storms, beating upon his head, and the Devil with his crafty wiles, and the man's own flesh and senses and lowest powers are beset with great weakness and passionate impulses towards outward things, and all this while the inward man is urged on by God, and by the thirst which he by nature has after God,—then, indeed, there must needs be within him a bitter agony and tearing strife. And what shall the poor, wretched, comfortless man do, hunted and assailed as he is, without way or means of escape? He shall do as this poor woman did; go to Jesus and cry with a loud voice of strong desire; "O, Lord, thou son of David, have mercy on me!" And then from the depths of the struggle an impetuous cry leaps forth; and this cry of the spirit flies over thousands and thousands of miles with its piercing call: it is an infinite

288

sighing from the fathomless abyss. This is something far above nature, whereunto the Holy Spirit must supply what is lacking because of our infirmities: as St. Paul says: “The Spirit maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” And by these means the Holy Spirit doth better prepare the ground of the heart than by any other preparation on earth that can be imagined.

289

And when a man is thus hunted and plunged into the bottomless pit of temptation and suffering, and then, amidst “groanings which cannot be uttered,” cries to God with a loud voice, so that the accents of his strong desire pierce through the heavens; and yet God makes as though He did not hear, or would not listen, O, how utterly must the man yield up his own self, and suffer his wishes to melt into the depths of God’s will, waiting with ever-strengthening patience upon God, till His appointed time come to visit him and all creatures! For, oh! how impossible were it that the fount of all mercy should be sealed up! yet, when this woman came crying after Jesus with a loud voice, the stream from this fount of mercy was not suffered to flow out unto her. The disciples prayed that it might be opened; and at last, with severe aspect and harsh words, Jesus answered them that He was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, saying: “It is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to the dogs.” He not only refused her the blessing she sought, but did what was much harder to bear,—proved in clear, cutting language that it was reasonable and just that He should do so. He not only refused to give her bread, which is necessary to life, and a common blessing, but denied her the name of a child, thus depriving her of humanity, and called her a dog. Could our Lord have tried her by a harder, sharper test,—could He have pressed her harder, or overwhelmed her more completely? But what does she do in this her distress and anguish? She takes it all meekly and patiently, and suffers herself to be driven and buffeted as He will. Nay, she sinks much lower than He had plunged her, and casts herself into the very depths of humiliation, saying: “No, Lord, not a dog, but even less, one of the least of the little whelps.” But in her self-abasement and self-annihilation she holds fast her confidence, and says: “Yet, O Lord, the little whelps are wont to be fed and satisfied with the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.”

290

Oh, how blessed and holy were men who could thus strike into the very truth of things, and see themselves with the mind of God, not through figures of speech, or customary phrases, or as the world judges. Neither God nor all His creatures could then abase and annihilate them so thoroughly as they would abase, and accuse, and annihilate themselves in the sight of the truth! Blessed indeed, if then, notwithstanding this wretched tumult of suffering and humiliation, they should be constant in their hope and confidence in the goodness of God, and abide therein without wavering; so that under all these afflictions their desire and earnest purpose towards Him should strengthen more and more, as it was with this woman. However harshly our Lord spoke to her, and denied her His acts of mercy, yet she never let go her trust in His grace. Therefore everything was granted to her that she had sought and desired of the Lord. Dear children, this is the right, true, godly way unto eternal truth. Oh! this way leads unto the truth; this alone leads straight to God without a means. And some have not strength to try the depth of this fathomless annihilation of self. This was the way the woman of Canaan took, and she received at last the blessed answer: “O, woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee according to thy will!”

Children, I tell you of God’s truth, that to every man who shall be found really and truly thus walking in this way, God will assuredly one day declare: “My beloved friend, whatsoever thou chooseth or desirest, it shall be done unto thee according to thy will; forasmuch as thou hast willingly given up all that was thine. Therefore, thy will is swallowed up in mine, and thou hast become one

with me by grace, and a partaker of my nature.” Now this becoming one with the eternal Goodness cannot come to pass but by an absolute renunciation of our Self, and all that is ours, natural or spiritual; for in the same measure that a man comes out from himself, in that measure does God enter in with His divine grace, and he who loseth his life shall find it.

Children, I will say no more now, but tell you a little story that is very apt to our purpose. I knew a “woman of Canaan,” well deserving of the name. What I am about to tell you, happened within these four years, and she is yet living. This woman lost her senses, and fell into a trance, and was borne up on high, till she came into the presence of God, and beheld our Lady and all the saints. And as she looked upon this vision she saw herself to be at an immeasurable distance from God. Then her spirit was seized with such unutterable woe that it seemed as if she must perish that moment with the bitter, smarting, hellish pain that it gave her to see herself so far off from God. (For know ye that this is the worst torment which the souls in hell have to endure, that they know themselves to be afar off, and utterly parted from God and all His elect, and know that it will last for ever, and that they shall never see God.) Now in this unspeakable distress she turned to our Lady and all the saints, and besought them all that they would intercede for her. But then she saw that the blessed saints were so utterly lost in the contemplation of God that none of them for a moment listened to her cries and appeals. In their overwhelming bliss and joy they never even heard her voice. Then she turned after a human fashion to the sacred sorrow and bitter death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and it was answered her, why should she appeal to that to which she had never shown due honour and reverence? But when she saw that neither our Lady, nor the saints, nor the sufferings of our Lord brought her help, she turned herself with all earnestness to God, and said: “Ah, Lord! since none will come to my help, behold, O beloved Lord, that I am Thy poor creature, and Thou art my God; I fall down before Thy righteous sentence, according to Thy most blessed will; and whether Thou wilt have me to remain for ever in this horrible, hellish torment, I leave, dear Lord, altogether to Thy most blessed will.” But when she had thus utterly surrendered herself to God for all eternity, that moment she was lifted up far away beyond all intervening things, and wafted into the abyss of God’s love. O what a glorious abyss is that! This same person is still often brought either into this state of mind, or carried into the abyss of the divine love. She is a young maiden, and I firmly believe that she had never in her life committed any gross sins, wherewith she had provoked God; and yet she needed thus to suffer. Children! how great and manifold, then, must be the pangs of those who have often and deeply angered God, and withal are still cleaving while on earth so closely to the miserable creature delights? But this maiden resigned herself humbly to the will of God, content to bear an eternity of pain in hell, if God in His righteousness saw fit to condemn her thereunto.

How unlike this woman are those who fancy that in four or five years they shall work wonders, and say to others: “Ah, my dear friend, pray the Lord for me that I may become one of his dearest friends.” Now know that, if thou wert in the right way, thou wouldst never think thyself worthy to become one of the least of the friends of God; therefore set thyself humbly in the lowest place, as the Gospel teaches, and then thou wilt be bidden to come up higher. But those who lift themselves up, God will assuredly cast down. Wherefore beseech Him that His good pleasure may be wrought in and with thee, according to His ever-blessed will, and so wilt thou find thy dwelling-place and rest in Him, and not else. Children, on this wise God entereth into the soul immediately, without a veil; that is, when a man wholly renounces Self—all that he has. Now, if any man while here on earth should obtain one drop of this blessing, and one spark of this love should be kindled in his



soul, he would be more truly and really made fit for God's dwelling, and led farther into the truth, than if he were to strip all the clothes off his body and give them to the poor, or to macerate his flesh with penances. One moment in this state were more worth living than forty years spent in doing and leaving undone what we pleased. Moreover this would be the noblest and shortest, and also the easiest, of all courses that reason can conceive. O God! with what things are men taken up, while they waste this precious, blessed season of grace, and come short of that pure, exalted good which might and ought unceasingly to be wrought in them; and so the long years roll slowly by, and they are as one in a sleep, never coming any farther, unstirred by God's grace; and after the many years that they have lived, they are as far from true perfectness as the first day that they set out. This is indeed a terrible and awful thought for all religious persons; for if they knew the great and perilous injury that they do to their souls with their own devices, their very marrow and blood would dry up within their body. Now let us pray God that we may thus sink into the divine abyss, and fall down before God's sentence, that we may be also found in Him like this woman of Canaan! Amen!



XII

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Of the power of the Word of God, of fiery desires, and the essence of self-renunciation.

John viii. 47.—“He who is of God heareth the words of God.”



DEAR children, ye ought not to cease from hearing or declaring the word of God because you do not always live according to it, nor keep it in mind. For inasmuch as you love it and crave after it, it will assuredly be given unto you; and you shall enjoy it for ever with God, according to the measure of your desire after it. There are some people who, when they hear speak of high things which they do not understand, and moreover see that they have no share in them, turn away from these things with such aversion, that they do not even like to hear them treated of, or that others should think about them and seek after them. Yea, they hear of high things, and say: “That is not my way of thinking; I had better not try to put it into practice, for I should not keep it, and then I should be just where I was before.” And thus they turn away themselves and others from the truth, just as if it in no wise concerned them, and sit down quite contented with their own ways, while yet they know in the bottom of their hearts that their ways are not the best that might be. This is an infallible token that these persons will never reach the highest point of which they are capable; nor will they become partakers of the highest, pure, absolute goodness, unless indeed they come to go through a painful and agonizing struggle after it.

St. Bernard has said: “Man, if thou desirest a noble and holy life, and unceasingly prayest to God for it, if thou continue constant in this thy desire, it will be granted unto thee without fail, even if only in the day or hour of thy death; and if God should not give it thee then, thou shalt find it in

Him in eternity: of this be assured.” Therefore do not relinquish your desire, though it be not fulfilled immediately, or though ye may swerve from your aspirations, or even forget them for a time. It were a hard case if this were to cut you off for ever from the end of your being. But when ye hear the word of God, surrender yourselves wholly to it, as if for eternity, with a full purpose of will to retain it in your mind and to order your life according to it; and let it sink down right deep into your heart as into an eternity. If afterward it should come to pass that you let it slip, and never think of it again, yet the love and aspiration which once really existed live for ever before God, and in Him ye shall find the fruit thereof; that is, to all eternity it shall be better for you than if you had never felt them.

What we can *do* is a small thing; but we can will and aspire to great things. Thus, if a man cannot be great, he can yet be good in will; and what he, with his whole heart and mind, love and desire, wills to be, that without doubt he most truly is. It is little we can bring to pass; but our will and desire may be large. Nay, they may grow till they lose themselves in the infinite abyss of God. Not that we ought to think within ourselves that we wish to be this or that, like such a saint or angel, for we ought to be much more than we can conceive or fathom: wherefore our part is to give ourselves over to God, and leave ourselves utterly in His hands, being wholly His. And if ye cannot be as entirely His as ye fain would be, be His as much as ye may attain unto; but whatever ye are, be that truly and entirely; and what ye cannot be, that be contented not to be, in a sincere spirit of resignation, for God’s sake and in Him. So shall you peradventure possess more of God in lacking than in having. Therefore be God’s; yield to His hand, suffer Him to do in thee, and to thee, and with thee, what He will; and then nothing here or hereafter shall be able to confound you.

Think not that God will be always caressing His children, or shine upon their head, or kindle their hearts, as He does at the first. He does so only to lure us to Himself, as the falconer lures the falcon with its gay hood. Our Lord works with His children so as to teach them afterwards to work themselves; as He bade Moses to make the tables of stone after the pattern of the first which He had made Himself. Thus, after a time, God allows a man to depend upon himself, and no longer enlightens, and stimulates, and rouses him. We must stir up and rouse ourselves, and be content to leave off learning, and no more enjoy feeling and fire, and must now serve the Lord with strenuous industry and at our own cost. Our Lord acts like a prudent father, who, while his children are young, lets them live at his cost, and manages everything for them. What is needful for them, he provides, and lets them go and play; and so long as this lasts they are at leisure, free from care, happy, and generous at their father’s expense. Afterwards he gives a portion of his estate into their own hands, because he will have them to take care of themselves, and earn their own living, to leave off childish play, and thus learn how to grow rich. So it is with us. In the beginning of a holy life, there is nothing but brightness, enjoyment, and feeling, and God draws us after Him with His gifts, that we may praise Him in the influencing of our wills, and we do all with a good will, and we know and recognize therein God’s will. But now it is very different; now God will have us to give up ourselves and our own will, and to accept Him with readiness in His acts of severity, and in all kinds of suffering, and in darkness of mind, whatever He may do, and however contrary it may be to all our natural wishes. As the Lord said to Peter: “When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hand, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.” Thus did the Lord in our early days go beside us, drawing us onward by His benefits; then we went whither we would, for our will was

sweetly girded with the pleasantness of divine things. But now it must be otherwise: another shall gird us, and lead us whither we would not.

The Lord will draw us and securely lead us to Himself, in a way contrary to all our natural will, until He have divested us thereof, and consumed it and made it thoroughly subject unto the Divine will. For this is His will: that we should cease to regard our own wishes or dislikes; that it should become a light matter to us whether He give or take away, whether we have abundance or suffer want, and let all things go, if only we may receive and apprehend God Himself; that whether things please or displease us, we may leave all things to take their course and cleave to Him alone. Then first do we attain to the fulness of God's love as His children, when it is no longer happiness or misery, prosperity or adversity, that draws us to Him, or keeps us back from Him. What we should then experience none can utter; but it would be something far better than when we were burning with the first flame of love, and had great emotion but less true submission: for here, though there may be less show of zeal, and less vehemence of feeling, there is more true faithfulness to God. That we may attain thereunto, may God help us with His grace. Amen!

298

XIII

299

Sermon for Palm Sunday

How a man ought in all His works to regard God alone, and purely to make Him his end without anything of his own, and shall freely and simply perform all these works for the glory of God only, and not seek his own, nor desire nor expect any reward. Wherewith he may do such works without any self-appropriation or reference to time and number, before or after, and without modes. How the Divine Word speaks and reveals itself in the soul, all in a lofty and subtile sense.

Matt. xxi. 10-17.—“And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves: And said unto them, It is written: My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, and said unto Him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise? And He left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and He lodged there.”

WE read in the holy Gospel how that our Lord went into the Temple, and drove out those who were buying and selling therein, and said to those who sold doves: “Take these things hence.” Herewith He signified nought else but that He would have the temple empty; just as if He had said: “I have a right to this temple, and will dwell there alone, and have the sole rule therein.” Now what is this temple of which God is minded to have possession even by force, and to rule according to His own will? It is the soul of man, which He has created and fashioned so truly in His own likeness; as we

300

read that God said: “Let us make man after our image.” And He has done so too, and made the soul of man so like Himself, that there is nothing in heaven or on earth so like Himself as that is. For which reason God will have this temple to be empty, that nothing be there but He alone; and the cause why this temple pleases Him so well, is that it is so like Himself, and He loveth to be in it forasmuch as He is there alone.

Now mark, who were the people who were buying and selling, and whom do they represent at this day? Now observe, I intend to speak only of the good people who thus bought and sold, and yet whom our Lord scourged and drove out, and do not mean to say anything to-day concerning open sinners, who knowingly live in the commission of deadly sins. And the Lord does the same now-a-days to all who buy and sell in His temple, for such He will not suffer to remain therein. Behold, dear children, all those are traders who keep themselves from open sins, and would fain be good people, and do their works to the glory of God, and perform many good works, such as fasting, watching, praying, and the like; yet do it all in order that our Lord may give them, or do for them, something that they wish, and thus they seek themselves in all things. All such are traders; that is, to speak in vulgar language, they wish to give one thing in exchange for another, and would fain thus drive a traffic with our Lord; and they are deceived in their bargain, for all that they possess or are able to perform they have received from God, and consequently God does not owe them anything in return, nor is He bound to do anything for them, except, indeed, He would do it of His free bounty. What they are, they are of God; and what they become, they have received of God and not from themselves; therefore God owes them nothing in return for their works and their gifts, unless He do it of His own pleasure, of His grace, and not for the sake of their works and gifts; for they have nothing of their own to give, they do not even do their good works of their own power; as Christ said: “Without me ye can do nothing!” Those who would thus bargain with our Lord are thick-headed and ignorant men, who have little or no insight into the truth, wherefore God scourges them and drives them out of the temple. Light and darkness cannot dwell together. God is the Truth and Light in Himself; when, therefore, He cometh into His temple, He drives out of it ignorance and darkness, and reveals Himself with light and truth. Then when the truth is perceived, the buyers and sellers are gone; and the truth will have nothing to do with trafficking. God does not seek His own; all His works are done voluntarily and in singleness of purpose; He does them for very love. So likewise is it with the man who is united with God: his works also are done voluntarily and in singleness of mind, and he does them for love without any wherefore—that is, without any regard to himself—to the glory of God only, and seeketh not his own in them; and God works them through him.

I say further, so long as a man in any of his works is seeking or desiring anything that God has to give, or will give hereafter, he is like these traffickers. But if thou wouldst be quite pure from such a mercenary spirit, thou must do thy utmost in good works simply for the praise of God, and shalt stand apart from it all, as if thou hadst not done it; thou shalt ask nothing in return. If thou doest thy works in this spirit, then are they godly and spiritual. And then the buyers and sellers are altogether driven out of the temple, and God alone dwelleth there, when thou purposeth nothing but what God purposeth.

Now mark, there is yet a higher state than that of the traders, which is indicated to us in this Gospel; namely, that of the men who perform their works with a sincerely good intent, and yet are hindered from coming to the closest union with God, inasmuch as they still carry on some traffic and converse with the creatures, and are thus like the money-changers and those who sold doves,

whose tables and seats the Lord overthrew. For although this their occupation was at first begun by certain of them with a good intent, it was an unseemly practice, and was afterwards turned to the greatest abuses of covetousness, rather than to the service of God. So likewise it is with the persons of whom I am speaking; for although their intent is good, and they do their good works sincerely for God's sake, and do not seek their own therein, yet nevertheless they do them with self-appropriation, with time and number, with images and reference to before and after. By these things they are hindered from coming to the best and highest truth; for they ought to keep themselves free and empty of all that is accidental, from pleasure and pain, even as our Lord is free and alone, and receiveth Himself ever afresh, without interval or time, from His Heavenly Father, and in the same Now is ever without ceasing begotten afresh in perfectness, with thankful praise, into the Majesty of the Father, in co-equal dignity. In like manner must the man who desireth to perceive the highest truth, and to live therein without before or after, and without let or hindrance from any of the outward acts or mental images with which he has ever been conversant, stand free and alone in this eternal Now. He shall simply receive the gift of God, and bring it forth again and render it up to God without let or hindrance, in His light, and with thankful praise through our Lord Jesus Christ. Thus he will have done with all the doves and money-changing; that is, with all the hindrance and qualification which arises from those works which are good in themselves, but in which a man seeks something of his own. For which cause also the Lord would not suffer any to carry vessels to and fro in the temple, as St. Mark tells us; all which has to do with the same principle—that a spiritual man must keep himself free and aloof from all objects that would hinder his advance towards perfectness.

Now when the temple is thus cleared of all that blocks it up, *i.e.* of all selfishness and ignorance, it shines forth in such beauty, and is so bright and resplendent above all else that God has created, that nothing can outshine it save the uncreated God alone. Nothing even that belongs to angelic existence can be compared to this temple. The highest angels do indeed in many respects resemble the temple of a noble soul, yet not wholly, for there is some measure, a certain bound, set to their similarity to it in knowledge and love, beyond which they cannot pass; but the soul is ever able to advance so long as it is in time. For if the soul of a man yet living in this present state were on a level with the highest angel, the man could yet, by virtue of his free self-determination, outstrip the angel at every successive moment, without count, that is to say without mode, and above the mode of the angels, and all created reason. God is alone free and uncreated; and therefore He alone is equal to the soul as touching freedom, and unequal as touching uncreatedness, for the soul is created. But when the soul enters into the unmixed light, she, with her created I, sinks so deeply into her own nothingness, that she cannot by her own power regain the sense of her separate existence as a creature. But God upholds her with His uncreated power, and keeps the soul still herself. The soul has dared to become naught; and yet she cannot attain thereunto of her own power, so entirely is she lost until God upholds her with His power. It must needs be so, seeing that, as I said before, Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out those who bought and sold therein, and began to speak in the temple.

Now, dear children, know of a truth, if any one else would fain speak in the temple, that is in the soul, except Jesus alone, He holds His peace, as if He were not there; and in truth He is not at

305

home in the soul, for she has strange guests with whom she desireth to hold converse. But if Jesus is to speak in the soul, she must be alone, and must be silent herself that she may hear the voice of Jesus; and then He enters in and begins to speak. What does He speak? He speaks that He is. And what is He then? He is the Word of the Father; in which Word the Father utters Himself, and all the divine nature, and all that God is, so that, in that He perceiveth it, He also is it, and He is perfect in His perception and in His power. Hence He is perfect through this His speaking, for when He uttereth this Word, He uttereth Himself and all things in another person, and giveth that person the same nature which He Himself has, and speaks all rational spirits into being in that Word, in the likeness of the same Word, according to the type or pattern which abideth continually in Him. And thus the Word shines forth in man, according as each word exists in God. Yet is he not in all respects like this same essential Word; but rather the possibility is granted to him of receiving a certain likeness by the grace of this Word, and of receiving the Word as it is in itself. This all has the Father Himself spoken through the Word, and all that is in the Word.

Here the question might be asked, If the Father hath spoken this, in what sense doth Jesus speak in the soul? Here remember, dear children, what I have said of the manner of His speaking, namely, that He revealeth Himself and all that the Father hath uttered in Him, according to the measure of the soul's ability to receive it.

306

In the first place He reveals the Father's sovereignty to the soul, by declaring His changeless, infinite Power. And when through the Son the soul hath experience of this power, it becomes strong and mighty in whatever happens, so that it grows powerful and steadfast in all virtues and in perfect singleness of mind, so that neither weal nor woe, nor any or all of the things that God has created in time, have power to stir him, for that he has firm and abiding footing in the strength of God, against which all things are weak and unavailing.

In the second place, the Lord reveals Himself in the soul with an infinite Wisdom, which He Himself is. In this Wisdom the Father perceiveth Himself, with all His Fatherly sovereignty. And that same Word which is also Wisdom, and all that it comprehends, is all the same, sole Unity. When this Wisdom is united with the soul, all doubt and error and darkness utterly vanish away, and she is transported into a pure light, which is God Himself. As the prophet says: "Lord in Thy light shall we see light." That is to say: "Lord in Thy light shall we perceive the light in the soul." Then is God perceived in the soul by means of God. Then does she, by means of this Wisdom, perceive herself and all things, and perceiveth this Wisdom itself, and through it she perceiveth the Father's majesty, and His essential self-existence in simple oneness, without distinction.

307

In the third place, Christ reveals Himself also with an infinite Love, sweetness and richness flowing forth from the power of the Holy Ghost, overflowing and streaming in a very flood of richness and sweetness into the heart that is waiting to receive it; and with this sweetness He not only reveals Himself to the soul, but unites Himself with her. Through this sweetness, the soul in its essence by grace flows out with power above all creatures back into her first origin and fount. Then is the outward man obedient unto the inward man, even unto death, and liveth in constant peace in the service of God continually. That the Lord may thus come into our souls also, overthrowing and casting out all hindrances, bodily or spiritual, that we may become one here on earth, and hereafter in the kingdom of heaven, may He help us evermore. Amen.

XIV



Sermon for Thursday in Easter Week

How we ought to love God, and how Christ is a Master of the Eternal Good, wherefore we ought to love Him above all things; a Master of the Highest Truth, wherefore we ought to contemplate Him; and a Master of the Highest Perfectness, wherefore we ought to follow after Him without let or hindrance.

John xx. 16.—“She turned herself and said unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.”

WHEN our Lord had risen from the dead, Mary Magdalene desired with her whole heart to behold our blessed Lord; and he revealed Himself to her in the form of a gardener, and so she did not know Him. Then our Lord said unto her “Mary;” and with that word she knew Him, and said, Rabboni! that is to say, Master.

Now mark, so long as Mary stood by the grave looking at the angels, Christ stood behind her, concealing Himself from her. For the Lord our God hideth Himself from those who are full of care about the creatures, and grieving over the loss of earthly things and creatures; but as soon as man turns from the creatures to find God, God reveals Himself unto the soul. Thus, when Mary turned to the grave of Christ, it was said unto her, “Mary,” which name signifies a star of the sea, a queen of the world, and one who is illuminated by the Holy Spirit. He who desireth to see God, must be as a star in the firmament, severed from and spurning all the things of time, and illuminated to see all heavenly things.

When she heard the word that Christ spoke, “Mary,” she knew our Lord, and said, Rabboni, which is to say, Master; for she and His other disciples and followers commonly address Him with this title, as He says: “Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am.” For He is truly a Master of the Highest Good, and therefore should we love Him above all things. He is a Master of Truth, and therefore should we contemplate Him. He is a Master of the Highest Perfectness, and therefore should we follow Him without any looking backwards behind us.

He is (as I said first) a Master of the Highest Good, and therefore should we love Him above all things. Now, thou mightest say, “God is infinite, a supreme Good without limits, and the soul and all creatures are finite and bounded; how, then, can the soul love and know God?” Hearken: God is infinite and without end, but the soul’s desire is an abyss which cannot be filled except by a Good which is infinite; and the more ardently the soul longeth after God, the more she wills to long after Him; for God is a Good without drawback, and a well of living water without bottom, and the soul is made in the image of God, and therefore it is created to know and love God. So, because Christ is a Master of the Highest Good, the soul ought to love Him above all things; for He is love, and from Him doth love flow into us, as out of a well of life. The well of life is love; and he who dwelleth not in love is dead, as St. John says in his Epistle. Now, forasmuch as Christ is a well-spring and Master of the Highest Good, therefore shall the soul love Him without resistance. For it is her property that she must love that which is God; and therefore must she love that which is the Highest Good, without measure, without rival, and without ceasing to utter forth His praise.




Without measure shall the soul love God; concerning which St. Bernard says: “The cause wherefore the soul shall love God, is God; but the measure of this love is without measure, for God is an immeasurable Good, because His benefits are without number or end: wherefore the soul shall love God without measure.” Hence St. Paul says: “I pray God that your love may increase and abound yet more and more.” And St. Bernard says: “In our love to God we have no rule nor direction to observe, but that we love Him as He hath loved us. He hath loved us unto the end that we might love Him world without end. Therefore, our inward desire ought ever to increase so long as we are here on earth; but although the inward work of our love to God ought ever to increase, yet the outward works of love ought to be meted out with due wisdom, that we so exercise ourselves as not to injure nature, but to subdue it unto the spirit.”

In the second place, the soul shall love God without a fellow; that is to say, in that *degree* of love with which the soul loveth God, shall no creature stand; and all whom the soul loves, she shall love in God and to God. Furthermore, she shall love the creatures for God’s sake, to God and in God. She loves them for God’s sake, when she loves them for that cause which is God; she loves them to God, when she loveth them for that goodness which is God; she loves them in God, when she seeks no other delight nor end in them but God; and thus she loveth the creatures in God, and God in the creatures. Hence Christ tells us: “Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” which words are thus expounded by St. Augustine: “Our Lord saith that we are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, to the intent that man should have no single faculty within his soul that is empty or barren of the love of God; that is, from which the love of God is absent; and that all which it comes into our heart to love, we may love for God’s sake, and enjoy in godly love; for God loveth the soul, and therefore shall the soul love Him without a fellow.”


In the third place, the soul shall love God without silence; for he who is in love cannot be silent, but must proclaim and utter forth his love. St. Gregory speaks of two sorts of crying aloud: the one is that of the mouth, the other that of the works. He says of the voice of the deeds, that it is louder than that of the mouth. Of the latter, David says; “I have cried unto God with my voice, and He hath heard my prayer.” Chrysostom says: “It is the habit and custom of loving souls that they cannot hide their love, nor forbear to speak of it, but they tell it to their familiar friends, and describe the inward flames of love; and the faults which they have committed against God they tell to those whom they love, and cannot keep silence about them, but often speak of them, that they may obtain relief and refreshment thereby.” The second cry is that of the actions,—the way in which a man proves his inward love by his outward works. St. Gregory says the witness of love is the proof given by the works; for where love is, it works great things; but if it work not, it is a sure sign that it is not there. Thus Mary Magdalene had good reason to exclaim “Master!” for Christ is a Master of all Good. Therefore we ought to love Him above all things. And rightly is He called a Master of Love, for three causes; for He rewards nothing but love, He rewards only out of love, and He rewards with love.

First, I say that He rewards nothing but love. By three things may a man win reward: by outward acts, by inward contemplation, and by inward aspiration and love. The outward act has no merit unless it be wrought in love; for the outward act perishes and is over, and cannot merit that which is eternal. For Paul says: “Charity never ceases;” wherefore a man can never win eternal life by any works except they be done in love; and hence he who truly loveth God separates himself from all that is not God; for he who loves the uncreated good, despises the created.

In the second place, I said that God only rewards out of love. For from the love wherewith He loveth man, He giveth Himself, He giveth His very self as a reward, He giveth Himself wholly, and not in part; for God hath loved man with an eternal love, and He gives a man nothing less than Himself. He said to Abraham: “Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.”

 313 In the third place, He rewards a man with love. For this reward consists in being able to behold God in His clearness without a veil, and to enjoy the fruition of His love, and keep it for all eternity. Wherefore it was not without reason that Mary exclaimed “Master!” And thou too, O man, cry unto Him devoutly from the bottom of thy heart; “O Master of the Highest Good, and my God, by the love which Thou art, draw me to Thyself, I long after Thy favour, and that I may love Thee above all things.”

Now when I began I mentioned two other points: first, how that Christ is a Master of the Highest Truth, and therefore we ought to contemplate Him. Here take note that thou canst contemplate God in His creatures, which He has made out of nothing, whereby thou art able to discover His omnipotence. But when thou seest and considerest how admirably the creatures are fashioned and put together, and in what wonderful order they are arranged, thou art able to perceive and trace the Wisdom of God, which is ascribed to the Son. And when further thou comest to perceive the gentleness of the creatures, and how all creatures have something loving in them, then thou perceivest the loving-kindness of the Holy Spirit. Thus St. Paul tells the Romans that men are able to behold the invisible goodness of God through the things that they can see; that is to say, the creatures which He has made. We are also able to perceive God by the light of grace, as the Prophet says: “Lord, in Thy light shall we see the light;” that is, God Himself; for “God is light, and in Him is no darkness anywhere.” Moreover we shall at the last behold God in the light of His glory, and there shall we see Him without a veil, bright as He is; for He is a Master of Truth, who giveth us to know all truth.

 314 In the third place, Christ is a Master of Perfection; wherefore a man shall leave all things to follow Him, for in God he shall find all things united in one perfectness which are scattered abroad among the creatures. Therefore, O man, if thou wilt be perfect, be a follower of Christ. He says: “Whoso will not forsake father and mother, and sisters and brothers, and all that he hath, cannot be my disciple.” For father and mother, sisters and brothers, and all creatures, are a man’s enemies if they keep him back from God and hinder him from treading the straight path to eternal blessedness. Therefore forsake the creatures, and follow after the Master of Perfection, even Jesus Christ, blessed for ever. May He grant us by His grace to do so! Amen.

XV

Sermon for the First Sunday after Easter


(From the Gospel for the day)


How we are to ascend by three stages to true peace and purity of heart.

John xx. 19.—“Peace be to you.”

PEACE be with you,” said our beloved Lord to His disciples after His resurrection. All men by nature desire rest and peace, and are ever striving after it in all their manifold actions, efforts, and labours; and yet to all eternity they will never attain to true peace, unless they seek it where alone it is to be found,—in God. What, then, are the means and ways to find true peace, and the purest, highest, and most perfect truth? Now mark, I will speak unto you in a parable. As our blessed Lord drew His disciple St. John to Himself in a three-fold manner, even so does He now draw all who ever arrive at the deepest truth.

The first way in which our Lord drew St. John to Himself was when He called him out of the world and made him an Apostle. The second was when He suffered him to rest on His bosom; and the third and most perfect was on the holy day of Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost was given unto him, and a door was opened unto him through which he was taken up into heaven.

 316 Thus, like St. John, is each man first called out of the world, when all his lower powers come to be governed by his highest reason, so that he learns to know himself and to exercise his free self-guiding power; so that he sets a watch over his words, saying nothing to anyone which he would not wish to be said to himself;—over his impulses, marking whether they proceed from God and tend towards Him;—over his thoughts, that he do not voluntarily indulge in any evil or vain imaginations, or that, if such suggest themselves, they should be made only an incentive and stepping-stone to better things;—over his works, that in his undertakings he may have a single eye to the glory of God and the welfare of mankind. On this wise does the Lord call thee out of the world, and make thee an apostle of Christ to thy fellow-man, and so thou learnest to convert the outward into the inward man, which is the first step in the Christian course.

 317 Secondly; wilt thou with St. John rest on the loving heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, thou must be transformed into the beauteous image of our Lord by a constant, earnest contemplation thereof, considering His holy meekness and humility, the deep, fiery love that He bore to His friends and His foes, and His mighty, obedient resignation which He manifested in all the paths wherein His Father called Him to tread. Next call to mind the boundless charity which He showed to all men, and also His blessed poverty. Heaven and earth were His, and He called them not His own. In all His words and deeds, He looked only to the glory of His Father and the salvation of mankind. And now ye must gaze much more closely and deeply into the glorious image of our Lord Jesus Christ than I can show you with my outward teaching, and maintain a continual, earnest effort and aspiration after it. Then look attentively at thyself, how unlike thou art to this image, and behold thy own littleness. Here will thy Lord let thee rest on Him. There is no better and more profitable way to this end while in our present state, than to receive worthily the sacrament of the body of Christ, and to follow the counsel of one on whom the light of grace has shone more brightly than it has on thee. In the glorious likeness of Christ thou wilt be made rich, and find all the solace and sweetness in the world.

But there are many who, having advanced thus far, think in their haste that they have conquered for their own the ground on which they stand, while yet they are far from the goal. Although St. John had lain on Christ’s bosom, yet he let his cloak fall and fled when the Jews laid hands on Christ. Therefore, however holy may be thy walk in these two paths, look to it that, if thou art assailed, thou do not let thy mantle fall through thy hasty thought for thyself. It is good and holy

that thou shouldst exercise thyself in these two ways, and let no creature turn thee aside therefrom, until God Himself draws thee up into a closer union with Himself. If He thus draw thee up, then let go all forms and images, and suffer Him to work as with His instrument. It is more well-pleasing to Him, and more profitable to thee, that thou shouldst leave Him to do as He will in thee for a moment, than that thou shouldst exercise thyself in lower things for a hundred years. Now some may ask: Art thou not yet got beyond all this? I answer: No; beyond the image of our Lord Jesus Christ may no man come. Thou shouldst ask: Art thou not got beyond the ways and works that thou hast called thine own? Look to it diligently and be quick to perceive the commands of God, and let each good work be followed by another.

318

In the third place, when the Holy Spirit was given to St. John, then was the door of heaven opened unto him. This happens to some with a convulsion of the mind, to others calmly and gradually. In it are fulfilled those words of St. Paul: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him; but God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit." Let no man boast that he is continually drawing nearer to the highest perfection possible while here on earth, unless the outward man have been converted into the inward man; then, indeed, it is possible for him to be received up on high, and to behold the wonders and riches of God. Believe me, children, one who would know much about these high matters, would often have to keep his bed, for his bodily frame could not support it. Further, know ye that before that can come to pass, of which we have here been speaking, nature must endure many a death, outward and inward. But to such death, eternal life answers. Children, this is not the work of a day or a year. Be not discouraged; it takes time, and requires simplicity, purity, and self-surrender, and these virtues are the shortest road to it. Through such exercises as we have described, a man obtains true purity of mind and body, such as St. John possessed in a high and peculiar manner; what our Lord meant when he said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." A pure heart is more precious in the sight of God than aught else on earth. A pure heart is a fair, fitly-adorned chamber, the dwelling of the Holy Ghost, a golden temple of the Godhead; a sanctuary of the only-begotten Son, in which He worships the Heavenly Father; an altar of the grand, divine sacrifice, on which the Son is daily offered to the Heavenly Father. A pure heart is the throne of the Supreme Judge; the seat and secret chamber of the Holy Trinity; a lamp bearing the Eternal Light; a secret council-chamber of the Divine Persons; a treasury of divine riches; a storehouse of divine sweetness; a panoply of eternal wisdom; a cell of divine solitude; the reward of all the life and sufferings of Christ. A pure heart is a tabernacle of the Holy Father; a bride of Christ; a friend of the Holy Ghost; a delight to the eyes of all saints; a sister of the angels; a cause of joy to the heavenly hosts; a brother of all good men; a terror to the Devil; a victory and conquest over all temptation; a weapon against all assaults; a reservoir of divine benefits; a treasury of all virtue; an example to all men; a restoration of all that has ever been lost. Now, what is a pure heart? It is, as we have said before, a heart which finds its whole and only satisfaction in God, which relishes and desires nothing but God, whose thoughts and intents are ever occupied with God, to which all that is not of God is strange and jarring, which keeps itself as far as possible apart from all unworthy images, joys, and griefs, and all outward cares and anxieties, and makes all these work together for good; for to the pure all things are pure, and to the gentle is nothing bitter. Amen!

319

XVI

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter

(From the Gospel for the day)

John xvi. 7-11—"It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."⁴⁷

CHILDREN, it behoves us to give diligent heed to the meaning of this passage, and see how it is that the Holy Ghost could not be given to the dear disciples and friends of Jesus, unless He first went away from them.

What is meant by Christ's going away from us? Nothing else than our destitution, hopelessness, and helplessness, when we are heavy and slow in all good things, and cold and dark; for then Christ is gone from us. If persons who are in this state render it useful and fruitful for themselves, this would be a truly noble thing for them thus to master and bend it; and to such an one all variety will be fused into unity, and he will have joy in sorrow, and be patient under reproach, in constant peace amid war and trouble, and all bitterness will to him become true sweetness.

Now our Lord said: "When the Holy Ghost cometh, He will reprove the world." What is the world which He will reprove, and how will He reprove it? He will enable man to see clearly whether the world is lying concealed within him, hidden in the principle of his being: this he will detect and rebuke. Now what is the world in us? It is the ways, the workings, the imaginations of the world, the world's comfort, joy, love, and grief, in love, in fear, in sorrow, in care; for St. Bernard says: "With all wherein thou rejoicest and sorrowest, thou shalt also be judged." Children, this will the Holy Ghost, when He comes to us, clearly reveal, and rebuke us on account thereof, so that we shall never have rest or quiet, so long as we know and find this evil and noxious possession within us. And when one finds this evil inclination in a man, that he is possessed by any creature, be it living or dead, and he remains unrebuked, all this is the world. And when a man keeps this in himself unrebuked, this is a true and manifest sign that the Holy Ghost has not entered into the principle of his life; for Christ has said: When He comes, He will rebuke all these things.

"He will reprove the world of sin." What is sin? Ye know well, dear children, that God has made all things, and appointed each thing for its right end. Thus He made fire that it should rise up, and stones that they should fall down. Thus nature has given to the eye to see, to the ears to hear, to the hands to work, and to the feet to walk; and thus each member is obedient to the natural will, without any opposition, whether the matter be easy or hard, sweet or sour, if so be that the will thoroughly wills it; thus, too, the members are thoroughly obedient, even when it is an affair of life and death. This appears often in many lovers of this world, how they merrily and joyfully cast away all ease, and riches, and honour, for the sake of what they love, to the end that their carnal

⁴⁷ The greater part of this and the following sermon having been translated by Archdeacon Hare, in his Notes to "The Mission of the Comforter," I obtained his kind permission to extract from that work the passages he had given there.—TR.

lust may thus be satisfied. Now sinners say, Who is thus obedient to God, and thus exact in all His commandments? Which of you dares thus to resign for God's sake his body and goods, and all that he likes or fears,—nay, every thing save his conscience, of which God is the rightful Ruler? Now this is the sin which the Holy Ghost reprove, that man so greatly and so often resists His divine will and admonitions. This sin and many hidden offences the Holy Ghost rebukes when He comes to a man. This rebuke works a quick, sharp, hard judgment in a man, and a hellish pain, and an intolerable woe, whereof worldly men know little. When this judgment is indeed borne, the case is safe. For a thousand offences which a man truly acknowledges and confesses himself to be guilty of, are not so perilous and so mischievous to a man as a single offence which thou wilt not recognise nor allow thyself to be convinced of. Children, those who are so well pleased with themselves and others, nor have ever felt any anxiety about their sin, except to prove that they are in the right, are very wrong; they are in dangerous sin, and will never come to any good.

Next: the Holy Ghost will reprove the world of righteousness. Alas, merciful God, what a poor miserable thing our righteousness is in the eyes of God! For St. Augustine says: Woe and woe to all righteousness, unless Almighty God judge, for He has said by the prophet Isaiah: "All your righteousnesses are as filthy rags;" and our Lord said: "When ye have done all that ye can, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do." He who thinketh somewhat of himself when he is nought, deceiveth himself, as St. John saith. Many a man is so heartily well pleased with his own ways, that he will neither open his heart to God nor to man, and keeps his eyes carefully shut, that he may not let God into his soul. If our Lord comes to him with his admonitions, directly or indirectly, he follows his own course, and heeds them not a straw. Such men are utterly untoward, both to God Almighty and to all His creatures: but wherever the Holy Ghost comes, he reprove these men's ways; for wherever he is, man perceives his faults plainly, and learns self-renunciation, humbleness, and all things that belong to eternal life.

Thirdly: the Holy Ghost reprove man for judgment. What is this judgment? It means that every man passes judgment on his neighbour, and that they have no eyes for their own faults and sin, although Christ has said; "With what measure thou metest, with the same it shall be measured to thee again:" "Judge not that ye be not judged." A holy man has said: "By as many as thou hast unjustly condemned, shalt thou be judged." The people all want to be priests and provincials, that they may have a right to sit in judgment, and know not what they are themselves. And know that therewith ye build great thick walls between God and yourselves. Children, beware of judging any but yourselves, as ye love God and your souls and everlasting happiness. A man should judge nothing that is not a plain mortal sin. I would rather bite my tongue that it bleed, than judge any man. One should leave this to the eternal judgment of God; for from man's judgment upon his neighbours there grows a complacency in one's self, an evil arrogance, and a contempt for one's neighbour. This fruit is therefore truly a seed of the Devil, whereby many a heart is defiled, and therein the Holy Ghost dwelleth not. But where the Holy Ghost is truly with His presence, He judges by that same man where it is necessary; and then that man waits for the hour and occasion when it is fitting to punish. This must not be done so that when we would heal one wound, we inflict two in doing it; not with violence, or harsh words, nor so as to crush a man nor lower him in any other man's heart; but we should do it as from love and gentleness, and so as to preserve our own humility and poverty of spirit which we then bear within us wherever we go, and whatever we do, whether amid a congregation or alone. And herewith we profit no one else but ourselves in a true simplicity; and let all such things alone as do not concern us and are not committed to us.

Children, ye shall not seek after great science. Simply enter into your own inward principle, and learn to know what you yourselves are, spiritually and naturally, and do not dive into the secret things of God, asking questions about the efflux and reflux of the Aught into the Naught, or the essence of the soul's spark, for Christ has said: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power." Therefore, let us maintain a true, entire, simple faith in one God in a Trinity of Persons, and yet not as manifold, but as one and simple. For Arius and Sabellius, who had a wonderful understanding of the Trinity, and the wise Solomon and Origen, who have marvellously instructed the holy Church, what has become of them? We know not. Wherefore, look to yourselves, and know that no one is answerable for you but yourselves. Therefore, give heed to God and His will, and to the calling wherewith He has called you, that ye may follow it in integrity and singleness of heart. And if ye know not what God's will is, then follow those who have been more enlightened by the Holy Spirit than yourselves; and if you have not these either, then go alone to God: without doubt He will give you purely and simply that which you need, if you continue instant in prayer for it. If you are not satisfied with this, then, in all doubtful cases, consider the matter with sincerity and earnestness, and choose that course which you see to be most bitter to nature, and to which you feel least inclined. Do this in the first place, for in each death of nature, God becomes most truly living in you, and will grow in you of a certainty.

Now, children, since the Holy Ghost could not be given unto the dear disciples unless Christ went away from them, we should in reason look to see with what we are holding converse. Wherefore forsake all things for God, and then God will be truly given unto you in all things. If you do this in earnest, and with your eyes constantly fixed upon the truth, you shall receive a wonderful reward of God, even in this present time. And "when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all Truth." . . . "And He will show you things to come." Dear children, the Holy Ghost will not teach us all things in the sense that we shall be given to know whether there will be a good harvest or vintage, whether bread will be dear or cheap, whether the present war will come to an end soon. No, dear children; but He will teach us all things which we can need for a perfect life, and for a knowledge of the hidden truth of God, of the bondage of nature, of the deceitfulness of the world, and of the cunning of evil spirits. Children, walk in the ways of God diligently, earnestly, and circumspectly; and give heed to the calling in which God by His mercy hath called you, and follow it faithfully. Do not, as some do, who, when God will have them to mind the affairs of their soul, attend to outward things; and when God summons them to outward duties, want to turn their thoughts inwards. This is a hard, poor, perverse course.

Thus when the Holy Ghost comes to us, He teaches us all truth; that is, He shows us a true picture of our failings, and confounds us in ourselves, and teaches us how we shall live singly and purely for the truth, and teaches us to sink humbly into a deep humility, and to cast ourselves utterly down beneath God and beneath every creature. This is a true art in which all art and wisdom is concluded, and which we indispensably need for our true perfection and felicity. This is a true, hearty humility, without any pretence, and not in word or outward show, but of a truth wrought into the substance of our souls, May God help us at all times to be thus prepared for the Holy Ghost to come and enter in to us! Amen.

325

326

327

XVII



Second Sermon for Fourth Sunday after Easter

Of three hindrances which resist the coming of the Holy Ghost in three classes of men.

John xvi. 7.—“It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.”

OBSERVE, dear children, how high and in what way man must be carried up to reach the state of his highest blessedness; for this can only be through a real abandonment of those things which are especially pleasant and lovely to him and his nature. To all these he must wholly die, and must let them go, however good, and holy, and spiritual, and precious he may deem them. For if it was necessary that Christ’s disciples should be deprived of His lovely, holy, gracious humanity, to be fitted for receiving the Holy Ghost, no man, it is certain, can be a recipient of Divine grace whose heart is possessed by any creature.

Now we find three sorts of hindrances in three different classes of men. The first are sinful persons, or open sinners, who are hindered by the creature, in that they make use thereof against God, according to their own will. These people go astray in God’s way. David says, “Cursed are they who err in God’s way,” that is, in the creature. There are also sundry good folks, who spend too much care upon the necessities of this life, or look too much for pleasure to outward things. Against these Christ says, “He who loves his life shall lose it;” that is, carnal love; he who holds this too dear loses his life; “and he who hates his life shall receive everlasting life;” that is, they who resist their disorderly lusts and desires, and do not follow them.

The second hindrance is when good people are kept back in true spirituality through the misuse of the seven sacraments. He who dwells with pleasure on the sign of a holy sacrament, does not get to the inward truth; for the sacraments all lead to the pure truth. Marriage is a sign of the union of the Divine and human natures, and also of the union of the soul with God: but he who would stop at the sign alone is hindered by his outward senses from reaching the eternal truth; for this is not a true marriage. There are also some who make too much of repentance and confession, and cleave to the sign, and do not strive to reach the pure truth. Against these Christ says, “He who is washed needeth not save to wash his feet;” that is, he who has once been washed with a hearty repentance and sincere confession needs nothing more than that he confess his daily sins, and not his old sins, which he has already repented of and confessed; but he must wash his feet—that is, his desires and conscience; these he must purify from his daily sins. Moreover many good men, by spending too much anxiety on outward gestures towards the sacred Body of our Lord, hinder themselves in divers ways, so that they cannot receive Him spiritually, and enter inwardly into the truth; for this is a desire after a real union, and not in appearance merely. Hence they do not receive the sacrament worthily; for all sacraments are the sign of spiritual truth.

Here it is to be remembered that we ought to worship God in all places and at all times. He who will worship the Father must concentrate his whole mind in aspiration and faith. These are the highest powers of the soul; for they are above time, and know nothing of time nor of the body. So St. Paul tells us, “that we ought to rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give

thanks.” Now, those pray without ceasing who do all their works alike for the love of God, and not for any selfish enjoyment, and humbly bow down before God, and let Him work alone. When the highest powers of the soul are thus gathered together in prayer, the soul becomes inspired, and if henceforward the spirit cleave unto God with an entire union of the will, it is “made a partaker of the Divine nature,” and then, for the first time, does the man offer up true worship, for he has attained the end for which he was created.

But there are some, ay, many people, who do not rightly worship the Father in the truth. For so soon as a man prays to God for any creature, he prays for his own harm; for since a creature is a creature, it bears its own bitterness and disquiet, pain and evil, about it: therefore such people meet their deserts when they have trouble and bitterness, for they have prayed for it. He who seeks God, if he seeks anything beside God, will not find Him; but he who seeks God alone in the truth, will find Him, and all that God can give, with Him.

Again, many good people hinder themselves in their perfection by this, that they look solely to the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that they give themselves too much to visions: that is to say, that they are too fond of contemplating the images of outward things in their minds, whether it be angels or men, or the humanity of Christ, and believe what they are told when they hear that they are specially favoured, or of other men’s faults or virtues, or hear that God purposes to do something by their means. Herein they are often deceived, for God never does anything through any creature, but only through His own pure goodness. And He even said to His disciples, “It is good for you that I go away;” forasmuch as to them that wish to be His disciples in high perfection, His humanity is a hindrance if they fix upon it, and cleave unto it with especial delight; for they ought to follow God in all His ways; therefore His humanity should lead them onward to His Deity. For Christ said, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Greatly then do they err who suppose that they can do anything good of themselves; for Christ says that of Himself He did nothing.

Christ’s true humanity we are to worship only in its union with His Deity; for the man Christ is truly God, and God is truly Man. Therefore we are not to trouble ourselves about any creature, but solely to seek God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our only Way to the Father. Now even if we come into the Way of truth, which is Christ, yet we are not perfectly blessed, although we behold the Truth of God: for while we are beholding, we are not one with that which we behold; so long as there is anything in our perceptions or understanding, we are not one with the One; for where there is nothing but One, we can see nothing but One: for we cannot see God except in blindness, or know Him except in ignorance. St. Augustine says that no soul can come to God unless it go to God without a creature, and taste Him without a likeness. Therefore, because the soul is a creature, it must cast itself out of itself, and in its hour of contemplation must cast out all saints and angels; for these are all creatures, and hinder the soul in its union with God. For it should be bare of all things, without need of anything, and then it can come to God in His likeness; for nothing unites so much as likeness, and receives its colour so soon; for God will then give Himself to the faculties of the soul, so that the soul grows in the likeness of God and takes His colour. The image lies in the soul’s powers, the likeness in its virtues, the Divine colour in its union; and thus its union becomes so intimate that it does not work its works in the form of a creature, but in its divine form, wherein it is united to God; nay, that its works are taken from it, and God works all its works in His form. And then, while it beholds God, and thus becomes more united with Him, the union may become such, that God altogether pours Himself into it, and draws it so entirely into Himself that

333

it no longer has any distinct perception of virtue or vice, or recognises any marks by which it knows what it is itself. But God regards the soul as a creature. Therefore let the light of grace overpower the light of nature in you; for the higher knowledge the soul attains in the light of grace, the darker does it deem the light of nature. If, then, it would know the real truth, it should observe whether it is drawn away from all things, whether it has lost itself, whether it loves God with His love, whether it be not hindered by any things, and whether God alone lives in it: if so, it has lost itself, as Mary lost Jesus, when He went into the school of His Father's highest doctrine; therefore He heeded not His mother. Thus it happens to the noblest soul that goes into God's school; there it learns to know what God is, in His Deity and in the Trinity, and what He is in His humanity, and to know the all-gracious Will of God. That man is most truly of God who works all his works out of love, and gives up his will to the will of his Heavenly Father.

That we may attain thereunto, being delivered from all hindrances, may God grant us. Amen!

334

XVIII

Sermon for Ascension Day

This third sermon on the Ascension tells us how man ought continually to follow after Christ, as He has walked before us for three and thirty years, passing through manifold and great sufferings, before He returned unto His Father.

Mark xvi. 19.—“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.”

AFTER the Son of God, Jesus Christ, had eaten with His disciples upon the Mount of Olives, and reproved them, that they had been so long time with Him and yet were so slow of heart to believe, He was taken up into heaven before their face.

Ah, children! how do you think it stood then with the hearts of the disciples, who regarded Him with such a strange love? For it was not unreasonable that they should be filled with a restless, sorrowful yearning to follow after Him; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. By His glorious ascension, willeth Jesus Christ to draw after Him the hearts and minds of all His elect Friends, and all their powers, inward and outward, that we may not henceforward have our dwelling with contentment and satisfaction among the things of time; but that all our walk and conversation, pleasure and satisfaction, may be in heaven, and nowhere else, where God dwelleth not. It cannot be otherwise but that the members should follow their Head, Who, as on this day, has ascended into heaven, and has gone before us in all humility to prepare a place for those who shall come after Him; therefore should we say with the Bride, in the Song of Songs: “Draw me, and I will come after Thee,” blessed Lord. And who can hinder us from following evermore after our Head, Jesus Christ? For He Himself has said: “I ascend to my Father and your Father.” His origin, His end, His blessedness and our blessedness, is truly a blessedness in Him, for we, with all that we are, have proceeded forth from the same source, and therefore we are partakers of the

335

same End, and destined to fall into the same Ocean (if we for our parts will only dispose ourselves accordingly).

Now let us meditate how Christ has gone before us into the glory of His heavenly Father. Therefore, if we desire to follow Him, we must mark the way which He has shown us and trodden for three and thirty years, in misery, in poverty, in shame, and in bitterness, even unto death. So likewise, to this day, must we follow in the same path, if we would fain enter with Him into the Kingdom of Heaven. For though all our masters were dead, and all our books burned, yet we should ever find instruction enough in His holy life. For He Himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and by no other way can we truly and undeviatingly advance towards the same consummation, than in that which He hath walked as our Exemplar while He was yet upon earth.

Now, as the loadstone draws the iron after itself, so doth Christ draw all hearts after Himself which have once been touched by Him; and as when the iron is impregnated with the energy of the loadstone that has touched it, it follows the stone uphill although that is contrary to its nature, and cannot rest in its own proper place, but strives to rise above itself on high; so all the souls which have been touched by this loadstone, Christ, can neither be chained down by joy or grief, but are ever rising up to God out of themselves. They forget their own nature, and follow after the touch of God, and follow it the more easily and directly, the more noble is their nature than that of other men, and the more they are touched by God's finger.

Now let each one mark for himself, whether his soul has been touched by God or not. Those who have not been touched by God often begin many excellent undertakings from which we might expect that great things would come to pass; but if we watch them for a time, behold it all comes to nothing; for they soon fall back again, and they plunge once more into all their old customs, and give themselves up to their natural inclinations. They do just as the untrained dogs in the chase, which have no perception of the noble quarry, but run with all speed after the good dogs of nobler breed. And verily, if they kept on running, they would with them bring down the stag. But no; in the space of some short hour or so, they look about them, and lose sight of their companions, or they stand still with their nose in the earth, and let the others get ahead of them, and so they are left behind. But the dogs of noble breed, who have come upon the scent of this noble quarry, eagerly pursue after it, through fire and water, through brake and bush, till they have brought down their game. So do those noble-minded men, who have caught a glimpse of the Highest Good; they never slacken step till they have come up with it. Now the other sort of men remain at the same point, and make no progress in their whole life: but all such as stand still while they are in this state, and make no progress before death, must stand still for ever hereafter; so long as God is eternal.

Children, if our souls have not been touched by God's finger, we have no right to lay the cause of it to the charge of the Eternal God, as men often do when they say, figuratively: "God does not touch me, nor move me, as He does such and such an one." This assertion is false. God touches, impels, and admonishes all men alike, and (so far as it rests with Him) will have all men to be saved; but His touch, His admonitions and His gifts, find a different reception and response in different men. With many when God comes to them with His touch and His gracious gifts, He finds the chambers of their soul occupied and defiled by other guests. So then, He must needs go His way, and cannot come into us, for we are loving and serving some one else. Therefore, His gifts, which He offers without ceasing to every man, remain unaccepted. This is the cause of our eternal loss: the guilt is ours, and not God's. How much useless trouble do we create for ourselves; insomuch that we neither perceive our own condition nor God's presence, and thereby do ourselves an

338
 unspeakable and eternal mischief. Against this, there is no better or surer remedy than an instant, resolute turning away of the thought, and hearty, fervent, continual prayer. Hereby we may obtain this steadfastness, together with a firm, and entire, and loving trust in the unfathomable mercy of God, in which lies all our salvation, and likewise a diligent and faithful watchfulness, to keep our goings ever in accordance with the will of God, that all we do or abstain from, and all our affections, spiritual and natural, may remain at all times agreeable to the will of God.

Children, the place from which Christ ascended up to heaven was the Mount of Olives. This mountain had three sorts of light. The first was from the sunrise, for the hill is high and slopes towards the East; and when the sun no longer shone on the mountain, its rays were reflected from the golden roof of the temple; and, thirdly, on that hill grew the essential material of light, the olive-tree. So likewise the soul in which God shall arise sweetly as without a cloud, must be a lofty hill, raised above these perishable earthly things, and be illuminated by three kinds of light; that is to say, there must be a place whereon the rays of the high and holy Trinity can shine and bring forth God's high and noble work in the soul, according to all His will, and so that the brightness of the Eternal God may flow into that soul.

339
 This mountain lay between Jerusalem and Bethany. Now, know of a truth that whosoever will truly follow after Christ, must mount or climb this hill, toilsome or weary as the task may be; for there is no mountain on the face of the earth, however beautiful and delightful, but what is difficult and toilsome to ascend. Thus, whosoever will follow Christ, must surely cast off Nature and her lusts. Now we find many who would gladly follow Him without pain or toil and as long as the path was easy, and would fain be upon this mountain on the side looking towards Jerusalem, which signifieth peace, that it should minister to their peace, and they should be without contradiction. Such persons experience in themselves comfort, peace, and joy; yet they come to nought. They will not set foot on the other side that looks towards Bethany, which name signifies the pain of obedience or of suffering. Of which place the prophet says in the Psalms: "Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well." Know, dear children, he who will not pitch his tent in this valley, remaineth unfruitful, and nothing will ever come of him. However great his peace, and however fair his seeming, it must have an end. Therefore, a devout heart shall ever have a sorrowful yearning after her Beloved, who has ascended to such distant and lofty heights, whither her eye cannot follow or trace Him. Hence, the more truly and deeply the ground of a man's soul has been touched by God, the more truly does he find this valley of tears within him. And had he no other cause for tears, there were need enough of them by reason of sin and the defilement that lies hidden in our frail nature, by which man is so often and so greatly hindered from a lofty converse with God (which might and ought by God's grace to go on without ceasing within the soul), and from the sweet aspirations by which a man should continually carry up all things to God, but that gross nature hinders him and turns his thoughts aside, and also often rules in secret where God alone ought to have His constant abode. This is the meaning of the other side of the mountain looking towards Bethany.

340
 But he who should experience in himself all that I have said, would then have his face turned towards Jerusalem, the city of peace, and thus would become wise as to all that he should do or leave undone, and able to distinguish between the promptings of God and of nature. Further, this would strengthen him that he might be the better able to bear pain and sorrow, and not grow too weak by reason of his sufferings and misery, when he is forsaken of God, and left without comfort or help in bitter desolation. The wise man says: "My son, when the evil days come, thou shalt not

forget the goodness of God.” Children, these two prospects towards Jerusalem and Bethany must be both at once in the soul of man. For Jerusalem means a city of peace; yet in this same city, Christ was put to death, and had to suffer all manner of torments. Truly, child, so must thou also in perfect peace suffer and die to all that is thine, for it cannot be otherwise; and commit thy cause simply and truly to God, and renounce thyself utterly, for thou too must needs fall into the hands of the wicked Jews, who will and must torment, scourge, and crucify thee, and cast thee out of their borders, as if thou wert a false traitor; and slay thee in the hearts of all men. Dear child, thou must utterly die, if God Himself without a medium is to become thy life and being. Nay, did not Christ Himself say to His disciples: “Whosoever slayeth you will think that he doeth God service?” For all those who despise and judge thee, or torment and slay thee, will be persuaded in their own minds that they are doing God a service on thee, and mean to do so. Ah! dear children, how greatly blessed were such a man, if he nevertheless were a dweller in Jerusalem, and had a perfect peace in himself, in the midst of all this disquiet! Then would the very peace of God be indeed brought forth in man.

341

Children, on this Mount grows the olive-tree, by which is signified true godly devoutness. Ah! children, the essence of devoutness is a cleaving of the whole spirit to God, with a mind ready and prepared at all times to love and to purpose all that is of God, so that the man is inwardly united with God in will and purpose and all things. This is an oil that overflows and rises above all tasting and feeling. Hast thou this olive-tree growing in the ground of thy soul, thou art in truth a devout man. This flame of devotion shall often be refreshed and renewed with the fire of Divine love, and thou shalt unceasingly look at and through the ground of thy soul, that nothing may be concealed there which is not truly and merely God’s; so that nature may not rule and work in the ground of thy soul, where God alone should dwell, and nought else. For, alas! we find many, both among the religious and the worldly, who do not simply purpose God in all things and nothing else, but will intend themselves in things spiritual and natural. We find very few who serve God for His own sake, and do not regard comfort, nor joy, nor divine gifts in time or eternity, but God alone, and no object besides.

And now may God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, grant us to ascend with the eternal Son of God from this miserable state, and from all creatures, that we may with Him possess eternal life! Amen.

342

XIX

Sermon for Whit Sunday

John vi. 44.—“No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.”

THUS said the blessed Jesus: “No man can come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.” The persecuted, disheartened disciples of Jesus, who were held captive in the bonds of ignorance as with iron fetters, and in their own esteem were lying in the deep dungeons of their trespasses, confessing themselves stript of all their own might, cried with fervent prayer to the

Almighty Father (as St. Luke tells us, that while they were waiting for the promise of the Father, they “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication”), praying that their bonds might be loosed, and that they might be delivered from their prison-house. Wherefore their Heavenly Father, to whom they had made known their requests in faith, heard their prayer, and set them free from all bonds, and drew them out of their dungeon by six steps into the glorious liberty of the Holy Spirit, where they were filled with all truth.

343

First of all, He turned His merciful eyes upon them, and made them fit to receive, not only His ordinary influences, whereby He is wont to bring men unto Himself, but He sought to bring them unto Himself in a peculiar manner above other men. For we find three other ways by which God draws men unto Himself. The first is by means of the creatures, in whom He very clearly reveals Himself to men through the created light of their souls. Thus St. Thomas tells us how some heathen, from the evidences of His in-dwelling and presence in all the creatures, have maintained that God is the creator and ruler of the world, and how therefore in every part of the world honours ought to be rendered unto Him. In this drawing by means of the creatures, does God give a hint and offer of Himself to man. The second way is by His voice in the soul, when an eternal truth mysteriously suggests itself. So St. Augustine says, that the heathens have discoursed of certain truths, and these they have reached by virtue of the eternal laws of God which are working in all men when they speak what is true, and not by the mere light of their own nature. As Augustine says: “Whatever is true, by whomsoever it is spoken, proceeds from the Holy Ghost.” Hence, at those moments when all the powers of the soul are collected and turned inwards, it often happens that some eternal truth presents itself with irresistible clearness. This happens not unfrequently in morning sleep, just before waking. This sort of drawing may be called a whisper of love, or a monition. The third way is when the human will is subdued, and stands waiting for the blessed Will of God, truly stript of itself and all things, so that the Almighty Father draws the created will without resistance, and it leans towards Him with peculiar delight. This drawing may be called a union and an embrace. This drawing of the will towards God comes from the Highest Good; from Him who has created heaven and earth, and all the creatures, for man’s sake, and yet humbled Himself even unto death. Now it is because He has a greater delight in man than in all the glories of heaven and earth, and for no other reason, that He seeks him out and gives him monitions through all things. It was that He might thus draw the beloved disciples unto Himself that He cast His eye of mercy on them, and through blessing and affliction turned and disposed their wills until He fitted them to receive and follow His leadings. And it was because the disciples let Him work in them as it pleased Him, that they came at last to experience the full power of His drawing, as we may see in all that happened to them afterwards.

344

Now some may ask, Why did God thus prepare the disciples for His leadings, and not me, or others before me, in whom He has not wrought after such a special manner? For this special leading there were two causes: the first is the sovereign will of God, who chooses some men above others to be partakers of His mysteries and hidden sweetness; just as a King, out of his mere good pleasure, chooses certain knights to compose his privy council and to be about his person. The second cause is that one man listens more attentively to God’s voice, and takes more pains to discover God’s leadings, or endeavours more strenuously to lay aside his faults and whatever comes between him and God; and for this cause also one man is more strongly drawn than another. Now because the

345

dear disciples had this mind in them, that with hearty repentance they besought forgiveness for all their past life of ignorance and sin, and meditated on the sweet teachings and holy life and death of their beloved Master and His boundless love and resignation, and forsook all things, and watched continually and committed themselves wholly to God, ever waiting to discern His will, and gave heed thereto, and did without means so far as they could, and prayed for help when they could not; therefore this special drawing was given unto them, as it is still given to this day to those who follow in their footsteps.

Now it may be asked, But the disciples could not have made this first step of their own power; for the Word of Truth says: “Without Me ye can do nothing.” Therefore, it must have been necessary for God to draw them, and to influence their will, even as regards these three points already treated of. But if this be so, all hangs upon the first cause, as has been said before. To this the doctrine of Scripture answers: It is true that we can do no good thing without God’s ordinary influence, except we make progress by means of a special influence from the Holy Spirit; yet, at the same time, man may do his part, inasmuch as his will has power to withstand the offers of the Holy Spirit, and to cleave to his own way. God does not justify a man without his own free will; even as our eyes cannot see except they are enlightened by the sun or any other light, yet even when we have the light we must open our eyes, or we can never see it. If the eyes were covered with a thick veil or screen, the man must take it away or he could see nothing, however brightly the sun might pour forth his rays. Now, when the Almighty Father came unto the disciples with his Divine light, they opened their eyes, and cast away the screen of outward forms, as much as might be; therefore, God did his part also, and drew them up unto Himself after a special manner. This was the work of the lovely, Divine Son, who is the reprovener of all hearts,—clearing out all stumbling-blocks and rending away all evils of darkness from the inward eye of the soul.

346

Secondly, their Heavenly Father drew them forth from the bonds of slavery to sense, so that they were delivered from this captivity never again to fall into it, but to stand ready in perfect acquiescence to receive His further leadings. Wherefore He gave them, by His beloved Son, four precepts, according to which they should order their lives, as St. Matthew tells us: “Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves.” He who only considers the matter aright, will find that this drawing them up above the things of the body was very necessary, if they were to enter the school of the Eternal Light. For this school has four qualities. First, that it is raised far above all time, not only in the third heaven, physically speaking, but above all the movements of the heavenly bodies, and all else that is subject to time. In the second place, that whatever may be found still remaining of self-appropriation is not suffered to make itself a home and resting-place in the heart. In the third place, in this school is perfect rest; for no storms, nor rain, nor sin, nor aught that can bring change, is there. Fourthly, there reigns perpetual light, clear and unbedimmed; for the sun and moon, which set from time to time, and leave the earth in darkness, do not shine there. God is their eternal sun, shining in His brightness. Now, seeing that all material, created things are base, narrow, subject to change and alloy, it was needful that the disciples should be raised above the trammels of material things, for St. Jerome says: “It is as impossible for God to bestow Himself under the limitations of time, or temporal things, as it is for a stone to possess the wisdom of an angel.”

347

Here a question occurs: Since the Eternal Father draws some men from earth by happiness, and others by pain, by which were the disciples most strongly drawn? I answer: If you consider their life, you will find that they were drawn to God much more by great hardships than by enjoyment;

for even while Christ dwelt with them, they were always suffering contempt, and contradiction to their self-love; and after His holy death, until they were lifted up as on this day, they were indeed well-nigh crushed to the earth with sorrow and disappointment, before the bonds were withdrawn from their eyes; and their Heavenly Father ordered it thus out of special love toward them. To be drawn to God through pain is in itself a surer way than by joy, as St. Gregory says, paraphrasing on the Psalmist: "In time of persecution and tribulation, a thousand shall fall by thy side; but in a time of prosperity and good fortune ten thousand shall fall at thy right hand." So, too, is it more like Christ in all His life and death; and, moreover, it is a greater proof of love; for it is said: "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Wherefore, as the disciples were to receive many peculiar and mysterious favours from God, so this was to be paid for beforehand, and for each gift a death was to be suffered—a dying unto themselves; and if one trial was removed by God, He forthwith sent another equally severe (as He does to this day with His beloved friends), and they understood this, and endured to the end all that their Heavenly Father laid upon them, until they came to have their suffering turned into gladness, and rejoiced that they were found worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.

348

Thirdly, their Heavenly Father drew them up above all the corporeal ideas that they had of the humanity of Christ, making their minds as bare of those and all other images, as they were when first created, in order that henceforward, according to their necessities, they might learn for evermore in the school of the Holy Spirit. For this we are able to perceive four reasons. First; that truth and love, which are the end of all teaching in all schools, have no images nor any existence outside the soul; for no painting can, properly speaking, depict truth and love; for they have no images, external or internal. No image or type which we can devise to express love, is love itself; and it is the same with truth. Next; that in the school of the Spirit, man does not learn through books, which teach through outward images addressed to the senses; but here the truth, which of its nature does not speak by means of images, is spoken into the soul itself. Hence the humble St. Francis commanded the brethren of his Order not to trouble themselves too much with books and letters, and that those who were unlettered should not be anxious about acquiring learning, but remember to covet above all things the Spirit of God, and pray only for a pure heart and His influences. Thirdly; because in the school of the Spirit man learns wisdom through humility, knowledge by forgetting, how to speak by silence, how to live by dying. For St. John was sleeping when he looked into the fount of eternal wisdom, and St. Paul knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body, when he was "caught up to the third heaven and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Therefore it was needful for the disciples to be deprived of all images that they might learn in this school. Fourthly; where the mind is busied with images, time must necessarily enter into the operations of the imagination, and this has no place in the highest school of the Holy Spirit; for there neither time nor images can help us, but contact is all that is needed, the which may happen without time within the space of a moment. St. Gregory says: "The Holy Ghost is an admirable master-workman; He fills a fisherman, and makes a preacher of him; He fills a persecutor, and transforms him into a teacher of the Gentiles; He fills a publican, and makes of him an evangelist. Who is this master-workman? He needs not time for His teachings; by whatever means He chooses, so soon as He has touched the soul, He has taught it, and His mere touch is His teaching." For these four reasons we can perceive how that it was necessary for the disciples to have their souls bereft of all images. But when they were drawn upwards to this end, not all happened to them which

349

350

happened to St. Paul, when he was caught up to the third heaven; for, in the opinion of St. Augustine, it was given to Paul in his trance, and to Moses in Sinai, to behold the Godhead without a veil. This was not the case with the disciples at this time, for they well knew that they were still in the body. Yet their hearts were so lifted up, and their minds so illumined with eternal truth, that they were enabled to receive that same thing, though some more and some less, which St. Paul afterwards received in his vision.

351

In the Fourth place; the Holy Father drew them out of themselves, and delivered them from all natural self-seeking, so that they stood at rest, in true peace with themselves, and in perfect freedom. Then ceased all the mourning, fears, and pain which they had suffered hitherto; for in the lifting up of their souls, there was an act of such entire self-surrender, that they reached the summit of that first stage of the Christian course of which we have spoken above. Henceforward the Eternal Father could fulfil His good pleasure in them without any resistance from their will or natural inclinations. The Eternal Father thus drew them upwards, that He might reign as a master in them, in His omnipotence, greatness, unity, and love, and they should learn of Him and grow up into His likeness. Hence it was needful that they should be drawn out of themselves, because they could not be free, at one, noble and loving, so long as they were held captive to Self. It may be asked: When the disciples were thus drawn out of themselves, and all images were effaced from their souls, was there an extinction of their natural powers, so that they were dead to nature? I answer, No: their nature was not extinguished, for they were much more truly according to nature in their self-surrender than they had ever been before; for what the Lord of nature ordains for a creature, that it is natural for the creature to observe, and if it departs therefrom, it acts contrary to nature. Thus St. Augustine says, “that the rod in the Old Testament was turned into a serpent was not contrary to nature, for it was God’s will.” Wherefore I say too, that inasmuch as the disciples surrendered themselves utterly to the Divine Will, they were in the highest sense in harmony with nature; and their nature did not perish, but was exalted and brought into rightful order. There were no fewer images in their minds than before; but the images did not disturb their inward harmony or move them out of God. And when I said that their minds were to be emptied of images, it is to be understood in this sense, that it was just as when you set a lighted taper at midday in the sunshine, the taper continues to burn, and sheds forth no less light than it did before; but its light is lost in the sunshine, because the greater light prevails over the lesser and absorbs it, so that it no longer seems to shine with a separate lustre, but is diffused and shed forth in the greater light. Thus I said of images and of creatures in the case of the disciples, that henceforth they performed all their works by means of the Divine light, and yet were much more according to nature, and their minds were as full of images as before.

352

Fifthly: the Heavenly Father drew His disciples, thus free and acquiescing, into so close a union that He gave Himself as truly unto them, as they had given themselves unto Him. Then all the desire of the good pleasure of God was fulfilled, and also all the desires of the disciples, so that God’s will with them went no farther than their own wills. Not only did the Holy Ghost give himself unto them, but also God the Father and the Son gave themselves with the Spirit, as one God without distinction of persons. For when love is attributed to the Holy Spirit (as wisdom to the Son), He must be considered as a distinct Person, as touching his attribute of being the bond of mutual love, but not as otherwise distinct. Here some may ask, if the disciples were all drawn out of themselves, and gave themselves up to God, did God draw them all to Himself in the same degree, and also give Himself alike to all? I answer: though all the disciples were set free of self, yet one turned to

God with warmer love and stronger desire than another; as the angels who kept their first estate all remained in perfect obedience to God, and yet one cleaved to Him with greater love than another. Wherefore God gave Himself more to one than to another, though all with like sincerity turned unto Him. Thus was it with the disciples; they turned unto God with unequal affections, and hence God bestowed Himself and His gifts upon them after an unequal manner. The beloved disciple John was the most highly favoured because he looked up to God with the greatest fervour of love. It is true, nevertheless, that in this matter much must be ascribed to the sovereign will of God, who giveth to every man as He will. Further, we must note that it was not only on the Day of Pentecost that God gave Himself personally to His disciples; for, as Richard and other doctors say, so often as that grace is given to man which makes the creature to find favour in the sight of God, so often is the Person of the Holy Ghost given unto him. Thus the disciples had many times before received the Person of the Holy Ghost, but they had never before utterly renounced themselves, and opened their hearts to His gifts. Hence, in this sense, He was first given unto them on the Day of Pentecost.

353

Sixthly, the Eternal Father brought them into the highest school of the Holy Spirit, in the which they straightway understood the mysteries of the Holy Scriptures, and the simple naked truth of God, which cannot be understood by any of the mere earthly masters in the schools. And in this school the greatness of God was first laid open to them; and therewith the gift of childlike fear of God sank down into their hearts, and abode there unto their life's end. Next, all power was given unto them, and they were enabled always to look up to God; and herewith they received the gift of strength. In the third place, they learnt not only to obey the precepts, but also to apprehend the counsel of Christ, and therewith they received the gift of counsel. Fourthly, He taught them to feel the hidden sweetness of God, and gave them therewith the gift of charity. Fifthly, He taught them how to observe and judge the creatures, and to distinguish between the light of God and the suggestions of nature, and therewith bestowed on them the gift of science. Sixthly, He taught them to perceive aright their present condition, and all their previous states, and gave them therewith the gift of understanding. Seventhly, He taught them to be transformed into the likeness of God, by loving union with Him, and gave them therewith the gift of wisdom. These sevenfold gifts does the Holy Ghost convey to the disciples in His school: for as the schools of natural learning teach the seven sciences, and the school of doctrine the seven sacraments, so does the Holy Ghost, in his school, teach those seven things with His sevenfold gifts.

354

Here a question arises: Did the disciples in this highest school of the Spirit obtain an insight into all those sciences which are learnt in the school of nature? I answer, Yes; it was given them to understand all science, whether touching the courses of the heavenly bodies, or what not, in so far as it might conduce to God's glory, or concerned the salvation of man; but those points of science which bear no fruit for the soul, they were not given to know. This in no wise abated their happiness, or their perfection; for, as St. Augustine says: "He is a miserable man who knows all things, and does not know God; and he is happy who knows God, even though he know nothing else. But he who knows God and all else beside is not made more blessed thereby; for he is blessed through God alone." That God may thus draw us up unto Himself, and shine into our inmost parts with the same truth, may He grant us of His grace! Amen!

XX



Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity

(From the Gospel for the day)

This sermon telleth us of four measures that shall be rendered unto man, and of two grades of a godly life, and how we ought to love our neighbour.

Luke vi. 36-42.

WE read in the Gospel for this day that our Lord Jesus Christ said: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again. And He spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch? The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother’s eye.”



I will say a few words on the precept: “Be ye merciful, even as your Father in heaven is merciful.” This noble virtue is, now-a-days, quite a stranger to the hearts of many, insomuch that it is grievous to behold. For each is called to exercise this mercy towards his neighbour, whereinsoever the latter may have need of it; not only as regards the giving of earthly goods, but also the bearing with his neighbour’s faults in all gentleness and mercy. But no! each one falls upon his neighbour and judges him; and as soon as any mishap befalls a man, whether deserved or not, straightway, without waiting to take thought, another comes along and lends a helping hand to make matters worse, to put a bad face on them, and suggests the most evil interpretation that he can imagine; nay, it is thanks to God if he do not add a great piece from the stores of his own wicked imagination. This evil tongue (from which arise untold sorrows and vexations) is at work at once before a man has time to reflect and pass a deliberate judgment. Poor creature! as thou lovest thy eternal salvation, wait, at all events, till thou canst calmly reflect, and know what thou thinkest and sayest. For it is a base and scandalous thing for a man thus thoughtlessly and rashly to pass sentence, which may not even be deserved, upon his neighbours, with his sharp, ruthless words, whereby he, spiritually speaking, slays his neighbour in the hearts of others. And who has commanded thee to pass judgment? Wherefore Christ tells us that whosoever judges another shall be judged by God: “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with the same measure that ye mete, shall it be measured to you again.” Of this matter no more for the present; but let us consider those words of Christ: “For with the same measure that ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”



We read in the Gospel of four sorts of measure that shall be given to a man,—a good measure, one shaken together, one pressed down, and one running over. The doctors of divinity teach us that

a good measure is for a man while in this present time, through the help and grace of God, to be in a state of salvation and holiness, whereby he may enter into eternal life hereafter. The second sort of measure is for the body of a justified man to be glorified with his soul at the day of judgment: this is the measure which is added to. The measure pressed down is, that a man should have his portion with all the saints and angels of God in eternal life. The measure running over is, that a man should have a perfect fruition of God directly without means.

Now, dear children, we will give you yet another exposition of these words, and ask: First, what is the measure whereby we shall be measured? Secondly, who is He that measures? The measure whereby we shall be measured is the faculty of love in the soul—the human Will. This is, properly speaking, the measure whereby all human words and works and life are measured, for this is neither added to nor taken from. By so large a measure as thou hast meted withal shall be meted unto thee again with thine own measure in eternity. And the meter is thine own enlightened reason and conscience. Now let us observe first concerning the good measure, that it is, when a man freely and heartily turns to God in his will, and lives circumspectly according to the commands of God and the Holy Church; and moreover lives orderly in the communion of the holy sacraments, in the true Christian faith, being truly sorry for his past sins, and having a thorough and steadfast purpose to abstain from them henceforward, and to live in penitence and the fear of God, loving God and his neighbour. Alas! there be few now-a-days who thus do, or even desire to live in the fear of God. Children, one who thus lives is said to and does lead a just Christian life, and is a true Christian man; and this is a good measure which, without doubt, hath a part in eternal life. These are rules which all really Christian men must needs observe. There are some whom God has invited and called to this “good measure,” and of whom He demands no more than this. And it may very possibly be appointed and come to pass that such men may walk so unspotted and godly in this way, that after death they may enter into eternal life without any purgatory. Yet nevertheless this is the lowest path by which to approach to our merciful God.

After these, there is a second sort of men whom God has called to tread a much higher path, that they may reach a much higher goal, notwithstanding that some of these should have to pass through purgatory, inasmuch as they have not lived perfectly and faultlessly according to the vocation to which God had called them. These have to suffer such long and sharp anguish in the fire of purification as no human heart can fathom or express. But when they have reached the term of their purification, they rise a thousand degrees higher than the former class of men. With them it stands thus: that having set out in a spiritual, blessed, and holy life, they were overtaken by death ere they had reached their goal. Now when these men are in the beginning of their spiritual life, they practise many excellent outward exercises of piety—such as prayer, weeping, fasting, and the like; but they receive from God a heaped-up measure, in that they have also inward exercises, setting themselves with all diligence to seek God in the inmost ground of their souls, for therein is seated the kingdom of God. Their life is very far different from that of the first class I have described.

Now, children, would a man attain to such a point that the outward things should not hinder the inward workings of the soul, that would be indeed above all a blessed thing; for two things are better than one. But if thou find that the outward work hinders the inward working of the soul, then boldly let it go, and turn thou with all thy might to that which is inward, for God esteemeth it far before that which is outward. Now we priests do on this wise: for during the fast days in Lent we have many services, but at Easter and Whitsuntide we shorten our services and say fewer prayers, for the greatness of the festival. So likewise do thou when thou art bidden to this high festival of

360

inward converse; and fear not to lay aside outward exercises, if else they would be a snare and hindrance to thee, except in so far as thou art bound to perform them for the sake of order. For I tell thee of a truth, that the pure inward work is a divine and blessed life, in which we shall be led into all truth, if we can but keep ourselves pure and separate, and undisturbed by outward anxieties. So in thy hours of meditation, when thou turnest thy thoughts within, set before thy mind whatever thou shalt find most helpful to thee, whether it be the noble and unspotted life of our Lord Jesus Christ, or His manifold sharp and bitter sufferings, or His many painful wounds and His precious blood-shedding, or the eternal and essential Godhead, or the Holy Trinity, or the Eternal Wisdom, or the Divine Power, or the gentle and compassionate kindness of God, or the countless benefits that He has bestowed on thee and all men, and will bestow evermore on thee and all those who deserve them and are found in God's grace at their end.

Therefore, dear children, among all these excellent things, whichever most stirs you up to true devoutness and fervent desire, take, and humbly sink down into the abyss of God, with great thankfulness, and wait for God with this preparation. For, by such exercises, with love, the soul becomes very quick to feel God's touch, far more so than by any outward practices of devotion. For the inward work is always better than the outward; and from it the outward works of virtue draw all their power and efficacy. It is as if thou hadst a noble excellent wine, of such virtue that a drop of it poured into a cask of water would be enough to make all the water taste like wine and turn it into good wine. This would be a great miracle; and so it is with the noble, excellent, inward work of the soul compared to the outward.

361

Now, we find some men whose love is like a very broad vessel; that is they can meditate a great deal upon our Lord, and with great desire and fervour, but they are hardly two inches deep. That is to say, they lack humility and a common godlike love toward all mankind. For, as St. Augustine says, "Salvation does not depend on the length of time that a person has been converted to God, nor on the number of good deeds performed, but solely on the greatness of his love." This we see in the example of the husbandmen who, with great labour, till the wheat-fields and precious vineyards, yet partake not themselves of these best fruits of the earth, but have only rye to eat and water to drink. So it is with many persons, in a spiritual sense, with regard to the outward good works which they do, that other more noble-minded and devout persons reap the fruit and benefit thereof.

362

Next comes the measure that is shaken together; and this signifies an overflowing love which draws all things into itself; that is to say, all good deeds and all sorrows, nay every good which is brought to pass in the world, whether by good or wicked men, does this overflowing love draw into its own vessel. And he who possesses this love has a much larger ownership and delight in the good actions of another, who does those actions but lacks this love, than the doer himself. Therefore, of all the pious acts, the masses, vigils, and psalters that are read and sung, the many great sacrifices that are made for God's sake,—of all these good things is more meted and allotted to such loving men than to those who may have done the good works, but do not stand in this overflowing love. For I tell thee that God will not accept the works of which He is not the beginning and the end; but, as St. Paul tells us, "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Hence this virtue of godly charity is the greatest of all virtues; for by love it draws unto itself all good deeds, customs, and services, in heaven or on earth, which are the fruits of grace: what evil a man has remains his own, but what good he has is the property of love. Even as when we pour corn into a vessel, all the grains do hurry

forward and press together as though they desired to become one, so doth love swallow up all the goodness of angels and saints in heaven, all suffering and pain, and all the goodness that is found in any creature in heaven and on earth, whereof more than can be told is wasted and thrown away, as far as we are concerned, but love doth gather it all up into itself, and will not suffer it to be lost. The godly doctors of Holy Scripture tell us that in heaven the elect do ever bear such great love one to another that, if one soul were to perceive and see that another soul had a clearer vision and greater fruition of the Deity than herself, she would rejoice with her sister as though she herself had won and enjoyed this blessedness. Therefore, the more while here on earth we approach and are made like unto this overflowing love, the more shall we enjoy of its blessedness hereafter in eternal life; for he who most entirely rejoices in good works here on earth in a spirit of love, he alone shall possess and enjoy love in eternal life hereafter. But this same spirit of love is what the Evil One always hates in a man: wherefore he is ever trying to bring such as have it into a false self-righteousness, and into displeasure with their neighbours' ways and works, so that the man conceits within himself that his neighbour's works are not so good as they ought to be, and so in a moment he falleth away from this love, and begins to judge his neighbour and pass sentence on him. And then from the depth of this judging spirit darts forth a stinging venomous tongue, that wounds and poisons the soul unto eternal death. This same arrow of judgment will smite and slay all the excellent and virtuous works that thou hadst stored up unto thyself through an overflowing love, and thus thou wilt find thyself despoiled and laid waste, and thy peace destroyed within thee, and then thou wilt be in a miserable and dangerous condition. Wherefore, in godly faithfulness, I counsel thee ever to keep thy tongue with all diligence, if thou wouldst be, and call thyself, a friend of God.

363

Ofttimes too does the Evil One come and seduce thee into anger with a pious and good man. If thou utterest this by passing a judgment on him, in thus cutting thyself off from the fellowship of his love, thou art also cut off from participation in the benefits of the gifts with which God has endowed him, and the works of his virtue. Of this brotherly fellowship the Psalmist says: "It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, that went down to the skirts of his garments." Now the beard has many hairs, and the precious ointment flows into them all; but if one hair be cut off, it receives none of this precious ointment. In like manner, so long as thou hast a whole and undivided love towards all men, a share of the virtues and divine influences bestowed upon all flows out unto thee through this love. But I tell thee, if thou dost sever any one from this spirit of universal love, thou wilt not receive the precious benefits of the outflowings of love. Wherefore give diligent and earnest heed to yourselves in this matter of divine love, and maintain a hearty good-will towards all men, and bear no grudge against any, and despoil not the sacred temple of God, which has been sanctified by our highest pontiff, Christ; and beware that ye do not call down upon your heads God's everlasting Interdict. But, alas! now-a-days, nature is so perverted in many, both clergy and laymen, as touching brotherly faithfulness and love, that if they see their neighbour fall, they laugh at him, or stand by and let it go on, and care nought for it. Take heed to your failings, and look how it stands with your inward love to God and your neighbour, and keep ever alive within you the fear of God; for I tell you that that which you fail to obtain here through your own neglect, you will lose for ever. After this life nothing will be added to you or taken from you, but ye shall receive according to that ye have deserved, whether it be good or whether it be evil. I tell you that then, though our Lady and all the saints should intercede for a man with tears of blood, it would not help him. Therefore give heed to yourselves; for now

364

God is always at hand, waiting for us, and ready to give us much more than we are ready to desire of Him. St Paul says, Love never faileth, it doeth all things, and endureth all things. Therefore seeing that the love of God is never standing idle, so be ye constantly abounding in good works, enduring all that befalls you cheerfully, for God's sake. And then shall ye be made partakers of the overflowing measure, which is so full, so rich, so generous, that it runneth over on all sides.

365

God touches this brimming vessel with His finger, and it overflows, and pours itself back again into its Divine source, from whence it has proceeded. It flows back into its source without channel or means, and loses itself altogether; will, knowledge, love, perception, are all swallowed up and lost in God, and become one with Him. Now God loveth Himself in these men, and worketh in them all their works. The gush and outflowing of this love cannot be contained within the man's own soul, but he hath a yearning desire, and saith: "Oh! my beloved Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech Thee to have compassion upon poor sinners, and to forgive them their sins and misdoings; and especially upon those who, after having done good works, have lost the same again by reason of sin; and grant them, dear Lord, the crumbs that fall from the rich table of Thy grace; and of Thy goodness turn them from their sins through the pains of purification, and impart unto them the overflowings of Thy grace, that through Thy merits they may be kept unto the end." Thus do these Elect men carry up all things, themselves and all creatures, to their true source in God, and take all things that are done in the holy Christian Church, and offer them up, from a joyful, humble, submissive heart, to their eternal, heavenly Father, for themselves and for all men, bad and good; for their love excludes none here in this time of grace, and they are always in unity with all men. No love or blessedness that the saints or angels possess is lost to them, but all is poured into their measure.

366

Verily, had we none of these godlike men among us at this present time, we were doubtless in evil case. Therefore let us all beseech the God of all mercy, that we may fulfil and receive again this measure that runneth over. Amen.

367

XXI

Sermon for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity

(From the Epistle for the day)

Admonishing each man to mark what is the office to which he is called of God, and teaching us to practise works of love and virtue, and to refrain from self-will.

1 Cor. xii. 6.—"There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

ST. PAUL tells us in this Epistle that there are different kinds of works, but that they are all wrought by the same Spirit to the profit and well-being of man. For they all proceed from the same God who works all in all. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the spirit the word of wisdom, to another faith;" and so Paul goes on enumerating

many gifts; but repeats that “all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.” And he says many things for the confirmation of our faith.

In old times the Holy Ghost has wrought very great and wondrous deeds through his servants for a testimony to the faith, having given us great signs by the raising up such a succession of prophets, and by the blood of His saints, and thus suffering unto death. For this kind of testimonies there is no longer any need. Yet, know that of true, living, active faith, there is, alas, as little in some Christian men as in Heathens or Jews!

368

Now let us meditate on these words of St. Paul: “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” Children, if you look around you, you see that you have bodies, and that these bodies have many members and many senses, and that each member, such as the eye, the mouth, the nose, the hands, the feet, has its own special office and work. No one of these takes upon itself to be another, nor to do anything but what God has ordained unto it. In like manner, we are all one body, and members one of another, and Christ is the head of the body. In this body there is a great diversity of members; the one is an eye, the other an ear, the third a hand or a foot or a mouth. The eyes of the body of the holy Christian Church are her teachers. This office is none of yours; but let us common Christians look to see what is our office, to the which our Lord has called and bidden us, and what is the gift of which our Lord has made us the vessels. For every art or work, however unimportant it may seem, is a gift of God, and all these gifts are bestowed by the Holy Spirit for the profit and welfare of man.

Let us begin with the lowest. One can spin, another can make shoes, and some have great aptness for all sorts of outward arts, so that they can earn a great deal, while others are altogether without this quickness. These are all gifts proceeding from the Spirit of God. If I were not a priest, but were living as a layman, I should take it as a great favour that I knew how to make shoes, and should try to make them better than any one else, and would gladly earn my bread by the labour of my hands. Children, the foot or the hand must not desire to be the eye. Each must fulfil the office for which God has fitted him, however weighty it may be, and what another could not easily do. Also our sisters shall each have her own office. Some have sweet voices; let them sing in the Churches, for this also comes from the Spirit of God. St. Augustine says: “God is a homogeneous, divine, simple substance, and yet the Author of all variety, and is all in all, one in all, and all in one.” There is no work so small, no art so mean, but it all comes from God and is a special gift of His. Thus, let each do that which another cannot do so well, and for love, returning gift for gift. Know ye, whoever does not exercise his gift, nor impart it, nor make use of it for the profit of his neighbour, lays up a heavy reckoning against the last day. For, as Christ tells us, a man must give account of his stewardship, or his office. Each shall and must restore that which he has received of God, and is answerable in proportion to his advantages over others, and the measure of the ability which God has given him.

369

Whence comes it then, that we have so many complaints, each saving that his occupation is a hindrance to him, while notwithstanding his work is of God, who hindereth no man? Whence comes this inward reproof and sense of guilt which torment and disquiet you? Dear children, know that it is not your work which gives you this disquiet. No: it is your want of order in fulfilling your work. If you performed your work in the right method, with a sole aim to God, and not to yourselves, your own likes and dislikes, and neither feared nor loved aught but God, nor sought your own gain or pleasure, but only God’s glory, in your work, it would be impossible that it should grieve your conscience. It is a shame for a spiritual man, if he have not done his work properly, but so imperfectly

370

that he has to be rebuked for it. For this is a sure sign that his works are not done in God, with a view to His glory and the good of his neighbour. You may know and be known by this, whether your works are directed to God alone, and whether you are in peace or not. Our Lord did not rebuke Martha on account of her works, for they were holy and good; He reprov'd her on account of her anxiety. A man ought to busy himself in good and useful occupations of whatever kind they may be, casting his care upon God, and labour silently and watchfully, keeping a rein upon himself, and proving himself, so as to sift what it is that urges and impels him in his work. Further, he must look within, and mark whether the Holy Spirit will have him to be active or quiet; that he may obey His godly leadings in each instance, and do and have undone by the influence of the Holy Spirit; now resting, now working, but ever fulfilling his due task in peace.

And wherever you see the aged, the sick, the helpless, you should run to their assistance, and strive with each other in fulfilling works of love—each helping the other to bear his burden. If thou dost not so, be sure that God will take thy work from thee, and give it to another who will do it aright, and will leave thee empty and bare at once of gifts and of merit.

371

If, when at thy work, thou feel thy spirit stirred within thee, receive it with solemn joy, and thus learn to do thy work in God, instead of straightway fleeing from thy task. Thus should ye learn to exercise yourselves in virtue; for ye must be exercised if ye are to come to God. Do not expect that God will pour virtue into you without your own effort. You should never trust in virtue that has not yet been put into practice, nor believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost have entered into a man, unless the man hath given evidence thereof in his own labours, outward or inward. Once as a good man was standing, threshing his corn, he fell into a trance; and if an angel had not turned aside the flail, he would have struck himself with it. Now ye are all craving to be thus set free from your work, and this comes, for the most part, from sloth; each would fain be an eye, and give himself to contemplation rather than to work.

I know a man who has the closest walk with God of any I ever saw, and who has been all his life a husbandman,—for more than forty years, and is so still. This man once asked the Lord in prayer if he should give up his occupation and go into the Church; and it was answered him, No; he should labour, earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, to the glory of Christ's precious blood, shed for him. But let each choose some suitable time in the course of every four-and-twenty hours, in which he can give his whole mind to earnest meditation, each after his own fashion. Those nobler men who are able to turn to God simply without the aid of images or forms, shall do so after their fashion, and others after theirs. Let each set apart a good hour for such exercises, each taking his own method; for we cannot all be eyes; but to our life's end it is most needful for us to keep up some strenuous exercises of piety, of whatever kind God may appoint, with loving and peaceful hearts, and in obedience to His will. He who serves God after God's will shall be rewarded according to his own will; but he who prays to God according to his own will shall not be answered in accordance with his own will, but after God's will.

372

Children, it is of this coming out from our own self-will, that the true, solid peace is begotten and springs forth, and it is the fruit of long-tried virtue. Unless thy peace come from this, be sure that it is false; for inwardly and outwardly thou must be exercised. But the peace that comes from within none can take away. Now some foolish men, who are puffed up in their own conceit, come and say that ye ought to do this and that, and want to direct every man's mind according to their own opinion and their own notions and practices. And many of them have lived for forty years in the profession of religion, and to this day do not know what is their own real state. They are much

373

bolder than I. I hold the office of an instructor; and when people come and consult me, I inquire how it stands with them, and how they came into this state. Yet I dare not pass a judgment on them; but I lay their case before the Lord, and if He does not give me what I shall speak, I say to them: Dear children, seek help yourselves from God, and He will give it you. But you want to judge and set an estimate on every man, trying him by the standard of your own usages and conceits. Thus it is that the worms get in and devour the good saplings that were shooting up in God's garden.—Then they say, “We have no such custom; this is an innovation, and comes from the new notions,” and never reflect that the hidden ways of God are unknown to them. Alas! what strange things do we see among those who fancy themselves in an excellent way!

Now St. Paul says, that the Holy Ghost, by His operations, teaches us the discerning of spirits. Children, who do you suppose are the men to whom God gives this power of discerning the spirits? Know ye, that the men who have this gift have been thoroughly exercised in all ways: by their own flesh and blood, and have gone through the most cruel and perplexing temptations: and the devil has been in them, and they in him, and they have been tried and tested to the very marrow; these are the men who can discern the spirits. When they are minded to do this, they consider a man, and straightway they discern his spirit, whether it be of God or no, and what are the nearest roads of access for him, and what is holding him back from God. Oh! how greatly to our hurt do we fall short of the noblest, highest truth through such trifling, mean things; for the sake of which we must suffer loss for ever and ever, so long as God is eternal. For what we here miss through our own neglect will never be made up to us hereafter. But may God help all of us truly to fulfil the offices and works which His Spirit has committed to us and taught us to perform, each doing as he is inwardly monished by the Holy Ghost! Amen.

XXII

374

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

(From the Epistle for the day)

Teaching us that we ought to receive God, in all His gifts, and in all His burdens, with true long-suffering.

2 Cor. iii. 6.—“The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

THERE are two sorts of men among God's friends; those of the Old Testament, and those of the New. All the men who should be saved before the birth of Christ had to observe the old dispensation with all its rites, until the new dispensation came with its laws and its rites. The old law served as a way unto the new, and was a perfect foreshadowing of it. And this new law we have under our very eyes, but it was the old law that prepared us to receive it. And everything that is meant to receive somewhat must first be made able to receive. The old law had many intolerable burdens, and terrible judgments for offenders, and a far sterner manifestation of the justice of God, with a

375

dark, distant hope of redemption. For five thousand years the gates were altogether closed against those who lived under the Old Covenant; so that, with all their pain and weary ceremonies, they could not enter into the Kingdom of God, but had to wait long in gloom and sorrow for the coming of the new law, which is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now he who would come to the new law with full assurance of faith must first be made at one with the old. Man must learn to suffer, and to bear heavy burdens, and to bow down humbly beneath the mighty hand of God; he must be afflicted outwardly and inwardly, from wheresoever his pain cometh, and whether it be deserved or not.

376

Dear children, behold! this thing must be brought to pass after a very different fashion from what you like to dream; but hold fast the doctrine of God, and let him who hath received it be wise, and hold it fast as long as he hath it. But submit and endure God's dealings in all that befalls you, through whomsoever it may come. If you would come to the new law, you must first suffer under the old one, and be subject to it in the humility of your hearts. So, whatever consolation may be granted you, spiritual or earthly, it will not follow you all your course through. And you must travel this road and no other; turn it which way you will, it must be even so. Therefore, dear children, learn to do without the Holy Sacraments, spiritual light, the sense of God's presence, and all human help. Dearly beloved, bow down your old man under the yoke of the old law, with all meekness and resignation, and receive all God's gifts with all their burdens. Of a truth, His burdens are light and His yoke is easy. Children, I commend you from the bottom of my heart into the captivity of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; that it may be in you, over you, behind you, and before you, lying heavy on you, and yet received by you with free and full acquiescence to the will of God, whatever it may please Him to do with you. May God, of His mercy, give you to bear with a good courage all the sorrow that is before you, and also, when ye are despised of all men, and slandered, and counted for nought. Thus let your old man be subject unto the old law, until Christ be born in you of a truth, where peace and joy in the truth do spring up. The patriarchs, greatly as they longed to see the advent of our Lord, yet had to wait five thousand years. But, verily, if you would thus humbly yield yourselves up, you need never wait a year. If you had had a quartan ague one year or two, you must bear it till you became well again; so you must bear the yoke of the old law.

377

The second burden of the old law was its awful judgments, and stern display of God's justice. This is manifested in many ways—by afflictions and by the gnawings of conscience. Now some try to work themselves out of this by confession. But if you were to confess your sins a thousand times, it would avail you nothing, save indeed the confessing of mortal sin, accompanied by satisfaction for it. The rest leave humbly to God, and bear what He appoints unto you, till He of His mercy send you relief. But confess all to Him inwardly in your soul, to the very last tittle, with humble submission to His will, and acquiescing in His unknown judgments, without looking to yourself or to other men for help. Meanwhile there are some who endeavour to get rid of the burden of sin by asking counsel and hearing preachers, hoping to hear somewhat that may afford them a stay, and thus they may find deliverance. Behold, dear friend, if thou spend all thy years in running from church to church, thou must look for and receive help from within, or thou wilt never come to any good; however thou mayest seek and inquire, thou must also be willing to be tormented without succour from the outward help of any creature. I tell you, children, that the very holiest man I ever saw in outward conduct and inward life, had never heard more than five sermons in all his days. When he saw and perceived how the matter stood, he thought that was enough, and set to work to die to that to which he ought to die, and live to that to which he ought to live. Let the

common people run about and hear all they can, that they may not fall into despair or unbelief; but know that all who would be God's, inwardly and outwardly, turn to themselves, and retire within. And know that if ever you desire to be spiritual and blessed men, you must cease from running outwards for help, and turn within; for you will never get what you want by a multitude of words, hear as many as you will; but only by loving and serving God from the bottom of your heart, and your neighbour as yourself, and leaving all things to stand on their own foundation. But pant after God with all your heart, as the holy patriarchs did, and covet that which you truly ought to covet, and leave all things, whether concerning yourself or any other creatures, to God's most blessed will.

The third characteristic of the old law was that it had a dark hope of a distant redemption; for the gates were closed, and there was no prophet who could tell when the redemption might come to pass. So likewise must we simply commit ourselves to God with perfect trust in His eternal purpose; for when He pleases that it shall be accomplished to our waiting souls, then, no doubt, He will come to us, and be born in us. But when? Leave that to Him: to some He comes in their youth; to others in old age; to some in death: this leave to His Divine will, and do not take upon thyself to adopt any singular exercises, but keep the Commandments, and believe the articles of the Christian faith. Learn the Creed and the Commandments, and have patience, and give up thyself in all things according to the will of God, and assuredly Christ, the new law, will be born in thee with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and thou wilt have a life like that of the angels, in freedom from the bonds of matter and in intelligence. This seems to thee a great thing! No; the truth is much greater. "The Spirit giveth life;"—a spark of His own Divine life, which is higher than all angelic life, and passes man's comprehension, lying beyond the sphere of sense and of reason. But this must come to pass in the way that I have told you, and no other. A man may, indeed, attain so far as to catch a glimpse of this glorious truth, and play upon the surface of it with his sense and reason; but to become and be such an one, to this none can attain but by this path of true self-surrender; but through that assuredly it will be found.

In the Old Testament the Levites bare the ark, but here the holy ark bears us. Thus, whoso will not yield to God in His justice and His judgments, without doubt he shall fall under God's eternal justice and eternal condemnation; it cannot be otherwise. Turn it as thou wilt, thou must give thyself to suffer what is appointed thee. But if we did that, God would bear us up at all times in all our sorrows and troubles, and God would lay His shoulder under our burdens, and help us to bear them. For if with a cheerful courage we submitted ourselves to God, no suffering would be unbearable. For it is because now we are without God, and standing in our own weakness, that we are neither able to endure nor yet to act. God help us all worthily to bear His yoke! Amen.

XXIII

Second Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

(From the Gospel for the day)

This sermon tells us how a man who truly loves God, whose ears have been opened to receive the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, is neither lifted up in joy nor cast down in sorrow.

Mark vii. 37.—“He hath done all things well: He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”

WE read in the Gospel for this day, that as our blessed Lord was going from one place to another, they brought unto Him a man who was born deaf and dumb; as must needs be; for he who is born deaf must also be dumb; for since he has never heard, he does not know what speech is. The Lord put His fingers into the ears of this deaf man, and touched his tongue with His spittle, and said, “Be opened.” And when the people saw what was done, they came together and wondered at the miracle; saying: “He hath done all things well; He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.”

Children, it behoves us greatly to mark what it is that makes men deaf, like the man in the Gospel. From the time that the first man opened his ears to the voice of the Enemy, he became deaf thereby, and all we after him, so that we cannot hear or understand the sweet voice of the Eternal Word. Yet we know that the Eternal Word is still so unutterably nigh to us inwardly, in the very principle of our being, that not even man himself, his own nature, his own thoughts, nor aught that can be named, or said, or understood, is so nigh or planted so deep within him, as the Eternal Word is in man. And it is ever speaking in man; but he hears it not by reason of the sore deafness that has come upon him. Whose fault is this? I say that something has covered man’s ears, and stopped them up that he may not hear this Word; and his sense is so benumbed that he has become dumb, not knowing his own self. If he desired to speak of what is within him, he could not; for he does not know how it stands with him, nor discern his own ways and works. The cause whereof is that the Enemy has whispered in his ear, and he has listened to the voice, and hence has he grown deaf and dumb. What is this most hurtful whispering of the Enemy? It is every disorderly image or suggestion that starts up in thy mind, whether belonging to thy creature likings and wishes, or the world and the things thereof; whether it be thy wealth, reputation, friends or relations, or thy own flesh, or whatever it be that lays hold of thy fancy, making thee to like or do somewhat. Through all these he has his access to thy soul; for he is ever at hand; and as he marks to what a man is inclined inwardly or outwardly, what he likes and dislikes, straightway he lays hold of it and attacks him with that weapon, and suggests what agrees with that man’s inclination, and pours into the ears of his soul all manner of imaginations concerning that thing, that the man may not be able to hear the Eternal Word. If the man instantly turned his ears and mind away from the enemy, the assault would be easily repulsed, but as soon as he opens his ears so far as to dwell upon and dally with temptation, he is already well nigh conquered, and the strife is at the hardest. But as soon as thou hast bravely turned thy ear away, thou hast well nigh prevailed; for this enables thee to hear the inward voice of the Word, and takes away thy deafness. Not only worldly but also religious men are liable to this deafness, if they make the creature their idol and aim, and their hearts are possessed therewith. The Devil has marked this, and suggests to them the imaginations to which he finds them inclined. With some their ears are stopped up with their own inventions, and the daily routine of habit with which they go through certain outward acts, learnt by means of their senses from the creatures. All this dulls a man’s hearing so that he cannot apprehend the Eternal Word speaking within him, nor in any wise understand what it says. It is true, however, that we ought to maintain the habit and practice of works of piety, though without a spirit of self-exaltation on

account of them, such as prayer, or meditation, or the like, in order that our sluggish nature may be aroused into vigour, our minds raised on high, and our hearts allured and kindled. But there must be no claiming to ourselves thereof, but rather our ears must be left open to listen to the whispers of the Eternal Word. Let us not be as some obstinate men who never go forward, but to the day of their death remain standing on their outward customs, seeking for nothing further, and when God would say aught unto them, there is always something that gets into their ears, so that His Word cannot be heard. Children, at the last day, when all things come to be laid bare and open, it will be an everlasting sorrow to think of the endless variety of these things that have come between us and God, and how we have been entangled in mean bondage to our own ways and habits.

383

Now the Word is spoken into no man's ear, except he have the love of God; for Christ says: "If ye love me, hear my words." On this point says St. Gregory: "Wilt thou know whether thou love God? take note when cares, troubles, or sorrows overtake thee (from within or from without, whencesoever they come), and weigh down thy spirit so that thou knowest not which way to turn, nor what is to become of thee, and canst find no counsel and art outwardly in a storm of affliction, in unwonted perplexity and sore distress; if thou then remainest inwardly at peace and unmoved in the bottom of thy heart, so that thou dost not in any wise falter, either by complaint, or in word, or work, or gesture, then there is no doubt that thou lovest God." For where there is true love, a man is neither out of measure lifted up by prosperity, nor cast down by mishap; whether you give or take away from him, so long as he keeps his beloved, he has a spring of inward peace. Thus, even though thy outward man grieve, or weep downright, that may well be borne, if only thy inner man remain at peace, perfectly content with the will of God. But if thou dost not find it thus with thee, then thou art in truth deaf, and hast not really heard the voice of the Eternal Word within thee.

384

Further, thou mayest try by this test whether thou hast the right sort of love; namely, whether thou hast a lively thankfulness for the great benefits which God has bestowed upon thee and all His creatures in Heaven and on earth, and for His holy Incarnation, and for all the manifold gifts which are ever flowing out from Him to all men. And this thankfulness shall comprehend all men, even as it shall spring from love to all; whether they be clergy or laymen, monks, nuns, or in whatever condition of life they be, or whatever be their conduct, thou shalt cherish an honest, true love for them, not a concealed self-love, or self-seeking. This real, universal love is a source of measureless benefits. Know ye, children, that where men are true, glorified friends of God, their hearts melt with tenderness towards all mankind, living or dead; and if there were none such on the earth, the world were in an evil plight. Moreover, thou shalt let thy love shine forth before men, so far as in thee lies, imparting to them of thy substance, and giving them comfort, help, and counsel. It is true that thou must minister to thine own necessities; but when thou hast nothing to spare, thy love should be still lively, wishing that thou hadst aught to give, and ready to do to the utmost of thy power. These are the true signs of love and that a man is not spiritually deaf.

385

Now when our Lord comes and puts his finger into a man's ear and touches his tongue, how eloquent will he become! O children, of this wondrous things might be said! But we will now consider the seven gifts of the Spirit, given to man through this touch whereby the ears of his mind are opened. First is given unto him the spirit of fear, which has power to rid him of all self-will, and teaches him to flee from temptation, and at all times to shun unruly appetites and licence. Next is given to him the spirit of charity, which makes him sweet-tempered, kind-hearted, merciful, nor ready to pass a harsh judgment on any one's conduct, but full of tolerance. Thirdly, he receives the gift of knowledge, so that he understands the meaning of his inward experience, and thus learns to

guide himself according to the blessed will of God. The fourth gift is Divine strength: through this gift such Divine might is imparted unto him, that, with Paul, it becomes a small and easy matter to him to do or bear all things through God who strengtheneth him. The fifth is the gift of good counsel, which all those who follow become gentle and loving. Lastly, come two great gifts, understanding and the wisdom of insight, which are so sublime and glorious, that it is better to seek to experience them than to speak thereof. That our ears may thus be opened of a truth, that the Eternal Word may be heard in us, may God grant us! Amen!

XXIV

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

(From the Gospel for the day)

This sermon forbiddeth all carefulness, and telleth in what righteousness consisteth, and rebukes sundry religious people and their works, likening their ways to simony.

Matt. vi. 33.—“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”

IN this passage, the Son of God gives us a similitude, bidding man, who is a reasonable creature, to look at the flowers that deck the face of the earth, and at the unreasoning fowls of the air, saying: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you that Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these!” “Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” “Therefore I say unto you, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Children, once before, the Son of God had said that no man could serve two masters, that is to say, God and Mammon, or the riches of this world; for he must love the one, and hate the other. It is indeed a wonder passing our understanding how much is comprehended in these words. We ought to set them up before our eyes as a mirror, and let them be our constant motto. How clearly does Christ here instruct us in the truth with plain unvarnished words and pertinent figures, when, forbidding us to be anxious about earthly and perishable things, he says: “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Therefore, ye of little faith, seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; neither be ye of doubtful mind.” Children, ye see well by this discourse how far we all are in common from living according to the simple truth of things, in all our earthly relationships. But know that there is an inward secret defect lurking under the cloak of our anxiety about daily things, a sinful, though unconscious covetousness, which is one of the seven deadly sins. And this sin, working silently and unperceived in the hearts both of worldly and religious people, is the cause of the greatest evils that afflict this earth. Let each, for instance, only mark

narrowly, in himself and others, the marvels of labour and ingenuity invented and wrought on all sides, each striving to outdo his fellow for the sake of earthly gain. If we were to probe to the bottom the workings of this false principle in worldly and in religious people, it could hardly be told how deeply its roots have struck, and how widely they have spread below the surface. Think what it implies to have so little confidence in that God who is able to do all things, when ye are striving, and toiling, and wearing yourselves out with anxiety, as if you meant to live for ever. All this comes from that evil principle of covetousness. If one really looked into the matter, it were frightful to see how man seeks his own ends and not his neighbour's good, in all things Divine and human; his own pleasure, or profit, or glory, by all his words and works—nay, even gifts and services. Children, this great sin is so deeply rooted in many, that every corner of their heart is full of earthly, perishable things, and they are just like the crooked woman we read of in the Gospel, who was bent down to the earth by her infirmity, and could in no wise lift herself up, or raise her eyes above the ground.

Thou poor blind man, spiritual in outward vesture but not in reality, why shouldst thou not trust that the God who has done thee so great a benefit in redeeming thee from the carking cares of this false, wicked world, that He is also willing to give thee such poor mean things as are needful for thy earthly sustenance? And is it not a pitiful thing that a religious man should spend his whole industry, and sole effort, and have his thoughts turned, day and night, upon his own little doings, and should be so full of them that he can hardly properly hold converse with God, or his own heart? And if what he has in hand succeeds, he feels no impulse urging him onwards towards eternal things, except in so far as it may be necessary to secure his own salvation, and from the delight that he may find in his own good works; and he is as much taken up with petty personal cares as worldly people are with weightier things. Wherefore our Lord says: Ye cannot serve two masters; ye cannot serve God and riches. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, which is before all things and above all things, and His righteousness, and “all other things shall be added unto you.” Just as if He had said, these are not worthy to be called a gift; but they shall be added over and above God's gifts. How greatly these vain, pitiful things are esteemed and loved and sought after, secretly and openly, and what anxiety they give rise to, and how eagerly men desire them, and heap up treasures by unlawful means, is not to be fully set forth, and I must not attempt it.

St. Peter says: “Cast all your care upon God, for He careth for you.” This carefulness concerning outward things works a man three great injuries. It blinds his reason and good sense; it quenches the fire of love, and destroys all its fervour and heat; and it blocks up the ways of secret access to God. It is like a noxious vapour, or thick smoke, that rises up and chokes a man's breath. This care is born of the sin and vice of covetousness. Therefore look well to your footsteps, and see with what ye hold converse while you are in this present state, and seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, that you may find and discover it where it lies hidden in the inmost depths of the soul, that it do not moulder away or remain unfruitful within you. But to this end, he who purposes manfully to withstand himself, the Devil, and the world, must sustain many bold, valiant conflicts, without rest or intermission. For the Kingdom of God will never be truly found except these faults be first cast off; and this is not the work of a day. For whatever a man shall take by force, he must first with great pains conquer; and thus he must make continual efforts before his outward man can be drawn away from the love of these perishable things. For this vice has struck its hidden roots so deeply into the animal nature of man, that he seeks himself in all things,—in his words and works, in his dealings with others, and in his friendships; nay, the miserable self-seeking of nature works in secret even as regards God, making men crave to enjoy, comfort, illumination, sweet

emotions; in short, they are ever wishing to obtain something, and would fain hold converse with the world and yet possess the Kingdom of Heaven. But we ought to bear all things in the holy faith of Christ, and leave the reward to God.

Do good works, and exercise thyself in all virtue, and God shall give thee a great reward, in so far as thou hast kept thyself from judging thy neighbour, and hast not preferred thyself before him, for that would ill become thee. Dear children, be on your guard against this subtle self-seeking of nature, that ye do not fulfil good works of piety for the sake of any earthly reward; for that has somewhat of the nature of simony, a sin which the holy Church abhors above all others, and which is especially contrary to God's righteousness; for God is by his nature the end of all things, and thou settest in His stead, as the end of thy works, an evil, mean, perishable thing. We should seek God's righteousness, but this is contrary to His righteousness; therefore, children, beware of this evil principle within you, and seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; that is to say, seek God alone, who is the true Kingdom for which we and all men daily pray when we say the Lord's Prayer. Children, the Lord's Prayer is a mighty prayer: ye know not what ye pray for in it. God is Himself the Kingdom, and in that Kingdom He reigns in all intelligent creatures. Therefore what we ask for is God Himself with all His riches. In that Kingdom does God become our Father, and manifests there His fatherly faithfulness and fatherly power. And insomuch as He finds place in us to work, is His name hallowed, and magnified, and made known. That His name should be hallowed in us, means that He should reign in us, and accomplish through us His rightful work. And thus is His will done here on earth as it is in heaven; that is, when it is done in us as it is in Himself, in the Heaven which He Himself is. Oh! how often does man give himself up in will to God, and take himself back again as quickly, and fall away from God! But now begin again, and give thyself to Him afresh; yield thyself captive to the Divine Will in rightful allegiance, and trust thyself to the power of thy Father, who has all power and might, and whose presence thou hast so often and so plainly felt, and art yet made to feel every day and hour. Trust Him wholly, and seek His righteousness. For therein is His righteousness shown, that He abideth ever with those who heartily seek Him, and make Him their end, and give themselves up to Him. In such He reigns, and all vain care falls away of itself in those who thus keep close to God in true self-surrender.

Not that we should tempt God; for it is our duty to exercise a reasonable prudence in providing such things as are right, to the supply of our necessities and those of others, and profitable to ourselves and the community, and to see that everything be done in a discreet and seemly manner. But that which is your end when you sit and meditate in the church, should be likewise your end when you are busied in all the affairs of daily life; whether you work, or speak, or eat, or drink, waking and sleeping, do all to the glory of God, and not for thyself. For a noble man will make these perishing things of time a mere passage-way by which he will ascend through the creatures, not being held down by any selfish cleaving to them, up to his everlasting home, his eternal source from which he sprang at his creation.

Now some may ask, how we can say that God forsakes none that trust Him, seeing that He often permits good men to suffer great poverty and affliction. This He does, as Bishop Albert says, for three causes: the first, that He may try them, and see whether they utterly believe and trust Him; thus God often suffers men to be brought into distress that he may teach them submission, and then succours them that they may perceive His hand and His friendship and help; in order that their love and gratitude may increase from that time forth, and they may draw closer to God and become dearer to Him. Or again, God will by these troubles shorten their purification hereafter; or again,

He sends them distress for a judgment on those who might relieve them and do it not. Therefore, children, seek first the Kingdom of God, which is God Himself, and nought else. When this cleaving to the creature is altogether cast off, then will the will of God be done on earth as it is in heaven, and so shall the Father have the power and the glory for ever in heaven, that is, in His Sons. For when man stands thus, having no end, nor purpose, nor desire but God, then does he himself become God's Kingdom, and God reigns in him. And then does the Eternal King sit on His royal throne, and command and govern in man.

393

This Kingdom is seated properly in the inmost recesses of the spirit. When, through all manner of exercises, the outward man has been converted into the inward, reasonable man, and thus the two, that is to say, the powers of the senses and the powers of the reason, are gathered up into the very centre of the man's being,—the unseen depths of his spirit, wherein lies the image of God,—and thus he flings himself into the Divine abyss, in which he dwelt eternally before he was created; then when God finds the man thus simply and nakedly turned towards Him, the Godhead bends down and descends into the depths of the pure, waiting soul, and transforms the created soul, drawing it up into the uncreated essence, so that the spirit becomes one with Him. Could such a man behold himself, he would see himself so noble that he would fancy himself God, and see himself a thousand times nobler than he is in himself, and would perceive all the thoughts and purposes, words and works, and have all the knowledge of all men that ever were.

Now thou shouldest look into the bottom of thy heart, and see whether thou wouldest fain enter into this Kingdom, and partake of this high dignity. Then were all thy cares over and gone for ever! This is the Kingdom which we are told to seek first; and this is righteousness, that we should set God before us, the rightful end of all our purposes in all our doings, and trust in Him. For as we can never love God too well, so we can never trust Him too much, if it be but the right sort of trust, that casts all care upon Him, as Peter bids us do.

394

Now St. Paul tells us, however, that we must be careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Children, that peace which is found in the spirit and the inner life is well worth our care, for in that peace lies the satisfaction of all our wants. In it the Kingdom of God is discovered and His righteousness is found. This peace a man should allow nothing to take from him, whatever betide, come weal or woe, honour or shame. But ever keep thy inward man in the bond of peace, which consists in the common love of all to all; and set before you the lovely example of our Lord Jesus Christ, and see how His love wrought, leading Him to endure greater sufferings than all the saints or all mankind ever endured. For He was all His life more utterly destitute of consolation than any man ever was, and ended it by the bitterest death that man ever died; and yet in His highest powers He was never less blessed than He is at this moment. Now those who are most truly followers of Him in emptiness of outward consolation, and in true poverty, inward and outward, having no refuge or stay, and in no wise clinging to the creature, or seeking themselves, these come to discover, in the truest and noblest sort, the Kingdom of God. And this is God's righteousness, that He will give us to find His Kingdom by treading in Christ's footsteps, in true self-surrender and willing poorness of spirit. That we may all so seek the Kingdom of God as truly to find it, may He help us. Amen.

XXV



Sermon for St. Stephen's Day

Of three grades of those who learn to die unto themselves, like corn of wheat, that they may bring forth fruit; or of those who are beginners, those who are advancing, and those who are perfect in a Divine life.

John xii. 24.—“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

BY the corn of wheat we understand our Lord Jesus Christ, who by His death has brought forth much fruit for all men, if they are but willing not only to reign with Him, but also and in the first place desire to follow Him in a dying life. For this may be called a dying life, when a man for the love of God refuses to gratify his senses and take his natural pleasure, and follow his own will; and as many lusts as he dies to, so many deaths does he offer to God, and so many fruits of life will he receive in return. For in what measure a man dies to himself, and grows out of himself, in the same measure does God, who is our Life, enter into him.



Now mark, dear children, that the path of a man thus dying may be divided into three stages. Those who have entered on the lowest stage, do acts of self-denial from fear of hell, and for the hope of heaven, with some love to God mingled therewith, which leads them to shun the most flagrant sins; but the love of God seldom works strongly in them, except it be stirred up by the contemplation of hell or heaven; for by reason of their blind self-love these men are terribly afraid of death, and by no means eager to set their hand to the work of mortifying their undisciplined nature, which shrinks therefrom; and they have little faith, which is the cause of this timorous weakness, that leads them to be ever fearing for their own safety: thus, just as formerly they sought and loved themselves in all kinds of carnal enjoyments and worldly vanities, and avoided bodily pain and inconvenience out of self-love, so now is the same motive at work leading them to shun sin on account of punishment, in order to escape hell, and obtain the rewards of heaven. And when they are still young in the love of God, they are apt to taste little sweetness in loving God, save when they hope to enjoy something from His love; as for instance, to escape hell and get to heaven; and if sometimes they meditate on the sufferings of our Lord, and weep over them with strong emotion, it is because they think how he was willing to suffer so much for their sakes, and to redeem them by his bitter death; still (because their love is small) they are much more inclined to dwell upon the bodily sufferings that He endured in His human nature, than to reflect how He manifested by His death the highest perfection of all virtue, as humility, love, and patience, and therein so greatly glorified His Heavenly Father. For this sort of persons set out and begin to die while as yet they love themselves far too well; hence they are not yet able to see truly what it is to resign themselves to God, and to maintain a spirit of submission; and although God does all things for the best, yet this they will never believe, and it is a perpetual stumbling-block to them. Thus, they often ask and wonder why our Lord chose to suffer so much, and why He leads His friends and followers to Himself along such a path of suffering. And when they are at the outset of a dying life, and only



half-way inclined towards true perfectness, nor perceive as yet wherein this consists, they oftentimes torment themselves with watching and fasting, and an austere way of life; for whatever is outwardly painful to the flesh, they fancy to be greatly and mightily regarded and prized by God. So when they eagerly take upon themselves all the hardships they can, then they think they have reached the summit of perfection, and judge all other men, nay even those who are much more perfect than themselves, and think meanly of all who do not practise outward austerities, calling them low-minded and ignorant in spiritual things; and those who do not feel as they do, they think to have gone astray altogether from a spiritual course, and desire that all men should be as they are; and whatever methods of avoiding sin they have practised and still make use of by reason of their infirmity, they desire, nay, demand, that every one else should observe; and if any do not do so, they judge them, and murmur at them, and say that they pay no regard to religion. Now, while they thus keep themselves and all that belongs to them as it were working in their own service, and in this self-love unduly regard themselves as their own property, they cut themselves off from our Lord and from the universal charity. For they ought to cherish continually a general love toward all men, both good and bad; but they remain absorbed in their partial and separate affections, whereby they bring upon themselves much disquiet, and remain a prey to their besetting sin of always seeking and intending themselves. And they are very niggardly of their spiritual blessings towards their fellow-Christians; for they devote all their prayers and religious exercises to their own behoof; and if they pray or do any other kind act for others, they think it a great thing, and fancy they have done them a great service thereby. In short, as they look little within, and are little enlightened in the knowledge of themselves, so also they make little increase in the love of God and their neighbour; for they are so entangled with unregulated affections, that they live alone in heart, not thoroughly commingling their soul with any in the right sort of thorough love. For the love of God which ought to unite them to God and all mankind, is wanting in them; and although they appear to keep the ordinances of God and the Holy Church, they do not keep the law of love. What they do is more out of constraint and fear than from hearty love; and because they are inwardly unfaithful to God, they dare not trust him, for the imperfection which they find in themselves makes a flaw in their love to God. Hence their whole life is full of care, full of fear, full of toil and ignoble misery; for they see Eternal Life on the one side, and fear to lose it, and see hell on the other, and fear to fall into it; and all their prayers and religious exercises cannot chase away their fear of hell, so long as they do not die unto themselves. For the more they love themselves, and take counsel for their own welfare, the more the fear of hell grows upon them; insomuch that when God does not help them forward as much as they wish, they complain; and they weep and sigh at every little difficulty they encounter, however small, such as being tempted to vanity, wandering thoughts, and the like. They make long stories of what is of no consequence, and talk about their great difficulties and sufferings, as if they were grievously wronged; for they esteem their works, although small, to be highly meritorious, and that God Almighty owes them great honour and blessings in return. But our Lord will tell them (as He does in fact afterward, when He has enlightened them with His grace) a poor fool loves his own wooden stick, or any other little worthless article, as well as a rich and wise man does his sword or any other great and precious thing.

All such are standing on the lowest steps of a dying life, and if they do not mortify themselves more, and come to experience more of what a dying life is, it is to be feared, that they will fall back from that little whereunto they have attained, and may plunge into depths of folly and wickedness, from which God keep us all! But before a man comes to such a fall, God gives him great spiritual

delight; and upon this he is so greatly rejoiced that he cheerfully endures all sorts of austerities and penances, and then he weeneth that he hath arrived at perfection, and begins to judge his neighbours, and wants to shape all men after his own model, so greatly does he esteem himself in his own conceits. Then God comes in His mercy to teach him what he is, and shows him into what error he has fallen, and permits the Enemy to set before him and make him taste the sweetness of sin; and then, when he has thus tasted, he conceives an inclination to one sin after another, and he cannot rid himself of these inclinations. Then he wishes to flee sin that he may escape hell, and begins to do outward good works; and yet it is a dreadful toil to perform these good works as a mere labour, and to put himself to pain; thus he is brought into an agonizing struggle with himself, and does not know which way to turn; for he dimly sees that he has gone astray. Then must God of His mercy come and raise him up, and he shall cry earnestly to God for help, and his chief meditation shall be on the life and works and especially the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second degree in which the corn of wheat dies, is when a man is called upon to endure insult, contempt, and such like deaths; and so long as his grace lasts he would fain continue to suffer, for by the sense of undeserved injury all his powers are but quickened and raised into a higher state of activity. But when he is bereft of this gracious sense of the Divine presence, forasmuch as he is still far from perfection, he cannot bear up under this spiritual destitution, and, through his infirmity, falls a prey to mistrust of God, and fancies that God has forgotten him, and is not willing to help him towards perfection. Often he is in a hundred minds what to do or not do, and if our Lord show him some kindness, then he feels as if all were well between his soul and God, and he feels himself so rich as if he could never more be poor, and thinks to enjoy the presence and favour of God (though as yet he is quite untried) just as if the Almighty were his own personal, special friend, and is ready to believe that our Lord is, so to speak, at his disposal, will comfort him in adversity, and enrich him with all virtue. But forasmuch as our gracious Lord sees that such a man will be very apt to rely upon his imagined powers, and thus to fall grievously, and sees also that the best and ripest fruit is being lost, inasmuch as the man has not yet attained to that perfection to which our Lord desires to lead him, therefore in due time He withdraws from him all that He had revealed to him, because the man was too much occupied with himself, with thinking about his own perfection, wisdom, holiness and virtues; He thus brings him through poverty to dissatisfaction with himself, and a humble acknowledgment that he has neither wisdom nor worthiness; then does he begin to reflect within himself how justly Almighty God has stayed His hand from bestowing any sensible tokens of His mercy, because he fancied that he was something; now he sees clearly that he is nothing. He was wont to care for his good name and honour in the world and to defend them as a man stands up for his wedded wife, and to count them who spoke evil of him as an enemy to the common good. He was wont to desire and thirst after the reputation of holiness, like a meadow after the dew of heaven. He weened that men's praises of him had proceeded altogether from real goodness and sympathy of heart and by God's ordination, and had wandered so far from self-knowledge as not to see that he was in himself unsound from head to foot; he fancied that he was really as he stood in man's opinion and knew nothing to the contrary.

Here we must mark that he who wishes to heal himself of such like grievous mistakes, and subdue such an unmortified nature, must take note of three points in himself. First, how much he has striven to endure cheerfully, for the sake of goodness, all the rebuke, slander, and shame that has come upon him, patiently enduring it in his heart without outward complaint. Secondly, how much in the time of his rebuke, shame, and distress he has praised and glorified God and his

fellow-men, and shown kindness to his neighbour in all ways, in spite of all contradiction against himself. Thirdly, let him examine himself whether he have loved with cheerful and willing heart the men or creatures who have thus persecuted him, and sincerely prayed for them; and if he finds that he has not done so, and is unwilling to do so, but is hard and bitter in his grief, then he may surely know and ought to feel certain that there is something false in him, and some resting in the praise of men and in his own spiritual pride, and that he is not dead. He has not yet come to the second step in a dying life.

But our kind Lord, like a tender mother who is full of love, or a wise physician who desires to restore a sick man to perfect health by his powerful remedies, suffers him to fall many times, that he may learn to know himself, and thus he falls into fleshly, unspiritual temptations such as he never experienced in those past days, in which he fancied himself very good and spiritual-minded. Out of mercy God deprives him of all understanding, and overclouds all the light in which he walked aforetime, and so hedges him in with the thorns of an anguished conscience, that he thinks nothing else but that he is cast off from the light of God's countenance; and he moans greatly, and often with many tears exclaims: "O, my God, why hast Thou cast me off, and why go I thus mourning all the days of my pilgrimage?"

403

And when he finds himself thus from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot unlike God, and at variance with Him, he is filled with the sense of his own unworthiness and with displeasure at himself, insomuch that he can hardly abide himself; and then he thinks many miserable things about himself from passages of Holy Scripture, and sheds many tears in the sense of his sinfulness, till he is weighed down to the earth with the pressure of God's hand, and exclaims with the Prophet: "My sins are more in number than the sands of the sea; they have taken hold upon me that I am not able to look up; for I have stirred up God's anger against me, and done much evil in His sight." These things he saith, and more of the like. And at times he is not even able thus to weep and lament and then he is still more tormented with tribulation and assaults; for on the one hand he feels a strong desire to cast himself down humbly and die to himself, and on the other he is conscious of great pride and arrogance about himself, till he is so exasperated at himself, that but for the dishonour to God he could fain kill himself. I believe that all such conflict greatly wears out the intellectual and natural powers, for it is so excessive, that one would rather suffer oneself to be put to death than endure it. Yet one grace is left him, namely, that he looks on it all as of no moment, whatever may be poured out over him, if only he may not knowingly offend God. After a while the grace of tears comes back to him, and he cries to God and says; "O Lord, arise! why sleepest thou?" and asks Him why He hath sealed up the fountains of His mercy. He calls upon the holy angels and blessed spirits to have pity on him. He asks the heavens why they have become as brass, and the earth wherefore she is as iron, and beseeches the very stones to have compassion on his woes. He exclaims: "Am I become as the blasted hill of Gilboa, which was cursed of David that no dew or rain should fall on it? And how should my wickedness alone vanquish the invincible God, and force Him to shut up His mercies whose property it is to have mercy and to help?"

404

In the second stage of the dying life God leads the soul through these exercises and operations of His hand as through fire and water by turns, until the workings of self-sufficiency are driven out from all the secret corners of the spirit, and the man henceforward is so utterly ashamed of himself, and so casts himself off, that he can never more ascribe any greatness to himself, but thoroughly perceives all his own weakness, in which he now is and always has been; and whatever he does or desires to do, or whatever good thing may be said of him, he does not take it to his own credit, for

he knows not how to say anything else of himself, but that he is full of all manner of infirmity. Then he has reached the end of this stage; and he who has arrived at this point is not far from the threshold of great mercies, by which he shall enter into the bride-chamber of Christ. Then when the day of his death shall come, he shall be brought in by the Bridegroom with great rejoicing.

405 It is hard to die. We know that little trees do not strike their roots deep into the earth, and therefore they cannot stand long; so it is with all humble hearts, who do not take deep root in earth, but in heaven. But the great trees which have waxed high, and are intended to endure long upon the earth, these strike their roots deep, and spread them out wide into the soil. So it is with the men who in old times and now at this present have been great upon earth, they must needs through many a struggle and death, die unto themselves before all the self-sufficiency of their heart can be broken down, and they can be surely and firmly rooted for ever in humility. It does, however, happen sometimes that the Holy Spirit finds easier ways than those of which we have spoken, whereby He brings such souls to Himself.

The third degree in which the corn of wheat dies belongs only to the perfect, who, with unflinching diligence and ceaseless desire, are ever striving to approach perfection. These men's state is one of mingled joy and sorrow, whereby they are tossed up and down; for the Holy Spirit is trying and sifting them, and preparing them for perfection, with two kinds of grief and two kinds of joy and happiness, which they have ever in their sight. The first grief is an inward pain and an overwhelming sorrow of heart, in the sense of the unspeakable wrong done to the Holy Trinity by all creatures, and specially by the bad Christians who are living in mortal sin. The second grief consists in their fellow-feeling for and experience of all the grief and pain which the human nature of Christ has undergone.

406 The first of the two joys lies in this dying; it is a clear intuition and a perfect fruition to which they are raised in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, that they may enjoy the fruition of Him, and triumph in all the joys which they hope and believe after this life to behold in all their perfect fulness. The second triumph is that they are fulfilled in all the joys which the human nature of Christ possessed. This joy such a man hopes to share as a member of Christ; and even if he cannot fathom the abyss of God, he rejoices therein, for he sees that the overflowings of God's mercy are unspeakable, and feels that it is good for him that he is vanquished in the effort to comprehend God's power, and bends down beneath God in his self-dying.

To this state a man cannot attain except he unite his will with God, with an entire renunciation and perfect denial of himself, and all selfish love of himself; and all delight in having his own will be over-mastered and quenched by the shedding abroad in his heart of the Holy Spirit in the love of God, so that it seem as though the Holy Spirit Himself were the man's will and love, and he were nothing and willed nothing on his own account. Yea, even the kingdom of heaven he shall desire for God's sake and God's glory, because Christ hath earned it in order to supply his needs, and chooseth to bestow it on him as one of His sons. When in this stage, a man loveth all things in their right order, God above all things,—next the blessed (human) nature of Christ, and after that the blessed Mother of Christ, and the saints of all degrees, each according to the rank which God hath enabled him to attain. When his affections are thus regulated, he sets himself in the lowest place at the wedding-feast of the Bridegroom. And when the Bridegroom comes who has bidden him to the feast, He saith unto him; "Friend go up higher." Then he is endowed with a new life, and illuminated with a new light, in the which he clearly perceives and sees, that he alone is the cause of his own evil, that he cannot, with truth, throw the blame either on nature, the world, or the

devil. Yea, he confesses that God has appointed him all these exercises and assaults out of His great love, in order that he may glorify God in overcoming these, and deserve a higher crown. Further, he perceives and sees, that it is God alone who has upheld him, and stayed his steps, so that he has no longer an inclination to sin, and who has removed the occasion to sin that he might not fall. Yea what is still worse, he is forced to confess that he has often been dissatisfied that he was not able to derive more enjoyment from his sins. Thus all his being is swallowed up in sorrow and remorse for that he is still laden with his boundless infirmity.

But he hath delight and joy in that he seeth that the goodness of God is as great as his necessities, so that his life may well be called a dying life by reason of such his griefs and joys which are conformable and like unto the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, which from beginning to end was always made up of mingled grief and joy. Grief, in that He left His heavenly throne and came down into this world; joy, in that He was not severed from the glory and honour of the Father. Grief, in that He was a Son of Man; joy, in that He nevertheless was and remained the Son of God. Grief, because He took upon Him the office of a servant; joy, in that He was nevertheless a great Lord. Grief, because in human nature He was mortal, and died upon the cross; joy, because He was immortal according to His Godhead. Grief, in His birth, in that He was once born of His mother; joy, in that He is the only-begotten of God's heart from everlasting to everlasting. Grief, because He became in Time subject to Time; joy, because He was Eternal before all Time, and shall be so for ever. Grief, in that the Word was born into the flesh, and hath dwelt in us; joy, in that the Word was in the beginning with God, and God Himself was the Word. Grief, in that it behoved Him to be baptized like any human sinner by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan; joy, in that the voice of His Heavenly Father said of Him: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Grief, in that like others, sinners, He was tempted of the Enemy; joy, in that the angels came and ministered unto Him. Grief, in that He oftentimes endured hunger and thirst; joy, because He is Himself the food of men and angels. Grief, in that He was often wearied with His labours; joy, because He is the rest of all loving hearts and blessed spirits. Grief, forasmuch as His holy life and sufferings should remain in vain for so many human beings; joy, because He should thereby save His friends. Grief, in that He must needs ask to drink water of the heathen woman at the well; joy, in that He gave to that same woman to drink of living water, so that she should never thirst again. Grief, in that He was wont to sail in ships over the sea; joy, because He was wont to walk dry-shod upon the waves. Grief, in that He wept with Martha and Mary over Lazarus; joy, in that He raised their brother Lazarus from the dead. Grief, in that He was nailed to the cross with nails; joy, in that He promised paradise to the thief by His side. Grief in that He thirsted when hanging on the cross; joy, in that He should thereby redeem His elect from eternal thirst. Grief, when He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" joy, in that He would with these words comfort all sad hearts. Grief, in that His soul was parted from His body, and He died and was buried; joy, because on the third day He rose again from the dead with a glorified body.

Thus was all His life, from the manger to the cross, a mingled web of grief and joy. Which life He hath left as a sacred testament to His followers in this present time, who are converted unto His dying life, that they may remember Him when they drink of His cup, and walk as He hath walked! May God help us so to do! Amen.

XXVI



Sermon for St. Peter's Day

Of brotherly rebuke and admonition, how far it is advisable and seemly or not, and especially how prelates and governors ought to demean themselves toward their subjects.

2 Tim. iv. 2.—“Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

THIS is the lesson which St. Paul gives to his beloved disciple Timothy, whom he set to rule over men, and it equally behoves all pastors of souls and magistrates, to possess these two things,—long-suffering and doctrine.

First, it is their office to rebuke all open sinners, whom they may possibly bring to a better way, and especially those over whom they are set in authority, that they may reveal the truth unto them, for this is needful, and in many places Scripture doth tell us how we ought to teach, rebuke, and exhort those who are committed to our charge, each according to the office which he holds, as St. Gregory has sufficiently shown and set forth in his Pastoral, wherefore we will refrain for the present from saying more on that point.



But we will rather turn to the second point, which is more spiritual, teaching a man to look within and judge himself, seeing that he who desires to become a spiritual man must not be ever taking note of others, and above all of their sins, lest he fall into wrath and bitterness, and a judging spirit towards his neighbours. O children, this works such great mischief in a man's soul, as it is miserable to think of; wherefore, as you love God, shun this evil temper, and turn your eyes full upon yourselves, and see if you cannot discover the same fault in yourselves, either in times past or now-a-days. And if you find it, remember how that it is God's appointing that you should now behold this sin in another in order that you may be brought to acknowledge and repent of it; and amend your ways and pray for your brother that God may grant him repentance and amendment, according to His Divine will. Thus a good heart draws amendment from the sins of others, and is guarded from all harsh judgment and wrath, and preserves an even temper, while an evil heart puts the worst interpretation on all that it sees and turns it to its own hurt. Thus is a good man able to maintain inviolate a due love and loyalty towards his fellow-man. Further, this generous love makes him hold others innocent in his heart: even when he sees infirmity or fault in his neighbour, he reflects that very likely all is not as it seems on the outside, but the act may have been done with a good intention; or else he thinks that God may have permitted it to take place for an admonition and lesson to himself; or again, as an opportunity for him to exercise self-control and to learn to die unto himself, by the patient endurance of and forbearance towards the faults of his neighbours, even as God has often borne many wrongs from him, and had patience with his sins. And this would often tend more to his neighbour's improvement than all the efforts he could make for it in the way of reproofs or chastisements, even if they were done in love (though indeed we often imagine that our reproofs are given in love when it is in truth far otherwise). For I tell thee, dear child, if thou couldst conquer thyself by long-suffering and gentleness and the pureness of thy heart, thou wouldst have vanquished all thine enemies. It would be better for thee than if thou hadst won the hearts of



all the world by thy writings and wisdom, and hadst miserably destroyed thine own soul by passing judgment on thy neighbours; for the Lord says: “And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?”

In thus speaking, I except those who are bound by their office in the holy Christian Church to rebuke others. Let them wisely beware how they reprove, and for what causes, so that they rebuke none with an irritable demeanour, or with harsh and angry words, from which much trouble and toil do spring, for that they have no right to do, but it is permitted to them to reprove those who are under them for their own amendment. But alas! it happens for the most part now-a-days that those who occupy the highest places do often and greatly forget themselves in these respects, and hence their rebukes do not produce any amendment, but only anger and alienation of heart. For if they were to instruct those who are under their care in the fear of God, in such wise that the people could mark and be sure that it was done solely for the saving of their souls, they would be much the more ready to set themselves to amend, and would be content,—but now, alas! they see that their superiors are only seeking their own glory and profit, and taking upon themselves wrongfully to keep them down and defraud them of their just rights, and therefore reproof only makes them the more refractory and indignant. And there are many in authority who do really believe that they rebuke those under them from a reverence for righteousness, and yet are doing it from a wrathful, domineering, and arrogant spirit; and what they think they are doing from hatred to sin, they are doing from hatred to men.

413

But I beseech you examine yourselves, whether you do in truth love those whom you are punishing so bitterly out of reverence and zeal for righteousness as you suppose. For when we see men punishing and oppressing with such vehemence those who are under them, or treating them so harshly with sharp words and sour looks, it is to be feared that there is more reproof given out of crabbed impatience, than for the sake of righteousness from the true ground of charity and kindness, especially by those who have not yet experienced the inward joy of hearty sweetness and godly love: for the soul that has not yet experienced inward love and divine sweetness does not know how to hold a discreet mien and just language in rebuking; but genuine love teaches us how we ought to treat those who are worthy of punishment.

Now let him who has to punish in virtue of his office first take account of God’s dishonour and the injury done to the souls of his flock, and then rebuke with sweet, loving words and patient demeanour and gestures, so that the weak shall be able to mark that he is seeking and purposing their welfare alone and nothing else. And if in the dispensations of God’s Providence it should happen that those who are subject should at times rise up and offend by license and presumptuous irreverence against their superiors, the latter ought not in any wise to regard or revenge it, so far as that may be, without scandal to the rest of their subjects; for if they revenge themselves they fall under suspicion of selfish motives, and it is likely that God will not be able to work any fruit through them; but they must rather treat such offenders with more patience, kinder words and acts, than they do others. For this is commonly the greatest temptation which befalls those in authority, by which they for the most either win or lose the greatest reward of their labours; wherefore they should ever be on their guard, for gentleness and a readiness to forgive injuries is the best virtue that a ruler can possess.

414

They shall show no partiality in their affections, neither for their own glory nor yet towards particular persons, but they shall embrace all their flock in the arms of a common love, as a mother does her children. To the weak they should ever show the greatest love and care, and without ceasing

lift up their hearts unto God in prayer, earnestly beseeching Him to guard and defend the people committed to their charge, and not indulging in any self-glorification. Likewise, so far as it rests with them, let them be the first to do such works as they would wish to see their people do: for so it stands, that, with the help of God, all may be accomplished to a good end, when those in authority are inclined to virtue, for then their subjects must needs follow as they lead, even though they may have been beforehand inclined to all evil and vice, and hostile to their superiors.

415

But for those who have received no commission to govern other men, but stand in a private character without office, it is needful that they secretly judge themselves inwardly, and beware of judging all things without, for in such judgments we do commonly err, and the true position of things is generally very far otherwise from that which it appears to us, as we often come to discover afterwards. On this point remember the proverb: "He is a wise man who can turn all things to the best."

May God help us so to do! Amen.

XXVII

416

Sermon on a Martyr's Day

Of three sorts of spiritual temptation by which holy men are secretly assailed; to wit: spiritual unchastity, covetousness, and pride.

James i. 12.—"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.

ALL our life (says Job), so long as we are upon earth, is full of struggle and temptation, insomuch that this life is not called a life by the Saints, but a temptation. When one temptation is over, straightway others are awaiting us, and the cause is that our Lord will have us to go and bring forth fruit; and the fruit is to walk in the ways of God and go forward; for the fruit consists in the very overcoming of temptation, from which we may draw out a hidden spiritual sweetness, as the bees suck honey from the thorn-bushes as well as from all other flowers. He who has not been tempted, knows nothing, nor lives as yet, say the wise man Solomon, and the holy teacher St. Bernard. We find more than a thousand testimonies in Scripture to the great profit of temptation; for it is the special sign of the love of God towards a man for him to be tempted and yet kept from falling; for thus he must and shall of a certainty receive the crown, like the martyr whose death the Christian Church commemorates this day, singing of him that he is blessed because he hath endured temptation, and has been tried and proved therein, that he might receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to them that love him.

417

Now observe, dear children, that there are two kinds of temptation. The one is carnal, and has its sphere in the kingdom of sense in this present life, as when a man is tempted through his outward senses to seek his happiness in other men, be they friends or relations, or any others, or to undue fondness for the outward show of life, such as dress, jewels, books, instruments, a pleasant abode,

and other transitory creatures, and wilfully cleaves thereunto with manifold affections, and they stick to him like burrs. At times our outward senses are left in peace, and are quit of assaults, yet is the man strangely assaulted inwardly in his flesh and blood by unseemly thoughts; but, however impure may be these temptations, and however horrible they may look, they cannot of themselves defile a man's purity. St. Gregory says: "Temptations do not defile a man except through his own slackness and want of diligence in turning aside from them."

The other sort of temptation is inward and spiritual, and has its seat in the realm of the intellect. The workings of the Spirit and of Nature are so mingled together and interwoven as long as we are in this present life, that all our inward exercises and converse with God are carried on at the same time with all the motions and workings of nature. Moreover, our Lord has so ordained it for our good, that the Evil Angel, Satan, has power to transform himself before the inward eye of the mind into an Angel of Light; and he does it most of all at those times when a man gathers up all his powers to enter into communion with God. Observe, dear children, that St. John divides sin into three kinds, when he says, all that is of the world is "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." As these three sins that reign in the world exist together in the flesh, so do they also reign inwardly in the mind, under a spiritual guise. Outward sins are very clear and easy to see, if a man have a mind to watch himself; but these mental sins are in many ways more covert, and can put on such a good face, that we are often hardly aware of the grievous fall that is close at hand.

Now mark: it is to be counted as spiritual unchastity or wantonness, when a man seeks himself too much, and with eager desire strives after warmth and sensible devoutness, to the end that he may always be in a state of contentment, and none may have a right to reprove him, though he should give himself to his own special prayers and religious exercises, while leaving unfulfilled the work that is his duty. When such an one has none of these sweet emotions, he is quite troubled and becomes peevish and very impatient in the trifling mishaps that befall him, though they are really of no importance whatever; and when he cannot enjoy or obtain inward peace according to his desire, he complains of the great grievances and temptations which he has to endure. St. Bernard says that our Lord bestows these graces of sensible emotion upon such as have done nothing to deserve them nor are worthy of them, but He does this in mercy, that He may draw such to His love; and He withholds these gifts from some who have undergone long and painful exercises, and were well fit to receive them; yea from some He withholds them all their life long, but He will give them a great recompense for it in the next life. The reason of His thus withholding sensible delight is that our spiritual fruitfulness and highest blessedness do not lie therein, but in our inward trusting and clinging to God, in our not seeking ourselves either in sorrow or joy, but through joy and sorrow devoting ourselves to God, and like poor unworthy servants offering ourselves to Him at our own costs, though we should have to serve him thus for ever. Yet it may indeed be permitted to a young, weak Christian, at the outset of his course, to pray for such graces or gifts from our good God, in order to be able to glorify Him with the greater activity, and to be grounded the more firmly in His love. But when we desire such inward fervours and sweet peace (which are His gifts and not our deserts) more for their own sakes than the Giver Himself, we fall into spiritual wantonness and black disloyalty, which our good Lord has not deserved at our hands with His utter renunciation of Himself outwardly and inwardly.

Spiritual covetousness is when a man is always coveting to have more than bare necessities while pursuing this earthly pilgrimage. For what more should a pilgrim take with him by the way

420

than such things as are needful to sustain him till he come safely to his home? Believe me, it is a great blemish in true outward poverty to desire aught beyond necessities; so likewise it is a still greater blemish in the inward poverty of the spirit. Ah, who has ever been so poor as He, who, in utter poorness of spirit, stood forsaken by Heaven and by the creatures, cast out alone in utter exile, when He sent forth that bitter cry: "My God, my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?" And this was all that He might be an ensample unto us, to comfort our poverty and bereavement by teaching us true submission. I hear thee saying: "Yes; if it were not my own fault, and if I had not failed to receive the blessing through my own heedlessness, or thrown it away by my own guilty folly, I could bear it all the better; what should I then have to mourn over? But now it is all my own doing: I have brought the mischief upon myself." I answer: Do not let this lead thee astray; dost thou not know how that it is written: "The just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again;" and dost thou think to stand always? Yes; I assert and confess with thee, that it is thine own fault, that thou hast brought it upon thyself, and well deserved it; yet, nevertheless, it is better that thou shouldst, with firm trust, pray our kind God for His grace (who knows thy weakness, and is ready to forgive thy trespasses seventy and seven times in a day), than that thou shouldst thus drive thyself back in thy course with such faint-heartedness. O child, hast thou fallen? arise, and go, with childlike trust, to thy Father, like the prodigal son, and humbly say, with heart and mouth: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." And what will thy Heavenly Father do but what that father did in the parable? Assuredly He will not change His essence, which is love, for the sake of thy misdoings. Is it not His own precious treasure, and a small thing with Him to forgive thee thy trespasses, if thou believe in Him? for His hand is not shortened that it cannot make thee fit to be saved. Therefore, beware of spiritual covetousness; for the poorer thou art in thine own eyes when thou comest to Him, the more acceptable art thou in His sight, and the more richly He will endow thee and clothe thee out of His treasures.


421


Spiritual pride is when a man is not willing to be put to shame in his own eyes on account of his transgressions, but is ever trying to excuse and gloss over his faults, and is never willing to abase himself, even in small matters. And this often leads people to make many useless and wrong speeches in order to excuse themselves and to justify themselves in every respect; as much as to say, I am not the man to be accused of this and that; and they are unwilling to remember, or consider, that he who cannot clear himself with the simple truth will not be helped by the untruths by which he often adds to his guilt; and that a man who humbles himself before God is more in his eyes than an arrogant, self-righteous man, who deems himself able to answer for all his deeds with his own righteousness. Hearken, dear child; what does all our righteousness come to at last? Isaiah says: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags;" and however great our righteousness is, or might become, yet, if the Lord should sit in judgment on us, without doubt we should have to confess ourselves His debtors, and place all our hope in His mercy. The Lord often disciplines a man by his own failings, if he is humble under them and throws himself at God's feet; for God will have every knee to bend before Him, and will have the praise and glory of all goodness. Hence we may observe that there is often a secret pride within us from which many unseemly fruits do grow. But he who gives diligence to beware of spiritual wantonness, covetousness and pride, shall be kept from straying out of God's ways, or falling into error in his inward exercises.

422

But in order to keep yourselves from these sins, and withstand this kind of temptation, you must observe three rules which I will tell you. The first is: none of the inward difficulties that rise up

from within, or the adverse circumstances that stay our hands from working, by which we are drawn or pressed into likeness and conformity to the humble image of Christ and His saints (not alone outwardly, but that of their inward condition), can be the work either of evil spirits or of nature, but without a doubt come from God. For He is the Highest Good, and from the Highest Good nought but what is good can flow; and all the goodness that God gives us of His stores, and that we render back again to Him, has proceeded from Him as its source; just as all streams flow back again to their source, the Ocean whence they have arisen, and all things do rejoice in their return. But all that draws us and leads us aside from such conformity and likeness proceeds without doubt from the Spirit of Evil, who is ever on the watch to disturb and draw us down, as our Lord said: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who gathereth not with me, scattereth." This rule is against the first spiritual vice, that of wantonness.

 423
The second rule is: Whatever befalls a man inwardly, whereby he is brought to a closer and more sensible gathering up of all his affections and impulses, in singleness of heart, into a steadfast trust in and love of the Father's loving-kindness and not his own works and experiences, this is from God. And he who at all times sees himself to be a poor beggar, however fair his works may seem, the more narrowly he looks into his own heart, and the more mastery he gains over himself, the more does he discover his own nakedness of all virtue. He becomes aware in himself that he is nothing but an empty, worthless vessel, fitted not unto honour but unto eternal destruction, which vessel God alone must and will fill with His grace. When we cling to Him, suffer Him to have access to our spirits, and do not defend ourselves with ourselves, that work is no doubt of God, by which a man is driven into himself to learn his own poverty. But the suggestions of the Enemy and of nature rob and despoil a man of all the benefits of his virtues; and this is the case whenever a man does not know his own real state, and thinks to possess what he never had, and says (as it is written): "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and knows not that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. This is the rule against spiritual covetousness.

 424
The third rule is: Whatever befalls a man by which he is lessened and humbled in his own inmost emotions, and which makes him bend under the Almighty Hand of God, under all creatures, abasing and annihilating himself in true humility, this comes no doubt from God. For as Lucifer and his followers desired to be great and lofty, and were therefore thrust down from heaven, so are we led back again to heaven by self-abasement, as it was said of the Kings of the East that they travelled back into their own land again by another way.

Thus does every being do and teach according to that which is his essence, drawing into his own likeness all whom there are to draw, as far as in him lies. The Evil Spirit is puffed up in his own obstinate conceit, and in the loftiness of his pride is so hardened and unbending in his own stiff-necked will and purpose, that neither to win heaven nor for anything else, will he humble himself for one moment, so fixed is he in his evil mind. So likewise is it with all the proud who have learnt of him to trust in their own understandings above all other men's opinion and reason; wherefore they fall into strife and variance with their neighbours, which begets much trouble and disquiet of heart, and hence arise many breaches of brotherly love. They will take reproof from none, and grow so hardened in their own obstinate evil will, and set upon their purposes, that they rashly dare to withstand all the admonitions of God and His friends, as the Jewish scribes and priests withstood our blessed Lord; and of such the prophet Isaiah, speaking in the person of Christ,

complains: “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts.”

But our blessed Lord, on the contrary, is meek and humble, yea, He is himself the essence of humility, whereunto He is unceasingly drawing all men whom there are to draw, and who are willing to be drawn. His Being is the cause, the essence, and the origin of all things. He is the life of the living, the resurrection of the dead, the restorer of all deformity and unfitness, and of those who have corrupted and despoiled themselves through sin. He calleth back those who have fallen away and wandered from His fold. He raiseth up and confirmeth those who are in temptation. He is the bulwark of those who stand, the awakener and guide of all who are looking and striving upwards towards Him, the source of all light, the lamp of all who walk in light, the revealer of mysteries, in so far as it is fitting for us to know, and the beginning of all beginnings. His Essence is incomprehensible, unspeakable, and without a name. Therefore should we honour and glorify His unspeakable mystery with holy reverence and silence, and nevermore covet to fathom or to taste aught except in so far as is to His honour and to our profit, but ever with fit reverence and devoutness turn with all our might in shamefaced awe to contemplate the radiance of His bright and spotless mirror. It behoves man to be ever in fear and to bethink him of the word that God, our Lord, spake by the mouth of Moses: “If a man or a beast touch the mountain, he shall be stoned;” which signifies that our animal senses must not presume to climb the Mount of the Divine Essence, but must rather keep themselves below and take the meanest place, until the time come when it shall be said unto man: “Friend, come up higher.” And then he shall not go up of himself, but he shall suffer himself to be led upwards, and his sensual nature shall be purified and endowed with the light of God, whereby he shall receive more light than he could ever win by all his great and strenuous labour. For the Divine Nature of Christ is a magnet that draws unto itself all spirits and hearts that bear its likeness, and daily unites them to itself through love.

Now Richardus says: “I receive Christ not alone on the cross, but also in His transfiguration on Mount Tabor. But I may not receive Him there except I find James, Peter and John, Moses and Elias with Him, who bear witness to me that it is truly Christ.” That is to say: in all our distresses, in all our painful inward destitution, we may boldly believe that Christ is present with us; but if He appears to us on the Mount of inward Contemplation, we need these witnesses that we may not enjoy the fruition of His gifts in a wanton spirit for the satisfaction of our own desires, nor too ardently covet more of His good gifts than we can put to a good use; but may ever abase ourselves so thoroughly that we fall not into any spiritual pride. These are the true witnesses that we may freely receive Christ in His glory on the heights of Mount Tabor without hindrance or error, for where these witnesses are of a truth, there we cannot be deceived by the Spirit of Falsehood. May Almighty God help us so to do! Amen.

THE END

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Isaiah

60:1

Hosea

14:1 14:1 14:2 14:2

Matthew

2:11 6:33 8:23 11:7 11:29 15:21-28 20:1 21:10-17 25:6

Mark

7:37 16:19

Luke

6:36-42 21:31

John

1:12 1:47 6:44 8:47 12:24 15:15 16:7 16:7-11 20:16 20:19

Romans

13:11

1 Corinthians

12:6

2 Corinthians

3:6

Galatians

2:20

2 Timothy

4:2

James

1:12

Index of Scripture Commentary

Isaiah

60:1

Hosea

14:1 14:2

Matthew

2:11 6:33 7:37 11:7 11:29 15:21-28 16:19 20:1 21:10-17

Luke

6:36-42 22:31

John

1:12 6:44 8:47 12:24 16:7 16:7-11 20:16 20:19

Romans

8:11

1 Corinthians

12:6

2 Corinthians

3:6

Galatians

2:20

2 Timothy

4:2

James

1:12

Index of Pages of the Print Edition

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36
37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67
68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98
99 100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108 109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117 118 119 120 121 122
123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132 133 134 135 136 137 138 139 140 141 142 143 144 145
146 147 148 149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168
169 170 171 172 173 174 175 176 177 178 179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 190 191
192 193 194 195 196 197 198 199 200 201 202 203 204 205 206 207 208 209 210 211 212 213 214
215 216 217 218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 233 234 235 236 237
238 239 240 241 242 243 244 245 246 247 248 249 250 251 252 253 254 255 256 257 258 259 260
261 262 263 264 265 266 267 268 269 270 271 272 273 274 275 276 277 278 279 280 281 282 283
284 285 286 287 288 289 290 291 292 293 294 295 296 297 298 299 300 301 302 303 304 305 306
307 308 309 310 311 312 313 314 315 316 317 318 319 320 321 322 323 324 325 326 327 328 329
330 331 332 333 334 335 336 337 338 339 340 341 342 343 344 345 346 347 348 349 350 351 352
353 354 355 356 357 358 359 360 361 362 363 364 365 366 367 368 369 370 371 372 373 374 375
376 377 378 379 380 381 382 383 384 385 386 387 388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396 397 398
399 400 401 402 403 404 405 406 407 408 409 410 411 412 413 414 415 416 417 418 419 420 421
422 423 424 425 426