Christian Counsel & Spiritual Letters

属灵劝勉与书信

François Fénelon 芬乃伦 (1651 – 1715)

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CHRISTIAN COUNSEL,

ON DIVERS MATTERS PERTAINING TO

THE INNER LIFE.

BY FENELON.

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." – Rev. iii. 18.

I. OF THE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THERE IS IN THE WORLD

What men stand most in need of, is the knowledge of God. They know, to be sure, by dint of reading, that history gives an account of a certain series of miracles and marked providences; they have reflected seriously on the corruption and instability of worldly things; they are even, perhaps, convinced that the reformation of their lives on certain principles of morality is desirable in order to their salvation; but the whole of the edifice is destitute of foundation; this pious and Christian exterior possesses no soul. The living principle which animates every true believer, God, the all and in all, the author and the sovereign of all, is wanting. He is, in all things, infinite – in wisdom power and love, – and what wonder, if everything that comes from his hand should partake of the same infinite character and set at nought the efforts of human reason. When He works, his ways and his thoughts are declared by the prophet to be as far above our ways and our thoughts as the heavens are above the earth (Isaiah Lv. 9). He makes no effort when He would execute what He has decreed; for to Him all things are equally easy; He speaks and causes the heavens and the earth to be created out of nothing, with as little difficulty as he causes water to descend or a stone to fall to the ground. His power is co-extensive with his will; when He wills, the thing is already accomplished. When the Scriptures represent Him as

speaking in the creation of the world, it is not to be understood as signifying that it was necessary that the word of command should issue from Him, in order that the universe he was about to create should hear and obey his will; that word was simple and interior, neither more nor less than the thought which he conceived of what He was about to do and the will to do it. The thought was fertile, and without being rendered exterior, begat from Him as the fountain of all life, the sum of the things that are. His mercy, too, is but his pure will; He loved us before the creation of the world; He saw and knew us, and prepared his blessings for us; He loved and chose us from all Eternity. Every new blessing we receive is derived from this Eternal origin; He forms no new will respecting us; it is not He that changes, but we. When we are righteous and good, we are conformable to his will and agreeable to Him; when we depart from well doing and cease to be good, we cease to be conformable to Him and to please Him. This is the immutable standard which the changeable creature is continually approaching and leaving. His justice against the wicked and his love towards the righteous are the same thing; it is the same quality that unites Him to everything that is good, and is incompatible with everything that is evil. Mercy is the goodness of God, beholding our wickedness and striving to make us good; perceived by us in time, it has its source in the eternal love of God for his creature. From Him alone proceeds true goodness; alas! for that presumptuous soul that seeks it in itself! It is God's love towards us that gives us everything; but the richest of his gifts is that we may love Him with that love which is his due. When He is able by his love to produce that love in us, He reigns within; He constitutes there our life, our peace, our happiness, and we then already begin to taste that blissful existence which He enjoys. His love towards us is stamped with his own character of infinity: it is not like ours, bounded and constrained; when He loves, all the measures of his love are infinite. He comes down from Heaven to earth to seek the creature of clay whom he loves; He becomes creature and clay with him; He gives him his flesh to eat. These are the prodigies of Divine love in which the Infinite outstrips all the affection we can manifest. He loves like a God, with a love utterly incomprehensible. It is the height of folly to seek

to measure infinite love by human wisdom. Far from losing any element of its greatness in these excesses, He impresses upon his love the stamp of his own grandeur, while He manifests a delight in us bounded only by the infinite. O! how great and lovely is He in his mysteries! But we want eyes to see them, and have no desire to behold God in everything.

II. OF THE NECESSITY OF KNOWING AND LOVING GOD.

It is not astonishing that men do so little for God and that the little which they do costs them so much. They do not know Him; scarcely do they believe that He exists; and the impression they have is rather a blind deference for general opinion than a lively and distinct conviction of the Divinity. They suppose it is so, because they do not dare to examine, and because they are indifferent in the matter, their souls being distracted by the inclination of their affections and passions for other objects; but their only idea of Him is of something wonderful, far off and unconnected with us. They think of Him as a stern and powerful Being, ever making requisitions upon us, thwarting our inclinations, threatening us with great evils, and against whose terrible judgment it behooves every one to be on his guard. Such is the inward thought of those who think seriously about religion, and their number even is small enough. "He is one who fears God," say they; and in truth such an one fears only, but does not love; as the child is in awe of the master who punishes him, or as the servant is in dread of the blows of one whom he serves from fear, and of whose interests is he utterly regardless. Would he like to be treated by a son or a servant as he treats God? It is because God is not known; if He were known, He would be loved. God is love, says the apostle John (1 John iv.8; 16) ; he who loves Him not, does not know Him, for how could we know love without loving it? It is plain, then, that all those who have hitherto only feared God, have not known Him.

But who shall know Thee, O! my God? He who shall seek with his whole heart to know Thee, who shall know himself with approbation no longer, and to whom all that is not Thou shall be as though it were not! The world cannot

receive this saying because it is full of self, and vanity, and lies, and is empty of God; but I trust that there will always be souls hungering for God, who will relish the truth which I am about to set forth.

O my God! before Thou madest the Heavens and the earth, there was none other but Thee. Thou wert, because of thy years there was no beginning; but Thou wert alone. Out of Thee there was nothing, and Thou did'st rejoice in this blessed solitude; Thou are all sufficient in Thyself, and thou hadst no need of anything out of Thyself, for none can give unto Thee, and it is Thou that givest to all by thine all-powerful word, that is, by thy simple will. To it, nothing is difficult, and it doeth whatsoever it will from its own labor. Thou didst cause that this world, which was not as yet, should begin to be; not as the workmen of the earth, who find the materials for their work ready made to their hands, and whose art consists in bringing them together, and arranging them by slow degrees in the requisite order; Thou didst find nothing ready made, but didst create all the materials for thy work. It was to nothing that Thou didst say, "Let the world be," and it was. Thou didst only speak and it was done.

But why didst Thou create all these things? They were all made for man and man was made for Thee. This is the order which is of thine appointment, and woe to him who inverts it, who would that all should be for him and shuts himself in self! He breaks the fundamental law of creation.

No! Lord, Thou canst not yield the essential prerogatives of a creator; it would degrade Thee. Thou canst pardon the guilty soul that has warred against Thee, because Thou canst fill it with thy pure love; but thou canst not cease to be at variance with the soul which refers all thy gifts to itself, and refuses to embrace Thee as its Creator with a sincere and disinterested affection. To have no feeling but fear, is not to refer to itself to Thee, but on the contrary, to think of Thee solely with reference to self. To love Thee with a single eye to the good Thou canst bestow, is not to lose one's self in Thee, but to lose Thee in self! What then must be done in order that we may be lost in Thee? We must renounce, forget and forever lose sight of self, take part with Thee and shine, O God, against ourselves and ours; have no longer any will, glory or peace,

but thine only; in a word, we must love Thee without loving self except in and for Thee.

God who made us out of nothing, re-creates us, as it were, every moment. It does not follow that because we were yesterday, we shall of course be to-day; we should cease to exist and return into the nothingness out of which He formed us, did not the same all-powerful hand prevent. Of ourselves we are nothing; we are but what God has made us, and for so long time only as He pleases. He has but to withdraw the hand that sustains us and we plunge into the abyss of annihilation, as a stone held in the air falls by its own weight when its support is removed. Existence and life, then, are only ours because they are conferred by God.

There are blessings, however, of a purer and higher order than these; a well-ordered life is better than life; virtue is of higher price than health; uprightness of heart and the love of God are as far above temporal goods as the heavens are above the earth. If then these lower and baser gifts are held only through the mercy and at the pleasure of God, with how much more reason must it be true of the sublime gift of his love!

They know Thee not, then, O my God, who regard Thee as an all-powerful Being, separate from themselves, giving laws to all nature, and creator of everything which we behold; they know Thee but in part! they know not that which is most marvelous and which most nearly concerns thy rational creatures! To know that Thou art the God of my heart, that Thou there doest what pleaseth Thee, this it is that elevates and affects me! When I am good, it is because Thou renderest me so; not only dost Thou turn my heart as pleaseth Thee, but Thou givest me one like thine own! It is Thyself that Thou lovest in me; Thou art the life of my soul as my soul is the life of my body; Thou art more intimately present to me than I am to myself; this I, to which I am so attached and which I have so ardently loved, ought to be strange to me in comparison with Thee; Thou art the bestower of it; without Thee it never would have been; therefore it is that Thou desirest that I should love Thee better than it.

O incomprehensible power of my Creator! O rights of the Creator over the creature which the creature will never sufficiently comprehend! O prodigy of love which God alone could perform! God interposes himself as it were, between me and myself; He separates me from myself; He desires to be nearer to me by his pure love than I am to myself. He would have me look upon this "me" as a stranger; He would have me escape from its walls, sacrifice it whole to Him, returning it absolutely and unconditionally to Him from whom I received it. What I am ought certainly to be less precious to me than He by whom I am. He made me for himself and not to be my own; that is, to love Him and to will what He wills, and not to seek my own will. Does any one feel his heart revolt at this total sacrifice of self to Him who has created us? I weep for his blindness; I compassionate his bondage to self, and pray God to deliver him from it, by teaching him to love Him above every other object.

O my God! in these souls, offended at thy pure love, I behold the darkness and rebellion resulting from the fall! Thou didst not make man's heart will this monstrous passion of appropriation. The uprightness wherein the scriptures teach us he was originally created consisted in this, that he had no claim upon himself but acknowledged that he belonged to his Creator. O Father! thy children are sadly changed, and no longer bear thine image! They are enraged, they are discouraged when they are told they should belong to Thee as Thou belongest to Thyself! They desire to reverse this holy order, and would madly raise themselves into Gods; they desire to be their own, to do everything for self, or at least, to surrender themselves with certain reservations and conditions, and for their own advantage. O monstrous usurpation! O unknown rights of God! O the ingratitude and insolence of the creature! Miserable nothing! what hast thou to keep for thyself! What hast thou which belongs to thee? What hast thou which did not come from on high, and ought not to return thither? Everything, yea, even this I which would divide with God his gifts, is a gift of God, and was only made for Him; everything within thee cries out against thee and for thy Creator. Be still, then, thou who, having been created, wouldst deny thy Creator, and surrender thyself wholly to Him.

But alas! O my God! what a consolation is it to know that everything within as well as without me, is the work of thy hand! Thou art ever with me. When I do wrong, Thou are within me, reproaching me with the evil which I do, raising within me regrets for the good which I abandon, and opening to me thine arms of mercy. When I do good, Thou inspirest the desire, and doest it in me and with me; it is Thou who lovest good and hatest evil in my heart, who sufferest and prayest, who doest good to the neighbor and givest alms: I do all these things but by thy means; Thou causest me to do them; it is Thou who puttest them in me. These good works, which are thy gifts, become my works; but they do not cease to be thy gifts; and they cease to be good works if I look at them for a moment as emanating from myself, or if I forget that they are good only because they come from Thee.

Thou, then, (it is my delight to believe it!) art incessantly working within me; there Thou laborest invisibly like a miner in the bowels of the earth. Thou doest everything and yet the world beholds Thee not, attributes nothing to Thee; and even I myself wandered everywhere vainly searching for Thee outside of myself; I ran over all the wonders of nature that I might form some conception of thy greatness; I asked thy creatures of Thee and not once thought of finding Thee in the depths of my heart where Thou hadst never ceased to dwell. No, O my God! it is not necessary to descent into the depths nor to pass beyond the seas; it is not necessary to ascend into the heavens to find Thee; Thou art nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

O my God! who art at once so great and so condescending, so high above the heavens and so accommodating to the misery of the creature, so infinite and so intimately enclosed in the depths of my heart, so terrible and so lovely, so jealous and so easy to be entreated of those who converse with Thee with the familiarity of pure love, when will thy children cease to be ignorant of Thee? Where shall I find a voice loud enough to reproach the whole world with its blindness, and to tell it with authority all that Thou art? When we bid men look for Thee in their own hearts, it is as though we bade them search for Thee in the remotest and most unknown lands! What territory is more distant or

more unknown to the greater part of them, vain and dissipated as they are, than the ground of their own hearts? Do they ever know what it is to enter within themselves? Have they ever endeavored to find the way? Can they even form the most distant conception of the nature of that interior sanctuary, that impenetrable depth of the soul where Thou desirest to be worshipped in spirit and in truth? They are ever outside of themselves in the objects of their ambition or of their pleasure. Alas! how can they understand heavenly truths, since, as our Lord says, they cannot even comprehend those which are earthly? (John iii. 12.) They cannot conceive what it is to enter within themselves by serious reflexion; what would they say if they were told bid to come out of themselves that they might be lost in God?

As for me, my Creator, I shut my eyes to all exterior things, which are but vanity and vexation of spirit, (Eccles. i. 14,) that I may enjoy in the deepest recesses of my heart an intimate companionship with Thee through Jesus Christ thy Son, who is thy Wisdom and Eternal Understanding. He became a child that by his childhood and the folly of his cross, he might put to shame our vain and lying wisdom. Cost what it may, and in spite of my fears and speculations, I desire to become lowly and a fool, still more despicable in my own eyes than in those of the wise in their own conceit. Like the apostles, I would become drunk with the Holy Spirit, and be content with them to become the sport of the world.

I find Thee everywhere within. It is Thou that doest every good thing which I seem to do. I have a thousand times experienced that I could not of myself govern my temper, overcome my habits, subdue my pride, follow my reason nor will again the good which I had once willed. It is Thou that must both bestow the will and preserve it pure; without Thee I am but a reed shaken by the wind. Thou art the author of all the courage, the uprightness and the truth which I possess; Thou has given me a new heart which longs after thy righteousness, and which is athirst for thine eternal truth; Thou has taken away the old man full of filth and corruption, and which was jealous, vain, ambitious, restless, unrighteous and devoted to its own pleasure. In what a state of misery did I live.

Ah! could I ever have believed that I should be enabled thus to turn to Thee, and shake off the yoke of my tyrannical passions?

But, behold a marvel that eclipses all the rest! Who but Thee could ever have snatched me from myself, and turned all my hatred and contempt against mine own bosom? I have not done this; for it is not by our own power that we depart from self; no! Thou, O Lord, didst shine with thine own light into the depth of my heart which could not be reached by any other, and didst there reveal the whole of my foulness. I know that, even after beholding, I have not changed it; that I am still filthy in thy sight, that my eyes have not been able to discover the extent of my pollution; but I have, at least, seen a part, and I desire to behold the whole. I am despised in my own sight, but the hope that I have in Thee causes me to live in peace; for I will neither flatter my defects nor suffer them to discourage me. I take thy side, O God, against myself; it is only by thy strength that I am able to do this. Behold what hath God wrought within me! and Thou continuest thy work from day to day in cleansing me from the old Adam and in building up the new. This is the new creation which is gradually going on.

I leave myself, Father, in thy hands; make and re-make this clay, shape it or grind it to atoms; it is thine own, it has nought to say; only let it always be subservient to thine ever-blessed designs, and let nothing in me oppose thy good pleasure for which I was created. Require, command, forbid; what wouldst Thou have me do? what not do? Exalted, or abased, rejoicing or suffering, doing thy work or laid aside, I will always praise Thee alike, ever yielding up all my own will to Thine! Nothing remains for me but to adopt the language of Mary: "Be it unto me according to thy words," (Luke i. 38.)

Let me, O my God, stifle forever in my heart, every thought that would tempt me to doubt thy goodness. I know that Thou canst not but be good. O merciful Father! let me no longer reason about grace, but silently abandon myself to its operation. Grace performs everything in us, but does it with and through us; it is by it, therefore, that I act, that I forbear, that I suffer, that I wait, that I resist, that I believe, that I hope, and that I love, all in co-operation with

grace. Following its guidance, it will do all things in me, and I shall do all things through it; it moves the heart, but the heart must move; there is no salvation without man's action. I must work, then, without losing a moment, that I may put no hinderance in the way of that grace which is incessantly working within me. All the good is of grace, all the evil is of self; when I do right, it is grace that does it; when I do wrong, it is because I resist grace. I pray God that I may not seek to know more than this; all else will but serve to nourish a presumptuous curiosity. O my God! keep me ever in the number of those babes to whom Thou revealest thy mysteries, while Thou concealest them from the wise and prudent!

Thou causest me clearly to understand that Thou makest use of the evils and imperfections of the creature to do the good which thou hast determined beforehand. Thou concealest thyself under the importunate visitor, who intrudes upon the occupation of thy impatient child, that he may learn not to be impatient, and that he may die to the gratification of being free to study or work as he pleases. Thou availest thyself of slanderous tongues to destroy the reputation of thine innocent children, that, beside their innocence, they may offer Thee the sacrifice of their too highly-cherished reputation. By the cunning artifices of the envious, Thou layest low the fortunes of those whose were too much set upon their prosperity. It is thy hand that sends death upon him to whom life is a constant source of danger, and the tomb a harbor of refuge. It is Thou that makest his death a remedy, bitter enough, it is true, but effectual, for those who were too fondly attached to him, and thus, while saving one, by removing him from life, Thou preparest the others, by that very act, for a happy death. Thus Thou mercifully strewest bitterness over everything that is not Thyself, to the end that our hearts, formed to love Thee and to exist upon thy love, may be, as it were, constrained to return to Thee by a want of satisfaction in everything else.

And this is because Thou art all Love, and consequently all Jealousy. O jealous God! (for thus art thou called!) a divided heart displeases Thee; a wandering one excites thy pity. Thou art infinite in all things, in love as well as in wisdom and power. Thou lovest like an infinite God when thou lovest; Thou

movest heaven and earth to save thy loved ones; Thou becomest man, a babe, the vilest of men, covered with reproaches, dying with infamy and under the pangs of the cross; all this is not too much for an infinite love. Our finite love and limited wisdom cannot understand it; how should the finite comprehend the Infinite? it has neither eyes to see it nor a heart to take it in; the debased and narrowed soul of man and his vain wisdom are offended, and can perceive no trace of God in this excess of love. But for myself, it is by this very character of infinity that I recognize it: this is the love that does all things; that brings to pass even the evils we suffer, so shaping them that they are but the instruments of preparing the good which, as yet, has not arrived.

But ah! when shall we return love for Love? When shall we seek Him who seeks us and constantly carries us in his arms? When He bears us along in his tender and paternal bosom, then it is that we forget Him; in the sweetness of his gifts, we forget the Giver; his ceaseless blessings, instead of melting us into love, distract our attention and turn it away from Him.

III. ON PURE LOVE.

The Lord hath made all things for Himself (Prov. xvi. 4), says the Scripture; everything belongs to Him, and He will never release his right to anything. Free and intelligent creatures are his as much as those which are otherwise. He refers every unintelligent thing totally and absolutely to Himself, and He desires that his intelligent creatures should voluntarily make the same disposition of themselves. It is true that He desires our happiness, but that is neither the chief end of his work, nor an end to be compared with that of his glory. It is for his glory only that He wills our happiness; the latter is a subordinate consideration, which He refers to the final and essential end of his glory.

That we may enter into his designs in this respect, we must prefer God before ourselves, and endeavor to will our own happiness for his glory; in any other case, we invert the order of things. And we must not desire his glory on account of our own salvation, but, on the other hand, the desire for his glory

should impel us to seek our own happiness as a thing which He has been pleased to make a part of his glory. It is true that all holy souls are not capable of exercising this explicit preference for God over themselves, but there must at least be an implicit preference; the former, which is more perfect, is reserved for those whom God has endowed with light and strength to prefer Him to themselves, to such a degree as to desire their own happiness simply because it adds to his glory.

Men have a great repugnance to this truth, and consider it to be a very hard saying, because they are lovers of self from self-interest. They understand, in a general and superficial way, that they must love God more than all his creatures, but they have no conception of loving God more than themselves, and loving themselves only for Him. They can utter these great words without difficulty, because they do not enter into their meaning, but they shudder when it is explained to them, that God and his glory are to be preferred before ourselves and everything else to such a degree that we must love his glory more than our own happiness, and must refer the latter to the former, as a subordinate means to an end.

IV. ON PRAYER AND THE PRINCIPAL EXERCISES OF PIETY.

1. True prayer is only another name for the love of God. Its excellence does not consist in the multitude of our words; for our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him. The true prayer is that of the heart, and the heart prays only for what it desires. To pray, then is to desire – but to desire what God would have us desire. He who asks what he does not from the bottom of his heart desire, is mistaken in thinking that he prays. Let him spend days in reciting prayers, in meditation or in inciting himself to pious exercises, he prays not once truly, if he really desire not the things he pretends to ask.

2. O! how few there are who pray! for how few are they who desire what is truly good! Crosses, external and internal humiliation, renouncement of our own wills, the death of self and the establishment of God's throne upon the

ruins of self love, these are indeed good; not to desire these, is not to pray; to desire them seriously, soberly, constantly, and with reference to all the details of life, this is true prayer; not to desire them, and yet to suppose we pray, is an illusion like that of the wretched who dream themselves happy. Alas! how many souls full of self, and of an imaginary desire for perfection in the midst of hosts of voluntary imperfections, have never yet uttered this true prayer of the heart! It is in reference to this that St. Augustine says: He that loveth little, prayeth little; he that loveth much, prayeth much.

3. On the other hand, that heart in which the true love of God and true desire exist, never ceases to pray. Love, hid in the bottom of the soul, prays without ceasing, even when the mind is drawn another way. God continually beholds the desire which He has himself implanted in the soul, though it may at times be unconscious of its existence; his heart is touched by it; it ceaselessly attracts his mercies; it is that Spirit which, according to St. Paul, helpeth our infirmities and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Rom. viii. 26.)

4. Love desires of God that he would give us what we need, and that He would have less regard to our frailty than to the purity of our intentions. It even covers over our trifling defects, and purifies us like a consuming fire; "He maketh intercession for the Saints, according to the will of God. (Rom. viii. 27.) For "we know not what we should pray for as we ought," and, in our ignorance, frequently request what would be injurious; we should like fervor of devotion, distinct sensible joys and apparent perfections, which would serve to nourish within us the life of self and a confidence in our own strength; but love leads us on, abandons us to all the operations of grace, puts us entirely at the disposal of God's will, and thus prepares us for all his secret designs.

5. Then we will all things and yet nothing. What God gives, is precisely what we should have desired to ask; for we will whatever He wills and only that. Thus, this state contains all prayer: it is a work of the heart which includes all desire. The Spirit prays within us for those very things which the Spirit himself wills to give us. Even when we are occupied with outward things, and our

thoughts drawn off by the providential engagements of our position, we still carry within us a constantly burning fire, which not only cannot be extinguished, but nourishes a secret prayer, and is like a lamp continually lighted before the throne of God, "I sleep but my heart waketh." (Sol. Song v. 2.) "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh, shall find watching." (Luke xii. 37.)

6. There are two principal points of attention necessary for the preservation of this constant spirit of prayer which unites us with God: we must continually seek to cherish it, and we must avoid everything that tends to make us lose it.

In order to cherish it, we should pursue a regulated course of reading; we must have appointed seasons of secret prayer, and frequent states of recollection during the day; we should make use of retirement when we feel the need of it, or when it is advised by those of greater experience, and unite in the ordinances appropriate to our condition.

We should greatly fear and be exceedingly cautious to avoid all things that have a tendency to make us lose this state of prayer. Thus we should decline those worldly occupations and associates which dissipate the mind, pleasures which excite the passions, and everything calculated to awaken the love of the world and those old inclinations that have caused us so much trouble.

There is an infinity of detail in these two heads; general directions only can be given, because each individual case presents features peculiar to itself.

7. We should choose those works for reading which instruct us in our duty and in our faults; which, while they point out the greatness of God, teach us what is our duty to Him, and how very far we are from performing it; not those barren productions which melt and sentimentalize the heart; the tree must bear fruit; we can only judge of the life of the root by its fecundity.

8. The first effect of a sincere love is an earnest desire to know all that we ought to do to gratify the object of our affection. Any other desire is a proof that we love ourselves under a pretence of loving God; that we are seeking an empty and deceitful consolation in Him; that we would use God as an instrument

for our pleasure, instead of sacrificing that for his glory. God forbid that his children should so love Him! Cost what it may, we must both know and do without reservation what he requires of us.

9. Seasons of secret prayer must be regulated by the leisure, the disposition, the condition, and the inward impulse of each individual.

Meditation is not prayer, but it is its necessary foundation; it brings to mind the truths which God has revealed. We should be conversant not only with all the mysteries of Jesus Christ, and the truths of his Gospel, but also with everything they ought to operate in us for our regeneration; we should be colored and penetrated by them as wool is by the dye.

10. So familiar should they become to us, that, in consequence of seeing them at all times and ever near to us, we may acquire the habit of forming no judgment except in their light; that they may be to us our only guide in matters of practice, as the rays of the sun are our only light in matters of perception.

When these truths are once, as it were, incorporated in us, then it is that our praying begins to be real and fruitful. Up to that point it was but the shadow; we thought we had penetrated to the inmost recesses of the gospel, when we had barely set foot upon the vestibule – all our most tender and lively feelings, all our firmest resolutions, all our clearest and farthest views, were but the rough and shapeless mass from which God would hew in us his likeness.

11. When his celestial rays begin to shine within us, then we see in the true light; then there is no truth to which we do not instantaneously assent, as we admit, without any process of reasoning, the splendor of the sun, the moment we behold his rising beams. Our union with God must be the result of our faithfulness in doing and suffering all his will.

12. Our meditations should become every day deeper and more interior. I say deeper, because by frequent and humble meditation upon God's truth, we penetrate farther and farther in search of new treasures; and more interior, because as we sink more and more to enter into these truths, they also descend

to penetrate the very substance of our souls. Then it is that a simple word goes farther than whole sermons.

13. The very things which had been, fruitlessly and coldly, heard a hundred times before, now nourish the soul with a hidden manna, having an infinite variety of flavors for days in succession. Let us beware, too, of ceasing to meditate upon truths which have heretofore been blessed to us, so long as there remains any nourishment in them, so long as they yet yield us anything; it is a certain sign that we still need their ministration; we derive instruction from them without receiving any precise or distinct impression; there is an indescribable something in them, which helps us more than all our reasonings. We behold a truth, we love it and repose upon it; it strengthens the soul and detaches us from ourselves; let us dwell upon it in peace as long as possible.

14. As to the manner of meditating, it should not be subtle, nor composed of long reasonings; simple and natural reflections derived immediately from the subject of our thoughts are all that is required.

We need take a few truths; meditate upon these without hurry, without effort, and without seeking for far-fetched reflections.

Every truth should be considered with reference to its practical bearing. To receive it without employing all means to put it faithfully in practice at whatever cost, is to desire "to hold the truth in unrighteousness" (Rom. i. 18); it is a resistance to the truth impressed upon us, and of course, to the Holy Spirit. This is the most terrible of all unfaithfulness.

15. As to a method in prayer, each one must be guided by his own experience. Those who find themselves profited in using a strict method, need not depart from it, while those who cannot so confine themselves, may make use of their own mode, without ceasing to respect that which has been useful to many, and which so many pious and experienced persons have highly recommended. A method is intended to assist; if it be found to embarrass, instead of assisting, the sooner it is discarded the better.

16. The most natural mode, at first, is to take a book, and to cease reading whenever we feel so inclined by the passage upon which we are engaged, and, whenever that no longer ministers to our interior nourishment, to begin again. As a general rule, those truths which we highly relish, and which shed a degree of practical light upon the things which we are required to give up for God, are leadings of Divine Grace, which we should follow without hesitation. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, (John iii. 8,) and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (2 Cor. iii. 17.)

In the course of time the proportion of reflections and reasonings will diminish, and that of tender feelings, affecting views and desires, will increase as we become sufficiently instructed and convinced by the Holy Spirit. The heart is satisfied, nourished, warmed, set on fire; a word only will give it employment for a long time.

17. Finally, increase of prayer is indicated by an increase of simplicity and steadiness in our views, a great multitude of objects and considerations being no longer necessary. Our intercourse with God resembles that with a friend; at first, there are a thousand things to be told, and as many to be asked; but after a time, these diminish, while the pleasure of being together does not. Everything has been said, but the satisfaction of seeing each other, of feeling that one is near the other, or reposing in the enjoyment of a pure and sweet friendship, can be felt without conversation; the silence is eloquent and mutually understood. Each feels that the other is in perfect sympathy with him, and that their two hearts are incessantly poured one into the other, and constitute but one.

18. Thus it is that in prayer, our communion with God becomes a simple and familiar union, far beyond the need of words. But let it be remembered that God himself must alone institute this prayer within us; nothing would be more rash nor more dangerous, than to dare to attempt it of ourselves. We must suffer ourselves to be led step by step, by some one conversant with the ways of God, who may lay the immovable foundations of correct teaching, and of the complete death of self in everything.

19. As regards retirement and attending upon ordinances, we must be governed by the advice of some one in whom we have confidence. Our own necessities, the effect produced upon us, and many other circumstances, are to be taken into consideration.

20. Our leisure and our needs must regulate our retirements; our needs, because it is with the soul as with the body; when we can no longer work without nourishment, we must take it; we shall otherwise be in danger of fainting. Our leisure, because, this absolute necessity of food excepted, we must attend to duty before we seek enjoyment in spiritual exercises. The man who has public duties and spends the time appropriate to them in meditating in retirement, would miss of God while he was seeking to be united to Him. True union with God is to do his will without ceasing, in spite of all our natural disinclination and in every duty of life, however disagreeable or mortifying.

21. As precautions against wanderings we must avoid close and intimate intercourse with those who are not pious, especially when we have been before led astray by their infectious maxims. They will open our wounds afresh: they have a secret correspondence deep in our souls; there is there a soft and insinuating counsellor who is always ready to blind and deceive us.

22. Would you judge of a man? says the Holy Spirit. (Prov. xiii. 20.) Observe who are his companions. How can he who loves God, and who loves nothing except in and for God, enjoy the intimate companionship of those who neither love, nor know God, and who look upon love to Him as a weakness? Can a heart full of God and sensible of its own frailty, ever rest, and be at ease with those who have no feelings in common with it, but are ever seeking to rob it of its treasure? Their delights, and the pleasures of which Faith is the source, are incompatible.

23. I am well aware that we cannot, nay, that we ought not to break with those friends to whom we are bound by esteem of their natural amiability, by their services, by the tie of sincere friendship, or by the regard consequent upon mutual good offices. Friends whom we have treated with a certain familiarity

and confidence, would be wounded to the quick, were we to separate from them entirely; we must gently and imperceptibly diminish our intercourse with them, without abruptly declaring our alteration of sentiment; we may see them in private, distinguish them from our less intimate friends, and confide to them those matters in which their integrity and friendship enable them to give us good advice, and to think with us, although our reasons for so thinking are more pure and elevated than theirs. In short, we may continue to serve them, and to manifest all the attentions of a cordial friendship, without suffering our hearts to be embarrassed by them.

24. How perilous is our state without this precaution! If we do not, from the first, boldly adopt all measures to render our piety entirely free and independent of our unregenerate friends, it is threatened with a speedy downfall. If a man surrounded by such companions be of a yielding disposition and inflammable passions, it is certain that his friends, even the best-intentioned ones, will lead him astray. They may be good, honest, faithful, and possessed of all those qualities which render friendship perfect in the eye of the world; but, for him, they are infected, and their amiability only increases the danger. Those who have not this estimable character, should be sacrificed at once; blessed are we, when a sacrifice that ought to cost us so little, may avail to give us so precious a security for our eternal salvation!

25. Not only, then, should we be exceedingly careful whom we will see, but we must also reserve the necessary time that we may see God alone in prayer. Those who have stations of importance to fill, have generally so many indispensable duties to perform, that without the greatest care in the management of their time, none will be left to be alone with God. If they have ever so little inclination for dissipation, the hours that belong to God and their neighbor disappear altogether.

We must be firm in observing our rules. This strictness seems excessive, but without it everything falls into confusion; we become dissipated, relaxed and lose strength; we insensibly separate from God, surrender ourselves to all our

pleasures, and only then begin to perceive that we have wandered, when it is almost hopeless to think of endeavoring to return.

Prayer, prayer! this is our only safety. "Blessed be God which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me." (Ps. 116:20.) And to be faithful in prayer it is indispensable that we should dispose all the employments of the day, with a regularity nothing can disturb.

V. ON CONFORMITY TO THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

We must imitate Jesus; live as He lived, think as He thought, and be conformed to his image, which is the seal of our sanctification.

What a contrast! Nothingness strives to be something, and the Omnipotent becomes nothing! I will be nothing with Thee, my Lord! I offer Thee the pride and vanity which have possessed me hitherto. Help Thou my will; remove from me occasions of my stumbling; turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity (Psalm cxviii. 37); let me behold nothing but Thee and myself in thy presence, that I may understand what I am and what Thou art.

Jesus Christ was born in a stable; he was obliged to fly into Egypt; thirty years of his life were spent in a workshop; he suffered hunger, thirst, and weariness; he was poor, despised and miserable; he taught the doctrines of Heaven, and no one would listen. The great and the wise persecuted and took him, subjected him to frightful torments, treated him as a slave and put him to death between two malefactors, having preferred to give liberty to a robber, rather than to suffer him to escape. Such was the life which our Lord chose; while we are horrified at any kind of humiliation, and cannot bear the slightest appearance of contempt.

Let us compare our lives with that of Jesus Christ, reflecting that he was the Master and that we are the servants; that He was all-powerful, and that we are but weakness; that he was abased and that we are exalted. Let us so constantly bear our wretchedness in mind, that we may have nothing but contempt for ourselves. With what face can we despise others, and dwell upon their faults,

when we ourselves are filled with nothing else? Let us begin to walk in the path which our Saviour has marked out, for it is the only one that can lead us to Him.

And how can we expect to find Jesus if we do not seek Him in the states of his earthly life, in loneliness and silence, in poverty and suffering, in persecution and contempt, in annihilation and the cross? The saints find him in heaven, in the splendors of glory and in unspeakable pleasures; but it is only after having dwelt with Him on earth in reproaches, in pain and in humiliation. To be a Christian is to be an imitator of Jesus Christ. In what can we imitate Him if not in his humiliation? Nothing else can bring us near to Him. We may adore him as Omnipotent, fear him as just, love him with all our heart as good and merciful, – but we can only imitate him as humble, submissive, poor and despised.

Let us not imagine that we can do this by our own efforts; everything that is written is opposed to it; but we may rejoice in the presence of God. Jesus has chosen to be made partaker of all our weaknesses; He is a compassionate high-priest who has voluntarily submitted to be tempted in all points like as we are; let us, then, have all our strength in Him who became weak that he might strengthen us; let us enrich ourselves out of his poverty, confidently exclaiming, I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. (Philip. iv. 13.)

Let me follow in thy footsteps, O Jesus! I would imitate Thee, but cannot without the aid of thy grace! O humble and lowly Saviour, grant me the knowledge of the true Christian, and that I may willingly despise myself; let me learn the lesson, so incomprehensible to the mind of man, that I must die to myself by an abandonment that shall produce true humility.

Let us earnestly engage in this work, and change this hard heart, so rebellious to the heart of Jesus Christ. Let us make some approaches toward the holy soul of Jesus; let Him animate our souls and destroy all our repugnances. O lovely Jesus! who hast suffered so many injuries and reproaches for my sake, let me esteem and love them for thine, and let me desire to share thy life of humiliation!

VI. ON HUMILITY.

What a mercy is humiliation to a soul that receives it with a steadfast faith! There are a thousand blessings in it for ourselves and for others; for our Lord bestows his grace upon the humble. Humility renders us charitable towards our neighbor; nothing will make us so tender and indulgent to the faults of others as a view of our own.

Two things produce humility when combined; the first is a sight of the abyss of wretchedness from which the all-powerful hand of God has snatched us, and over which he still holds us, as it were, suspected in the air, and the other is the presence of that God who is ALL.

Our faults, even those most difficult to bear, will all be of service to us, if we make use of them for our humiliation, without relaxing our efforts to correct them. It does no good to be discouraged; it is the result of a disappointed and despairing self-love. The true method of profiting by the humiliation of our faults, is to behold them in all their deformity, without losing our hope in God, and without having any confidence in ourselves.

We must bear with ourselves without either flattery or discouragement, a mean seldom attained; for we either expect great things of ourselves and of our good intentions, or wholly despair. We must hope nothing for self, but wait for everything from God. Utter despair of ourselves, in consequence of a conviction of our helplessness, and unbounded confidence in God, are the true foundations of the spiritual edifice.

That is a false humility, which, acknowledging itself unworthy of the gifts of God, dares not confidently expect them; true humility consists in a deep view of our utter unworthiness, and in an absolute abandonment to God, without the slightest doubt that He will do the greatest things in us.

Those who are truly humble, will be surprised to hear anything exalted of themselves. They are mild and peaceful, of a contrite and humble heart, merciful and compassionate; they are quiet, cheerful, obedient, watchful,

fervent in spirit and incapable of strife; they always take the lowest place, rejoice when they are despised, and consider every one superior to themselves; they are lenient to the faults of others in view of their own, and very far from preferring themselves before any one. We may judge of our advancement in humility, by the delight we have in humiliations and contempt.

VII. ON PRAYER

Many are tempted to believe that they no longer pray, when they cease to enjoy a certain pleasure in the act of prayer. But, if they will reflect that perfect prayer is only another name for love to God, they will be undeceived.

Prayer, then, does not consist in sweet feelings, nor in the charms of an excited imagination, nor in that illumination of the intellect that traces with ease the sublimest truths in God; nor even in a certain consolation in the view of God: all these things are external gifts from his hand, in the absence of which, love may exist even more purely, as the soul may then attach itself immediately and solely to God, instead of to his mercies.

This is that love by naked faith which is the death of nature, because it leaves it no support; and when we are convinced that all is lost, that very conviction is the evidence that all is gained.

Pure love is in the will alone; it is no sentimental love, for the imagination has no part in it; it loves, if we may so express it, without feeling, as faith believes without seeing. We need not fear that this love is an imaginary thing – nothing can be less so than the mere will separate from all imagination: the more purely intellectual and spiritual are the operations of our minds, the nearer are they, not only to reality but to the perfection which God requires of us: their working is more perfect; faith is in full exercise while humility is preserved.

Such love is chaste: for it is the love of God in and for God; we are attached to Him, but not for the pleasure which he bestows on us; we follow Him, but not for the loaves and fishes.

What! some may say, can it be that a simple will to be united with God, is the whole of piety? How can we be assured that this will is not a mere idea, a trick of the imagination, instead of a true willing of the soul?

I should indeed believe that it was a deception, if it were not the parent of faithfulness on all proper occasions; for a good tree bringeth forth good fruit; and a true will makes us truly earnest and diligent in doing the will of God; but it is still compatible in this life with little failings which are permitted by God that the soul may be humbled. If, then, we experience only these little daily frailties, let us not be discouraged, but extract from them their proper fruit, humility.

True virtue and pure love reside in the will alone. Is it not a great matter always to desire the Supreme Good whenever He is seen; to keep the mind steadily turned towards Him, and to bring it back whenever it is perceived to wander; to will nothing advisedly but according to his order; in short, in the absence of all sensible enjoyment, still to remain the same in the spirit of a submissive, irreclaimable burnt-offering? Think you it is nothing to repress all the uneasy reflections of self-love; to press forward continually without knowing whither we go, and yet without stopping; to cease from self-satisfied thoughts of self, or at least, to think of ourselves as we would of another; to fulfill the indications of Providence for the moment, and no further? Is not this more likely to be the death of the Old Adam than fine sentiments, in which we are, in fact, thinking only of self, or external acts, in the performance of which we congratulate self on our advancement?

It is a sort of infidelity to simple faith when we desire to be continually assured that we are doing well; it is, in fact, to desire to know what we are doing, which we shall never know, and of which it is the will of God that we should be ignorant. It is trifling by the way in order to reason about the way. The safest and shortest course is to renounce, forget and abandon self, and through faithfulness to God to think no more of it. This is the whole of religion – to get out of self and of self-love in order to get into God.

As to involuntary wanderings, they are no hinderance to love, inasmuch as love is in the will, and the will only wanders when it wills to wander. As soon as we perceive that they have occurred, we drop them instantly and return to God, and thus, while the external senses of the spouse are asleep, the heart is watching; its love knows no intermission. A tender parent does not always bear his son distinctly in mind; he thinks and imagines a thousand things disconnected with him, but they do not interfere with the paternal affection; the moment that his thoughts rest again upon his child, he loves, and feels in the depths of his soul that though he has ceased to think of him he has not for an instant failed to love him. Such should be our love to our Heavenly Father; a love simple, trustful, confident and without anxiety.

If our imagination take wing and our thoughts wander, let us not be perplexed; all these things are not that "hidden man of the heart in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," of which St. Peter speaks. (1 Pet. iii. 4.) Let us only turn our thoughts, whenever we can, towards the face of the Well-beloved without being troubled at our wanderings. When He shall see fit to enable us to preserve a more constant sense of his presence with us, He will do so.

He sometimes removes it for our advancement; it amuses us with too many reflections which are true distractions, diverting the mind from a simple and direct look toward God and withdrawing us from the shades of naked faith.

We often seek in these reflections a resting-place for our self-love and consolation in the testimony we endeavor to extract from them for self; and thus the warmth of our feelings causes us to wander. On the contrary, we never pray so purely as when we are tempted to believe that we do not pray at all; we fear that we pray ill, but we should only fear being left to the desolation of sinful nature, to a philosophical infidelity, seeking perpetually a demonstration of its own operations in faith; in short, to impatient desires for consolation in sight and feeling.

There is no more bitter penance than this state of pure faith without sensible support; and hence it seems to me the most effective, the most crucifying, and the least illusive. Strange temptation! We look impatiently for sensible consolation from the fear of not being penitent enough! Ah! why do we not consider the renouncement of that consolation which we are so strongly tempted to seek, as a proof of our penitence? Remember our Lord abandoned by his Father on the cross: all feeling, all reflection withdrawn that his God might be hidden from him; this was indeed the last blow that fell upon the man of sorrows, the consummation of the sacrifice!

Never should we so abandon ourselves to God as when He seems to abandon us. Let us enjoy light and consolation when it is his pleasure to give it to us, but let us not attach ourselves to his gifts, but to Him; and when He plunges us into the night of Pure Faith, let us still press on through the agonizing darkness.

Moments are worth days in this tribulation; the soul is troubled and yet at peace; not only is God hidden from it, but it is hidden from itself, that all may be of faith; it is discouraged, but feels nevertheless an immovable will to bear all that God may choose to inflict; it wills all, accepts all, even the troubles that try its faith, and thus in the very height of the tempest, the waters beneath are secretly calm and at peace, because its Will is one with God's. Blessed be the Lord who performeth such great things in us, notwithstanding our unworthiness!

VIII. ON MEDITATION.

When the solid foundations of a perfect conversion of heart, a scrupulous repentance and a serious meditation of all the Christian virtues have been laid, both theoretically and practically, we become gradually so accustomed to these truths, that we regard them at last with a simple and steady look, without the necessity of going back to examine and convince ourselves of each of them in detail. They are then all embraced in a certain enjoyment of God, so pure and

so intimate, that we find everything in Him. It is no longer the intellect that examines and reasons; it is the will which loves and plunges into the infinite Good.

But this is not your state. You must walk for a long while in the way of the sinners who are beginning to seek God; ordinary meditation is your lot, too happy that God condescends to admit you to it.

Walk then in the spirit, like Abraham, without knowing whither you go; be content with your daily bread, and remember that in the desert the manna of to-day could not be preserved until to-morrow without corrupting. The children of God must be shut up to the grace of the present moment, without desiring to foresee the designs of Providence concerning them.

Meditate, then, since now is your opportunity, upon all the mysteries of Jesus Christ and upon all the Gospel truths which you have for so long a time ignored and rejected. When God shall have entirely effaced from your mind the impression of all your worldly maxims, and the Spirit shall have left there no trace of your old prejudices, then it will be necessary to ascertain the direction in which you are attracted by grace, and to follow step by step without anticipating.

In the meantime, dwell in peace in the bosom of God, like a little child on the breast of its mother; be satisfied with thinking on your chosen subject simply and easily; suffer yourself to be led gently to the truths which affect you, and which you find to nourish your heart. Avoid all exertions that excite the intellect, which often tempt us to believe that there is more piety in a dangerous vivacity of the imagination, than in a pure and upright intention of abandonment to God. Avoid likewise all refined speculation; confine yourself to simple reflections, and recur to them frequently. Those who pass too rapidly from one truth to another, feed their curiosity and restlessness; they even distract their intellect by too great a multiplicity of views.

Give every truth time to send down deep roots into the heart; the main point is – to love. Nothing gives rise to such severe fits of indigestion as eating

too much and too hastily. Digest every truth leisurely, if you would extract the essence of it for your nourishment, but let there be no restless self-reflective acts. Be sure that your exercise will not be acceptable unless performed without agitation or tumult.

I am well aware that you will have distractions enough; bear them without impatience, dismiss them and recur quietly to your subject as soon as you perceive that your imagination has wandered. In this way these involuntary distractions will produce no injurious effects, and the patience with which you bear them without being discouraged, will advance you farther than a more continuous meditation, in which you might take more self-satisfaction. The true method of conquering wandering thoughts, is never to attack them directly with bitterness, and never to be discouraged by their frequency or duration.

Suffer yourself, then, to be quietly occupied by the subject you have chosen; only let the exercise be as holy as you can make it, to which end take the following directions:

Do not encumber yourself with a great number of thoughts upon a subject; but dwell upon each sufficiently long to allow it to afford its proper nourishment to the heart. You will gradually become accustomed to regard each truth steadily by itself, without flitting from one to another; this habit will serve to fix them deeply in your soul. You will thus, also, acquire a habit of dwelling upon your themes with pleasure and peaceful acquiescence, instead of considering them rapidly and intellectually as most persons do. Thus the foundations will be firmly laid for all that God intends to do in you; he will thus mortify the natural activity of the mind, that ever inclines it to seek novelties, instead of deeply imprinting the truths already in some degree familiar. You must not, however, forcibly restrain your mind to a subject which no longer seems to afford any nourishment; I would advise only that you should not abandon it so long as it still ministers food.

As to your affections, retain all which the view of your subject naturally and quietly induces; but do not attempt to stir yourself up to great efforts, for

they will exhaust and agitate you, and even cause aridities; they will occupy you too much with your own exertions, and implant a dangerous confidence in your own power; in short, they will attach you too firmly to sensible pleasures, and will thus prepare you great trouble in a time of dryness. Be content, then, to follow with simplicity, and without too many reflections, the emotions which God shall excite in view of your subject, or of any other truth. As for higher things, have no thoughts of them; there is a time for everything, and it is of the greatest importance that nothing should be precipitated.

One of the cardinal rules of the spiritual life is, that we are to live exclusively in the present moment, without casting a look beyond. You remember that the Israelites in the desert followed the pillar of fire, or of cloud, without knowing whither it was leading them; they had a supply of manna but for one day; all above that became useless. There is no necessity now for moving rapidly; think only of laying a solid foundation; see that it is deep and broad by an absolute renunciation of self, and by an abandonment without reserve to the requirements of God. Let God, then, raise upon this foundation such a building as He pleases. Shut your eyes and commit yourself to Him. How wonderful is this walking with Abraham in pure faith, not knowing whither we go! and how full of blessings is the path!

God will then be your guide; He himself will travel with you, as we are told He did with the Israelites, to bring them step by step across the desert to the promised land. Ah! what will be your blessedness if you will but surrender yourself into the hands of God, permitting him to do whatever He will, not according to your desires, but according to His own good pleasure!

IX. ON MORTIFICATION.

God calls us hourly and momentarily to the exercise of mortification; but nothing can be more false than the maxim that we should always choose that which mortifies us the most. Such a plan would soon destroy our health, our reputation, our business, our intercourse with our relatives and friends, and

the good works which Providence requires of us. I have no hesitation in saying that we ought to avoid certain things which experience has shown us to injure our health, such as certain kinds of food, etc. This course will, no doubt, spare us some suffering; but it does not tend to pamper the body nor require the employment of expensive or delicious substitutes; on the contrary, it conduces to a sober, and, therefore, in many respects, mortified life.

Failures in regimen are owing to a want of mortification; they are not due either to courage in enduring pain, or to indifference to life, but to a weak hankering for pleasure, and impatience of anything that annoys. Submitting to regimen for the purpose of preserving health, is a great constraint; we would much rather suffer and be sick, than be constantly restraining our appetites; we love liberty and pleasure more than health. But God arranges all that in the heart which is devoted to Him; He causes us to fall in quietly with every regulation, and takes away a certain want of pliability in the will, and a dangerous confidence in ourselves; He blunts the desires, cools the passions, and detaches the man, not only from exterior things, but from self, renders him mild, amiable, simple, lowly, ready to will or not, according to His good pleasure. Let it be so with us; God desires it, and is ready to effect it; let us not resist his will. The mortification which comes in the order of God, is more serviceable than any enjoyment in devotion which should result from our own affection and choice.

In regard to austerities, every one must regard his attraction, his state, his need and his temperament. A simple mortification, consisting in nothing more than an unshaken fidelity in providential crosses, is often far more valuable than severe austerities which render the life more marked, and tempt to a vain self-complacency. Whoever will refuse nothing which comes in the order of God, and seek nothing out of that order, need never fear to finish his day's work without partaking of the cross of Jesus Christ. There is an indispensable Providence for crosses as well as for the necessities of life; they are a part of our daily bread; God never will suffer it to fail. It is sometimes a very useful mortification to certain fervent souls, to give up their own plans

of mortification, and adopt with cheerfulness those which are momentarily revealed in the order of God.

When a soul is not faithful in providential mortifications, there is reason to fear some illusion in those which are sought through the fervor of devotion; such warmth is often deceitful, and it seems to me that a soul in this case would do well to examine its faithfulness under the daily crosses allotted by Providence.

X. ON SELF-ABANDONMENT.

If you would fully comprehend the meaning of self-abandonment, [1] recall the interior difficulty which you felt, and which you very naturally testified when I directed you always to count as nothing this self which is so dear to us. To abandon one's self is to count one's self as nought; and he who has perceived the difficulty of doing it, has already learned what that renunciation is, which so revolts our nature. Since you have felt the blow, it is evident that it has fallen upon the sore spot in your heart; let the all-powerful hand of God work in you as he well knows how, to tear you from yourself.

The origin of our trouble is, that we love ourselves with a blind passion that amounts to idolatry. If we love anything beyond, it is only for our own sakes. We must be undeceived respecting all those generous friendships, in which it appears as though we so far forgot ourselves as to think only of the interests of our friend. If the motive of our friendship be not low and gross, it is nevertheless still selfish; and the more delicate, the more concealed, and the more proper in the eyes of the world it is, the more dangerous does it become, and the more likely to poison us by feeding our self-love.

In those friendships which appear, both to ourselves and to the world, so generous and disinterested, we seek, in short, the pleasure of loving without recompense, and by the indulgence of so noble a sentiment, of raising ourselves above the weak and sordid of our race. Besides the tribute which we pay to our own pride, we seek from the world the reputation of disinterestedness and generosity; we desire to be loved by our friends, although we do not desire to be

served by them; we hope that they will be charmed with what we do for them without any expectation of return; and in this way we get that very return which we seem to despise: for what is more delicious to a delicate self-love, than to hear itself applauded for not being self-love?

You may have seen some one who seemed to think of every one but himself, who was the delight of good people, who was well disciplined, and seemed entirely forgetful of self. The self-oblivion is so great that self-love even would imitate it, and finds no glory equal to that of seeming to seek none at all. This moderation and self-renunciation which, if genuine, would be the death of nature, become, on the other hand, the most subtle and imperceptible food of a pride which despises all ordinary forms of glory, and desires only that which is to be secured by trampling under foot all the gross objects of ambition which captivate ordinary minds.

But it is not a difficult matter to unmask this modest arrogance – this pride which seems no pride at all, so much does it appear to have renounced all the ordinary objects of desire. Condemn it and it cannot bear to be found fault with; let those whom it loves fail to repay it with friendship, esteem, and confidence, and it is stung to the quick. It is easy to see that it is not disinterested, though it tries so hard to seem so: it does not indeed accept payment in as gross coin as others; it does not desire insipid praise, or money, or that good fortune which consists in office and dignities. It must be paid, nevertheless; it is greedy of the esteem of good people; it loves that it may be loved again and be admired for its disinterestedness; it seems to forget self, that, by that means, it may draw the attention of the whole world upon self alone.

It does not, indeed, make all these reflections in full detail; it does not say in so many words, I will deceive the whole world with my generosity, in order that the world may love and admire me; no, it would not dare to address such a gross and unworthy language to itself; it deceives itself with the rest of the world; it admires itself in its generosity, as a belle admires her beauty in a mirror; it is affected by perceiving that it is more generous and more disinterested than the rest of mankind; the illusion it prepares for others extends to itself; it passes

with itself for what it passes itself upon others, that is, for generosity, and this is what pleases it more than anything else.

However little we may have looked within to study the occasions of our pleasure and our grief, we shall have no difficulty in admitting that pride, as it is more or less delicate, has various tastes. But give it what taste you will, it is still pride; and that which appears the most restrained and the most reasonable is the most devilish; in esteeming itself, it despises others; it pities those who are pleased with foolish vanities; it recognizes the emptiness of greatness and rank; it cannot abide those who are intoxicated with good fortune; it would, by its moderation, be above fortune, and thus raise itself to a new height, by putting under foot all the false glory of men; like Lucifer, it would become like to the Most High. It would be a sort of divinity, above all human passions and interests, and it does not perceive that it seeks to place itself above men by this deceitful pride which blinds it.

We may be sure, then, that it is the love of God only that can make us come out of self. If his powerful hand did not sustain us, we should not know how to take the first step in that direction.

There is no middle course; we must refer everything either to God or to self; if to self, we have no other God than self; if to God, we are then in order, and regarding ourselves only as one among the other creatures of God, without selfish interests, and with a single eye to accomplish his will, we enter into that self-abandonment which you desire so earnestly to understand.

But let me say again, that nothing will so shut your heart against the grace of abandonment, as that philosophic pride and self love in the disguise of worldly generosity, of which you should be especially in fear, on account of your natural disposition towards it. The greater our inherent endowment of frankness, disinteredness, pleasure in doing good, delicacy of feeling, love of honor, and generous friendship, the more lively should be our distrust of self, and our fear lest we take complacency in these gifts of nature.

The reason why no creature can draw us out of ourselves is, that there is none that deserves to be preferred before ourselves. There is none which has the right so to detach us, nor the perfection which would be necessary to unite us to them without reference to ourselves, nor the power to satisfy the soul in such an attachment. Hence it is that we love nothing out of ourselves, except for the reference it has to self; we choose under the direction of our coarse and brutal passions, if we are low and boorish, or under the guidance of a refined desire for glory, if we are so delicate as not to be satisfied with what is gross and vulgar.

But God does two things, which He only has the power to do. He reveals himself to us, with all his rights over the creature, and in all the charms of his goodness. Then we feel that, not having made ourselves, we are not made for ourselves; that we are created for the glory of Him whom it has pleased to form us; that He is too great to make anything except for Himself, and that thus all our perfection and our happiness should be to be lost in Him.

This is what no created thing, dazzling though it may be, can make us realize in respect to itself. Far from finding in them that infinity which so fills and transports us in God, we discover only a void, a powerlessness to fill our hearts, an imperfection that continually drives us into ourselves.

The second miracle which God works is, to operate in our hearts that which He pleases, after having enlightened our understanding. He is not satisfied with having displayed his own charms; He makes us love Him by producing, by his grace, his love in our hearts; and He thus himself performs within us, what He makes us see we owe to Him.

You desire, perhaps, to know more in detail in what this self-abandonment consists. I will endeavor to satisfy you.

There is little difficulty in comprehending that we must reject criminal pleasures, unjust gains, and gross vanities, because the renouncement of these things consists in a contempt which repudiates them absolutely, and forbids our deriving any enjoyment from them; but it is not so easy to understand that we

must abandon property honestly acquired, the pleasures of a modest and well-spent life, and the honors derivable from a good reputation, and a virtue which elevates us above the reach of envy.

The reason why we do not understand that these things must be given up, is, that we are not required to discard them with dislike, but, on the contrary, to preserve them to be used according to the station in which the Divine Providence places us.

We have need of the consolation of a mild and peaceful life, to console us under its troubles; in respect to honors, we must regard "that which is convenient," and we must keep the property we possess to supply our wants. How then are we to renounce these things at the very moment when we are occupied in the care of preserving them? We are, moderately and without inordinate emotion, to do what is in our power to retain them, in order to make a sober use of them, without desiring to enjoy them or placing our hearts upon them.

I say, a sober use of them, because, when we are not attached to a thing for the purposes of self-enjoyment and of seeking our happiness in it, we use only so much of it as we are necessarily obliged to; as you may see a wise and faithful steward study to appropriate only so much of his master's property as is precisely requisite to meet his necessary wants.

The abandonment of evil things then, consists in refusing them with horror; of good things, in using them with moderation for our necessities, continually studying to retrench all those imaginary wants with which greedy nature would flatter herself.

Remember that we must not only renounce evil, but also good things; for Jesus has said, "Whatsoever he be of you that forsaketh not all he hath, he cannot be my disciple." (Luke xiv. 33.)

It follows, then, that the Christian must abandon everything that he has, however innocent; for, if he do not renounce it, it ceases to be innocent.

He must abandon those things which it is his duty to guard with the greatest possible care, such as the good of his family, or his own reputation, for he must have his heart on none of these things; he must preserve them for a sober and moderate use; in short, he must be ready to give them all up whenever it is the will of Providence to deprive him of them.

He must give up those whom he loves best, and whom it is his duty to love; and his renouncement of them consists in this, that he is to love them for God only; to make use of the consolation of their friendship soberly, and for the supply of his wants; to be ready to part with them whenever God wills it, and never to seek in them the true repose of his heart. This is that chastity of true Christian friendship which seeks in the mortal and earthly friend, only the heavenly spouse. It is thus that we use the world and the creature as not abusing them, according to Saint Paul. (1 Cor. vii. 31.) We do not desire to take pleasure in them; we only use what God gives us, what he wills that we should love, and what we accept with the reserve of a heart, receiving it only for necessity's sake, and keeping itself for a more worthy object.

It is in this sense that Christ would have us leave father and mother, brothers and sisters, and friends, and that he is come to bring a sword upon earth.

God is a jealous God; if, in the recesses of your soul, you are attached to any creature, your heart is not worthy of Him: He must reject it as a spouse that divides her affections between her bridegroom and a stranger.

Having abandoned everything exterior, and which is not self, it remains to complete the sacrifice by renouncing everything interior, including self.

The renouncement of the body is frightful to most delicate and worldly-minded persons. They know nothing, so to speak, that is more themselves than this body, which they flatter and adorn with so much care; and even when deprived of its graces, they often retain a love for its life amounting to a shameful cowardice, so that the very name of death makes them shudder.

Your natural courage raises you above these fears, and I think I hear you say, I desire neither to flatter my body, nor to hesitate in consenting to its destruction, whenever it shall be the will of God to waste and consume it to ashes.

You may thus renounce the body, and yet there may remain great obstacles in the way of your renouncing the spirit. The more we are able, by the aid of our natural courage, to despise the clay tenement, the more apt are we to set a higher value upon that which it contains, by the aid of which we are enabled to look down upon it.

We feel towards our understanding, our wisdom, and our virtue, as a young and worldly woman feels towards her beauty. We take pleasure in them; it gives us a satisfaction to feel that we are wise, moderate, and preserved from the excitement which we see in others; we are intoxicated with the pleasure of not being intoxicated with pleasure; we renounce with courageous moderation the most flattering temptations of the world, and content us with the satisfaction derived from a conviction of our self-control.

What a dangerous state! What a subtle poison! How recreant are you to God, if you yield your heart to this refinement of self-love! You must renounce all satisfaction and all natural complacency in your own wisdom and virtue.

Remember, the purer and more excellent the gifts of God, the more jealous He is of them.

He showed mercy to the first human rebel, and denied it to the angels. Both sinned by the love of self, but as the angel was perfect, and regarded as a sort of divinity, God punished his unfaithfulness with a fiercer jealousy than He did man's disobedience. We may infer from this, that God is more jealous of his most excellent gifts than He is of the more common ones; He would have us attached to nothing but Himself, and to regard his gifts, however excellent, as only the means of uniting us more easily and intimately to Him. Whoever contemplates the grace of God with a satisfaction and sort of pleasure of ownership, turns it into poison.

Never appropriate exterior things to yourself then, such as favor or talents, nor even things the most interior. Your good will is no less a gift of God's mercy, than the life and being which you receive direct from his hands. Live, as it were, on trust; all that is in you, and all that you are, is only loaned you; make use of it according to the will of Him who lends it, but never regard it for a moment as your own.

Herein consists true self-abandonment; it is this spirit of self-divesting, this use of ourselves and of ours with a single eye to the movements of God, who alone is the true proprietor of his creatures.

You will desire to know, probably, what should be the practice of this renouncement in detail. But I answer that the feeling is no sooner established in the interior of the soul, than God himself will take you by the hand, that you may be exercised in self-renunciation in every event of every day.

Self-abandonment is not accomplished by means of painful reflections and continual struggles; it is only by refraining from self-contemplation, and from desiring to master ourselves in our own way, that we lose ourselves in God.

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[1] The terms abandonment, annihilation and death of itself, and the correlative expressions, union with God, oneness, and others of similar import, are frequently used by writers on the higher life, as a most concise and convenient form of designating a state of experience indicated throughout the New Testament, by such texts as the following: "Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ," etc. (Col. ii. 20.) "If ye then be risen with Christ, etc. (Col. iii. 1.) "For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. iii. 3.) "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." Gal. v. 24.) "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Phil. ii. 13.) "That they all may be one: as Thou, Father, art one in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." (John xvii. 21.) It has been objected by some, that this abnegation of self, recommended in such glowing terms by these pious authors, involved two exceedingly dangerous errors. That on the

one hand it necessarily implied an abandonment and loss of our identity, by a sort of Pagan transfusion into God, and on the other , that it bordered upon, if it did not constitute, a very pernicious form of perfectionism, in that it made God the author of all our willing and doing whatever their moral character. It can scarcely be necessary to say to any one who has made himself familiar with the subject, that such doctrines would be a melancholy perversion of the teachings of the writers in question. By the death of self, and annihilation of the will, they simply mean to express, in the strongest manner possible, that the soul, on every occasion, and under all circumstances, wills only what God wills, retaining perfectly its identity, and of course, its power to will. By union with, or absorption into God, they intend to convey the idea of the state of Oneness referred to by Christ, wherein the soul is made partaker of the perfect Holiness of God; but none are more earnest in insisting that the smallest appearance of evil is unanswerable evidence that such an attainment is still at a distance. By their fruits ye shall know them, is constantly asserted to be the inexorable standard of judgment for this, as for all other states of experience.-Editor.

XI. ON TEMPTATIONS.

I know of but two resources against temptations. One is, faithfully to follow the interior light in sternly and immediately cutting off everything we are at liberty to dismiss, and which may excite or strengthen the temptation. I say everything which we are at liberty to dismiss, because we are not always permitted to avoid the occasions of evil. Such as are unavoidable connected with the particular position in which Providence has placed us, are not considered to be within our power.

The other expedient consists in turning towards God in every temptation, without being disturbed or anxious to know if we have not already yielded a sort of half consent, and without interrupting our immediate recourse to God. By examining too closely whether we have not been guilty of some unfaithfulness, we incur the risk of being again entangled in the temptation. The shortest and

surest way is to act like a little child at the breast; when we show it a frightful monster, it shrinks back and buries its face in its mother's bosom, that it may no longer behold it.

The sovereign remedy is the habit of dwelling continually in the presence of God. He sustains, consoles, and calms us.

We must never be astonished at temptations, be they never so outrageous. On this earth all is temptation. Crosses tempt us by irritating our pride, and prosperity by flattering it. Our life is a continual combat, but one in which Jesus Christ fights for us. We must pass on unmoved, while temptations rage around us, as the traveller, overtaken by a storm, simply wraps his cloak more closely about him, and pushes on more vigorously towards his destined home.

If the thought of former sins and wretchedness should be permitted to come before us, we must remain confounded and abashed before God, quietly enduring in his adorable presence all the shame and ignominy of our transgressions. We must not, however, seek to entertain or to call up so dangerous a recollection.

In conclusion, it may be said that in doing what God wills, there is very little to be done by us; and yet there is a wonderful work to be accomplished, no less than that of reserving nothing, and making no resistance for a moment, to that jealous love, which searches inexorably into the most secret recesses of the soul for the smallest trace of self, for the slightest intimations of an affection of which itself is not the author. So, on the other hand, true progress does not consist in a multitude of views, nor in austerities, trouble and strife; it is simply willing nothing and everything, without reservation and without choice, cheerfully performing each day's journey as Providence appoints it for us; seeking nothing, refusing nothing; finding everything in the present moment, and suffering God, who does everything, to do his pleasure in and by us, without the slightest resistance. O how happy is he who has attained to this state! and how full of good things is his soul, when it appears emptied of everything!

Let us pray the Lord to open to us the whole infinitude of his paternal heart, that our own may be there submerged and lost, so that it may make but one with His! Such was the desire of Paul for the faithful, when he longed for them in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

XII. ON WANDERING THOUGHTS AND DEJECTION.

1. Two things trouble you; one is, how you may avoid wandering thoughts; the other, how you may be sustained against dejection. As to the former, you will never cure them by set reflections; you must not expect to do the work of grace by the resources and activity of nature. Be simply content to yield your will to God without reservation; and whenever any state of suffering is brought before you, accept it as his will, in an absolute abandonment to his guidance.

Do not go out in search of these crucifixions, but when God permits them to reach you without your having sought them, they need never pass without your deriving profit from them.

Receive everything that God presents to your mind, notwithstanding the shrinking of nature, as a trial by which He would exercise and strengthen your faith. Never trouble yourself to inquire whether you will have strength to endure what is presented, if it should actually come upon you, for the moment of trial will have its appointed and sufficient grace; that of the present moment is to behold the afflictions presented tranquilly, and to feel willing to receive them whenever it should be the will of God to bestow them.

Go on cheerfully and confidently in this trust. If this state of the will should not change in consequence of a voluntary attachment to something out of the will of God, it will continue forever.

Your imagination will doubtless wander to a thousand matters of vanity; it will be subject to more or less agitation, according to your situation and the character of the objects presented to its regard. But what matter? The imagination, as St. Theresa declares, is the fool of the household; it is constantly busy in making some bustle or other, to distract the mind which cannot avoid

beholding the images which it exhibits. The attention is inevitable, and is a true distraction, but, so long as it is involuntary, it does not separate us from God; nothing can do that but some distraction of the will.

You will never have wandering thoughts if you never will to have them, and may then say with truth that you have prayed without ceasing. Whenever you perceive that you have involuntarily strayed away, return without effort, and you will tranquilly find God again without any disturbance of soul. As long as you are not aware of it, it is no wandering of the heart; when it is made manifest, look to God at once with fidelity, and you will find that this simple faithfulness to Him will be the occasion of blessing you with his more constant and more familiar indwelling.

A frequent and easy recollection is one of the fruits of this faithful readiness to leave all wanderings as soon as they are perceived; but it must not be supposed that it can be accomplished by our own labors. Such efforts would produce trouble, scrupulosity, and restlessness in all those matters in which you have most occasion to be free. You will be constantly dreading lest you should lose the presence of God and continually endeavoring to recover it; you will surround yourself with the creations of your own imagination, and thus, the presence of God, which ought, by its sweetness and illumination, to assist us in everything which comes before us in his providence, will have the effect of keeping us always in a tumult, and render us incapable of performing the exterior duties of our condition.

Be never troubled, then, at the loss of the sensible presence of God; but, above all, beware of seeking to retain Him by a multitude of argumentative and reflective acts. Be satisfied during the day, and while about the details of your daily duties, with a general and interior view of God, so that if asked, at any moment, whither your heart is tending, you may answer with truth that it is toward God, though the attention of your mind may then be engrossed by something else. Be not troubled by the wanderings of your imagination which you cannot restrain; how often do we wander through the fear of wandering and the regret that we have done so! What would you say of a traveller who,

instead of constantly advancing in his journey, should employ his time in anticipating the falls which he might suffer, or in weeping over the place where one had happened? On! on! you would say to him, on! without looking behind or stopping. We must proceed, as the Apostle bids us, that we may abound more and more. (1 Thess. iv. 1.) The abundance of the love of God will be of more service in correcting us than all our restlessness and selfish reflections.

This rule is simple enough; but nature, accustomed to the intricacies of reasoning and reflection, considers it as altogether too simple. We want to help ourselves, and to communicate more impulse to our progress; but it is the very excellency of the precept that it confines us to a state of naked faith, sustained by God alone in our absolute abandonment to Him, and leads us to the death of self by stifling all remains of it whatever. In this way we shall not be led to increase the external devotional practices of such as are exceedingly occupied, or are feeble in body, but shall be contented with turning them all into simple love; thus, we shall only act as constrained by love, and shall never be overburdened, for we shall only do what we love to do.

2. Dejection often arises from the fact that, in seeking God, we have not so found Him as to content us. The desire to find Him, is not the desire to possess Him: it is simply a selfish anxiety to be assured, for our own consolation, that we do possess Him. Poor Nature, depressed and discouraged, is impatient of the restraints of naked faith, where every support is withdrawn; it is grieved to be travelling, as it were, in the air, where it cannot behold its own progress towards perfection. Its pride is irritated by a view of its defects, and this sentiment is mistaken for humility. It longs, from self-love, to behold itself perfect; it is vexed that it is not so already; it is impatient, haughty, and out of temper with itself and everybody else. Sad state! As though the work of God could be accomplished by our ill-humor! As though the peace of God could be attained by means of such interior restlessness!

Martha, Martha! why art thou troubled and anxious about many things? One thing is needful, to love Him and to sit attentively at his feet!

When we are truly abandoned to God, all things are accomplished without the performance of useless labor; we suffer ourselves to be guided in perfect trust; for the future, we will whatever God wills, and shut our eyes to everything else; for the present, we give ourselves up to the fulfillment of his designs.

Sufficient for every day is the good and the evil thereof. This daily doing of the will of God is the coming of his kingdom within us, and at the same time our daily bread. We should be faithless indeed, and guilty of heathen distrust, did we desire to penetrate the future, which God has hidden from us; leave it to Him: let Him make it short or long, bitter or sweet; let Him do with it even as it shall please Himself.

The most perfect preparation for this future, whatever it may be, is to die to every will of our own, and yield ourselves wholly up to his; we shall in this frame of mind, be ready to receive all the grace suitable to whatever state it shall be the will of God to develop in and around us.

3. When we are thus prepared for every event, we begin to feel the Rock under our feet at the very bottom of the abyss; we are ready to suppose every imaginable evil of ourselves, but we throw ourselves blindly into the arms of God, forgetting and losing everything else. This forgetfulness of self is the most perfect renouncement of self and acceptance of God; it is the sacrifice of self-love; it would be a thousand times more agreeable to accuse and condemn ourselves, to torment body and mind, rather than to forget.

Such an abandonment is an annihilation of self-love, in which it no longer finds any nourishment. Then the heart begins to expand; we begin to feel lighter for having thrown off the burden of self, which we formerly carried; we are astounded to behold the simplicity and straightness of the way. We thought there was a need of strife and constant exertion, but we now perceive that there is little to do; that it is sufficient to look to God with confidence, without reasoning either upon the past or the future, regarding Him as a loving Father, who leads us every moment by the hand. If some distraction or other should hide Him for a moment, without stopping to look at it, we simply turn again

to Him from whom we had departed. If we commit faults, we repent with a repentance wholly of love, and, returning to God, he makes us feel whatever we ought. Sin seems hideous, but we love the humiliation of which it is the cause, and for which God permitted it.

As the reflections of our pride upon our defects are bitter, disheartening and vexatious, so the return of the soul towards God is recollected, peaceful and sustained by confidence. You will find by experience how much more your progress will be aided by this simple, peaceful turning to God, than by all your chagrin and spite at the faults that exist in you. Only be faithful in turning quietly towards God alone, the moment you perceive what you have done; do not stop to argue with yourself; you can gain nothing from that quarter; when you accuse yourself of your misery, I see but you and yourself in consultation; poor wisdom that will issue from where God is not!

Whose hand is it that must pluck you out of the mire? Your own? Alas! you are buried deeper than thought, and cannot help yourself; and more, this very slough is nothing but self; the whole of your trouble consists in the inability to leave yourself, and do you expect to increase your chances by dwelling constantly upon your defects, and feeding your sensitiveness by a view of your folly? You will in this way only increase your difficulties, while the gentlest look towards God would calm your heart. It is his presence that causes us to go forth from self, and when He has accomplished that, we are in peace. But how are we to go forth? Simply by turning gently towards God, and gradually forming the habit of so doing, by a faithful persistence in it, whenever we perceive that we have wandered from Him.

As to that natural dejection which arises from a melancholic temperament, it belongs purely to the body, and is the province of the physician. It is true that it is constantly recurring, but let it be borne in peace, as we receive from his hands a fever or any other bodily ailment.

The question is not, what is the state of our feelings, but what is the condition of our will. Let us will to have what is the condition of our will. Let us

will to have whatever we have, and not to have whatever we have not. We would not even be delivered from our sufferings, for it is God's place to apportion to us our crosses and our joys. In the midst of affliction we rejoice, as did the Apostle; but it is not joy of the feelings, but of the will. The wicked are wretched in the midst of their pleasures, because they are never content with their state; they are always desiring to remove some thorn, or to add some flower to their present condition. The faithful soul, on the other hand, has a will which is perfectly free; it accepts, without questioning, whatever bitter blessings God develops, wills them, from them, and embraces them; it would not be freed from them, if it could be accomplished by a simple wish; for such a wish would be an act originating in self, and contrary to its abandonment to Providence, and it is desirous that this abandonment should be absolutely perfect.

If there be anything capable of setting a soul in a large place, it is this absolute abandonment to God. It diffuses in the soul a peace which flows as a river, and a righteousness which is as the waves of the sea. (Isaiah xlviii. 18.) If there be anything that can render the soul calm, dissipate its scruples and dispel its fears, sweeten its sufferings by the anointing of love, impart strength to it in all its actions, and spread abroad the joy of the Holy Spirit in its countenance and words, it is this simple, free, and child-like repose in the arms of God.

XIII. ON CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

The best rule we can ever adopt, is to receive equally, and with the same submission, everything that God sends us during the day, both within and without.

Without, there are things disagreeable that must be met with courage, and things pleasant that must not be suffered to arrest our affections. We resist the temptations of the former by accepting them at once, and of the latter by refusing to admit them into our hearts. The same curse is necessary in regard to the interior life; whatever is bitter serves to crucify us, and works all its benefit

in the soul, if we receive it simply, with a willingness that knows no bounds, and a readiness that seeks no alleviation.

Pleasant gifts, which are intended to support our weakness by giving us a sensible consolation in our external acts, must be accepted with equal satisfaction, but in a different way. They must be received, because God sends them, and not because they are agreeable to our own feelings; they are to be used, like any other medicine, without self-complacency, without attachment to them, and without appropriation. We must accept them, but not hold on to them; so that when God sees fit to withdraw them, we may neither be dejected nor discouraged.

The source presumption lies in attachment to these transitory and sensible gifts. We imagine we have no regard to anything but the gift of God, while we are really looking to self, appropriating his mercy and mistaking it for Him. And thus we become discouraged whenever we find that we have been deceived in ourselves; the soul, however, that is sustained upon God, is not surprised at its own misery; it is delighted to find new proof that it can do nothing of itself, and that God must do everything. I am never in the least troubled at being poor, when I know that my Father has infinite treasures which He will give me. We shall soon become independent of trust in ourselves, if we suffer our hearts to feed upon absolute confidence in God.

We must count less upon sensible delights and the measures of wisdom which devise for our own perfection, than upon simplicity, lowliness, renunciation of our own efforts, and perfect pliability to all the designs of grace. Everything else tends to emblazon our virtues, and thus inspire a secret reliance upon our own resources.

Let us pray God that he would root out of our hearts everything of our own planting, and set out there, with his own hands, the tree of life, bearing all manner of fruits.

XIV. IN WHAT MANNER WE ARE TO WATCH OURSELVES.

The following seem to me to be useful practical directions as to the manner in which we ought to watch ourselves, without being too much occupied with the duty.

The wise and diligent traveller watches all his steps, and keeps his eyes always directed to that part of the road which is immediately before him; but he does not incessantly look backwards to count his steps and examine his footmarks, – he would lose time and hinder his progress by so doing.

The soul which God truly leads by the hand (for I do not now speak of those who are learning to walk, and who are yet looking for the road), ought to watch its path, but with a simple, tranquil vigilance confined to the present moment, and without restlessness from love of self. Its attention should be continually directed to the will of God, in order to fulfill it every instant, and not be engaged in reflex acts upon itself in order to be assured of its state, when God prefers it should be uncertain. Thus the Psalmist exclaims, Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for he shall pluck my feet out of the net. (Ps. xxv. 15.)

Observe how, in order to keep his feet in safety in a way sown with snares, instead of fixing his eyes upon the ground to scrutinize every step, he raises them to the Lord. We never watch so diligently over ourselves as when we walk in the presence of God, as He commanded Abraham. And, in fact, what should be the end of all our vigilance? To follow step by step the will of God. He who conforms to that in all things, watches over himself and sanctifies himself in everything.

If, then, we never lost sight of the presence of God, we should never cease to watch, and always with a simple, lovely, quiet and disinterested vigilance; while, on the other hand, the watchfulness which is the result of a desire to be assured of our state, is harsh, restless, and full of self. We must walk not by our own light, but by that of God. We cannot behold the holiness of God without feeling horror at the smallest of our transgressions.

In addition to the presence of God and a state of recollection, we may add, the examination of conscience according to our need, but conducted in a way that grows more and more simple, easy, and destitute of restless self-

contemplations. We examine ourselves not for our own satisfaction, but to conform to the advice we receive, and to accomplish the will of God.

In short, we abandon ourselves into the hands of God, and are just as happy in knowing ourselves there, as we should be miserable if we were in our own. We desire to see nothing of what it pleases Him to conceal. As we love Him infinitely more than we do ourselves, we make an unconditional sacrifice of ourselves to his good pleasure; desiring only to love Him and to forget ourselves. He who thus generously loses his soul, shall find it again with eternal life.

XV. ON THE INWARD TEACHING OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD.

It is certain from the Holy Scriptures (Rom. viii.; John xiv.,) that the Spirit of God dwells within us, acts there, prays without ceasing, groans, desires, asks for us what we know not how to ask for ourselves, urges us on, animates us, speaks to us when we are silent, suggests to us all truth, and so unites us to Him that we become one spirit. (1 Cor. vi. 17.) This is the teaching of faith, and even those instructors who are farthest removed from the interior life, cannot avoid acknowledging so much. Still, notwithstanding these theoretical principles, they always strive to maintain that in practice the external law, or at least a certain light of learning and reason, illuminates us within, and that then our understanding acts of itself from that instruction. They do not rely sufficiently upon the interior teacher, the Holy Spirit, who does everything in us. He is the soul of our soul; we could not form a thought or a desire without Him. Alas! what blindness is ours! We reckon ourselves alone in the interior sanctuary, when God is much more intimately present there than we are ourselves.

What, then! you will say, are we all inspired? Yes, doubtless; but not as were the prophets and apostles. Without the actual inspiration of the Spirit of grace, we could neither do, nor will, nor believe any good thing. We are, then, always inspired, but we incessantly stifle the inspiration. God does not cease to speak, but the noise of the creatures without, and of our passions within, confines us and prevents our hearing. We must silence every creature, including

self, that in the deep stillness of the soul we may perceive the ineffable voice of the Bridegroom. We must lend an attentive ear, for his voice is soft and still, and is only heard of those who hear nothing else!

Ah, how rare is it to find a soul still enough to hear God speak! The slightest murmur of our vain desires, or of a love fixed upon self, confounds all the words of the Spirit of God. We hear well enough that he is speaking, and that he is asking for something, but we cannot distinguish what is said, and are often glad enough that we cannot. The least reserve, the slightest self-reflective act, the most imperceptible fear of hearing too clearly what God demands, interferes with the interior voice. Need we be astonished, then, if so many people, pious indeed, but full of amusements, vain desires, false wisdom, and confidence in their own virtues, cannot hear it, and consider its existence as a dream of fanatics? Alas! what would they with their proud reasonings? Of what efficacy would be the exterior word of pastors, or even of the Scriptures themselves, if we had not within, the word of the Holy Spirit giving to the others all their vitality? The outward word, even of the Gospel, without the fecundating, vivifying, interior word would be but an empty sound. It is the letter that alone killeth (2 Cor. iii. 6), and the Spirit alone can give us life.

O! eternal and omnipotent word of the Father, it is thou that speakest in the depth of our souls! The word that proceeded from the mouth of the Saviour, during the days of his mortal life, has only had energy to produce such wonderous fruits, because it has been animated by that Spirit of life which is The Word itself. Hence it is that St. Peter says: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. (John vi. 68.)

It is not, then, the outward law of the Gospel alone which God shows us internally, by the light of reason and faith; it is his Spirit that speaks, touches, operates in and animates us; so that it is the Spirit which does in us and with us whatever we do that is good, as it is our soul that gives life to our body, and regulates all its movements.

It is, then, true, that we are continually inspired, and that we do not lead a gracious life, except so far as we act under this interior inspiration. But O God! how few Christians feel it! how few are they, who do not annihilate it by their voluntary distractions, or by their resistance!

Let us recognize, then, the fact that God is incessantly speaking in us. [2] He speaks in the impenitent also, but, stunned by the noise of the world and their passions, they cannot hear Him; the interior voice is to them a fable. He speaks in awakened sinners; they are sensible of remorse of conscience, which is the voice of God reproaching them inwardly for their sins. When they are deeply moved, they have no difficulty in understanding about this interior voice, for it is it that pierces them so sharply. It is in them that two-edged sword of which Paul speaks as piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. (Heb. iv. 12.) God causes himself to be perceived, enjoyed, followed; they hear that sweet voice that buries a reproach in the bottom of the heart, and causes it to be torn in pieces. Such is true and pure contrition.

God speaks, too, in wise and enlightened persons, whose life, outwardly correct, seems adorned with many virtues; but such are often too full of themselves and their lights, to listen to God. Everything is turned into reasoning; they substitute the principles of natural wisdom and the plans of human prudence, for what would come infinitely better through the channel of simplicity and docility to the word of God. They seem good, sometimes better than others; they are so, perhaps, up to a certain point, but it is a mixed goodness. They are still in possession of themselves, and desire always to be so, according to the measure of their reason; they love to be in the hands of their own counsel, and to be strong and great in their own eyes.

I thank thee, O my God with Jesus Christ, that Thou hast hid thine ineffable secrets from these great and wise ones, whilst Thou takest pleasure in revealing them to feeble and humble souls! It is with babes alone that Thou art wholly unreserved; the others Thou treatest in their own way; they desire knowledge and great virtues, and Thou givest them dazzling illuminations, and convertest them into heroes. But this is not the better part; there is something

more hidden for thy dearest children; they lie with John on thy breast. As for these great ones who are constantly afraid of stooping and becoming lowly, Thou leavest them in all their greatness; they shall never share thy caresses and thy familiarity, for to deserve these, they must become as little children, and play upon thy knees.

I have often observed that a rude, ignorant sinner, just beginning to be touched by a lively sense of the love of God, is much more disposed to listen to this inward language of the Spirit of Grace, than those enlightened and learned persons who have grown old in their own wisdom. God, whose sole desire is to communicate Himself, cannot, so to speak, find where to set his foot in souls so full of themselves, who have grown fat upon their own wisdom and virtues; but, as says the Scripture, "his secret is with the simple." (Prov. iii. 32. vulg.)

But where are they? I do not find them; God sees them and loves to dwell in them; "My Father and I," says Jesus Christ, "will come unto him and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 23.) Ah! a soul delivered from self, and abandoned to grace, counting itself as nothing, and walking, without thought, at the will of that pure love which is its perfect guide, has an experience which the wise can neither receive nor understand!

I was once as wise as any; thinking I saw everything, I saw nothing; I crept along feeling my way by a succession of reasonings, but there was no ray to enlighten my darkness; I was content to reason. But when we have silenced everything within, that we may listen to God, we know all things without knowing anything, and then perceive that, until then, we were utterly ignorant of all that we thought we understood. We lose all that we once had, and care not for it; we have then no more that belongs to self; all things are lost, and we with them. There is something within that joins with the spouse in the Canticles in saying; "Let me see thy countenance, let he hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice and thy countenance is comely." (Sol. Song. ii. 14.) Ah! how sweet is that voice, it makes me all tremulous within! Speak, O beloved, and let none other dare to speak but Thee! Be still, my soul; speak, Love!

Then it is that we know all things without knowing anything. Not that we have the presumption to suppose that we possess in ourselves all truth. No! on the contrary, we feel that we see nothing, can do nothing, and are nothing: we feel it and are delighted at it. But in this unreserved abandonment, we find everything we need from moment to moment, in the infinity of God. There we find the daily bread of knowledge, as of everything else, without lying up; then the unction from above teaches us all truth, while it takes away our own wisdom, glory, interest, yea, our own will; it makes us content with our powerlessness, and with a position below every creature; we are ready to yield to the merest worms of the dust, and to confess our most secret miseries before the whole world, fearing unfaithfulness more than punishment and confusion of face.

Here it is, I say, that the Spirit teaches us all truth; for all truth is eminently contained in this sacrifice of love, where the soul strips itself of everything to present it to God.

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[2] Imitation of Jesus Christ, book iii. c. iii. 83.

XVI. ON DAILY FAULTS AND THE TOLERATION OF OURSELVES.

You understand that many of our faults are voluntary in different degrees, though they may not be committed with a deliberate purpose of failing in our allegiance to God. One friend sometimes reproaches another for a fault not expressly intended to be offensive, and yet committed with the knowledge that it would be so. In the same way, God lays this sort of faults to our charge. They are voluntary, for although not done with an express intention, they are still committed freely and against a certain interior light of conscience, which should have caused us to hesitate and wait.

Of these offences, pious souls are often guilty; as to those of deliberate purpose, it would be strange indeed if a soul consecrated to God should fall into such.

Little faults become great, and even monstrous in our eyes, in proportion as the pure light of God increases in us; just as the sun in rising, reveals the true dimensions of objects which were dimly and confusedly discovered during the night. Be sure that, with the increase of the inward light, the imperfections which you have hitherto seen, will be beheld as far greater and more deadly in their foundations, than you now conceive them, and that you will witness, in addition, the development of a crowd of others, of the existence of which you have not now the slightest suspicion. You will there find the weaknesses necessary to deprive you of all confidence in your own strength; but this discovery, far from discouraging, will serve to destroy your self-reliance, and to raze to the ground the edifice of pride. Nothing marks so decidedly the solid progress of a soul, as that it is enabled to view its own depravity without being disturbed or discouraged.

It is an important precept to abstain from doing a wrong thing whenever we perceive it in time, and when we do not, to bear the humiliation of the fault courageously.

If a fault is perceived before it is committed, we must see to it that we do not resist and quench the Spirit of God, advising us of it inwardly. The Spirit is easily offended, and very jealous; He desires to be listened to and obeyed; He retires if He be displeased; the slightest resistance to Him is a wrong, for everything must yield to Him, the moment He is perceived. Faults of haste and frailty are nothing in comparison with those where we shut our ears to the voice of the Holy Spirit beginning to speak in the depths of the heart.

Restlessness and an injured self-love will never mend those faults which are not perceived until after they are committed; on the contrary, such feelings are simply the impatience of wounded pride at beholding what confounds it. We must quietly humble ourselves in peace; I say in peace, for it is no humiliation to do it in a vexed and spiteful way. We must condemn our faults, mourn over them, repent of them, without seeking the slightest shadow of consolation in any excuse, and behold ourselves covered with confusion in the presence of God; and all this without being bitter against ourselves or discouraged; but peacefully

reaping the profit of our humiliation. Thus from the serpent itself we draw the antidote to his venom.

It often happens that what we offer to God, is not what he most desires to have of us; that we are frequently the most unwilling to give, and the most fearful He will ask. He desires the sacrifice of the Isaac, the well-beloved son; all the rest is as nothing in his eyes, and he permits it to be offered in a painful unprofitable manner, because He has no blessings for a divided soul. He will have everything, and until then there is no rest. Who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered? (Job ix. 4.) Would you prosper, and secure the blessing of God upon your labors? Reserve nothing, cut to the quick and burn, spare nothing, and the God of peace will be with you. What consolation, what liberty, what strength, what enlargedness of heart, what increase of grace, will follow when there remains nothing between God and the soul, and when the last sacrifices have been offered up without hesitation!

We must neither be astonished nor disheartened. We are not more wicked than we were; we are really less so; but while our evil diminishes, our light increases, and we are struck with horror at its extent. But let us remember, for our consolation, that the perception of our disease is the first step to a cure; when we have no sense of our need, we have no curative principle within; it is a state of blindness, presumption and insensibility, in which we are delivered over to our own counsel, and commit ourselves to the current, the fatal rapidity of which we do not realize, until we are called to struggle against it.

We must not be discouraged either by experience of our weakness, or by dislike of the constant activity which may be inseparable from our condition in life. Discouragement is not a fruit of humility, but of pride; nothing can be worse. Suppose we have stumbled, or even fallen, let us rise and run again; all our falls are useful, if they strip us of a disastrous confidence in ourselves, while they do not take away a humble and salutary trust in God.

The repugnances which we feel towards our duties, come, no doubt, of imperfections; if we were perfect, we should love everything in the order of God,

but since we are born corrupt, and with a nature revolting against his laws, let us praise Him that He knows how to evolve good from evil, and can make use even of our repugnances as a source of virtue. The work of grace does not always advance as regularly as that of nature, says St. Theresa.

Carefully purify your conscience, then, from daily faults; suffer no sin to dwell in your heart; small as it may seem, it obscures the light of grace, weighs down the soul, and hinders that constant communion with Jesus Christ which it should be your pleasure to cultivate; you will become lukewarm, forget God, and find yourself growing in attachment to the creature. A pure soul, on the other hand, which is humiliated, and rises promptly after its smallest faults, is always fervent and always upright.

God never makes us sensible of our weakness except to give us of His strength; we must not be disturbed by what is involuntary. The great point is, never to act in opposition to the inward light, and to be willing to go as far as God would have us.

XVII. ON FIDELITY IN SMALL MATTERS.

St. Francis of Sales says that great virtues and fidelity in small things are like sugar and salt; sugar is more delicious, but of less frequent use, while salt enters into every article of our food. Great virtues are rare; they are seldom needed, and when the occasion comes, we are prepared for it by everything which has preceded, excited by the greatness of the sacrifice, and sustained either by the brilliancy of the action in the eyes of others, or by self-complacency in our ability to do such wonderful things. Small occasions, however, are unforeseen; they recur every moment, and place us incessantly in conflict with our pride, our sloth, our self-esteem, and our passions; they are calculated thoroughly to subdue our wills, and leave us no retreat. If we are faithful in them, nature will have no time to breathe, and must die to all her inclinations. It would please us much better to make some great sacrifices, however painful and violent, on condition of obtaining liberty to follow our own pleasure, and

retain our old habits in little things. But it is only by this fidelity in small matters that the grace of true love is sustained and distinguished from the transitory excitements of nature.

It is with piety as it is with our temporal goods; there is more danger from little expenses than from larger disbursements, and he who understands how to take care of what is insignificant, will soon accumulate a large fortune. Everything great owes its greatness to the small elements of which it is composed; he that loses nothing, will soon be rich.

Consider, on the other hand, that God does not so much regard our actions, as the motive of love from which they spring, and the pliability of our wills to his. Men judge our deeds by their outward appearance; with God, that which is most dazzling in the eyes of man, is of no account. What he desires is a pure intention, a will ready for anything, and ever pliable in his hands, and an honest abandonment of self; and all this can be much more frequently manifested on small than on extraordinary occasions; there will also be much less danger from pride, and the trial will be far more searching. Indeed, it sometimes happens, that we find it harder to part with a trifle than with an important interest; it may be more of a cross to abandon a vain amusement, than to bestow a large sum in charity.

We are the more easily deceived about these small matters, in proportion as we imagine them to be innocent, and ourselves indifferent to them. Nevertheless, when God takes them away, we may easily recognize, in the pain of the deprivation, how excessive and inexcusable were both the use and the attachment. If we are in the habit of neglecting little things, we shall be constantly offending our families, our domestics, and the public. No one can well believe that our piety is sincere, when our behavior is loose and irregular in its little details. What ground have we for believing that we are ready to make the greatest sacrifices, when we daily fail in offering the least?

But the greatest danger of all consists in this, that by neglecting small matters, the soul becomes accustomed to unfaithfulness. We grieve the Holy

Spirit, we return to ourselves, we think it a little thing to be wanting towards God. On the other hand, true love can see nothing small; everything that can either please or displease God, seems to be great; not that true love disturbs the soul with scruples, but it puts no limits to its faithfulness. It acts simply with God; and as it does not concern itself about those things which God does not require from it, so it never hesitates an instant about those which He does, be they great or small.

Thus it is not by incessant care that we become faithful and exact in the smallest things, but simply by a love which is free from the reflections and fears of restless and scrupulous souls. We are, as it were, drawn along by the love of God; we have no desire to do anything but what we do, and no will in respect to anything which we do not do. At the very moment when God is following the soul, relentlessly pursuing it into the smallest details, and seemingly depriving it of all its liberty, it finds itself in a large place, and enjoys a perfect peace in Him. Happy soul!

Those persons who are by nature less strict in small matters, should lay down and preserve inviolate the most rigid laws in respect to them. They are tempted to despise them; they habitually think little of them, and do not sufficiently estimate their importance; they do not consider the insensible progress of our passions, and even forget their own sad experience on the subject. They prefer rather to be deluded by the promise of an imaginary firmness, and to trust to their own courage that has so often deceived them, than to subject themselves to a never-ceasing fidelity. It is a small matter, say they; true, but it is of amazing consequence to you; it is a matter that you love well enough to refuse to give it up to God; a matter which you sneer at in words, that you may have a pretence to retain it; a small matter, but one that you withhold from your Maker, and which will prove your ruin.

It is no nobility of soul that despises small things; on the contrary, it is a contracted spirit that regards as unimportant, what it cannot trace to its necessary and overwhelming results. The more trouble it occasions us to be on our guard against small matters, the more need have we to fear negligence, to

distrust our strength, and to interpose impregnable barriers between ourselves and the least remissness.

Finally, judge by your own feelings. What would you think of a friend who owed everything to you, and who was willing from a sense of duty to serve you on those rare occasions which are called great, but who should manifest neither affection nor the least regard for your wishes in the common intercourse of life?

Do not be frightened at this minute attention to small matters. It needs courage at first; but this is a penance which you deserve, which you need, and which will work out for you peace and security; without it, all is trouble and relapse. God will gradually make it pleasant and easy to you, for true love is obedient without constraint, and without strife or effort.

XVIII. ON TRANSITORY EMOTIONS, FIDELITY, AND SIMPLICITY.

We must not be surprised if we frequently perceive in ourselves emotions of pride, of self-complacency, of confidence in ourselves, of desire to follow our own inclination contrary to right, of impatience at the weakness of others, or at the annoyances of our own state. In such cases we must instantly let them drop like a stone to the bottom of the sea, recollect ourselves in God, and wait, before acting, until we are in such a frame as our recollection should induce in us. If the distraction of business, or of vivacity of imagination, should hinder us from calmly and easily entering into such a state, we must at least endeavor to be quiet by the rectitude of the will, and by the desire for recollection. In such a case, the will to be recollected, answers to deprive the soul of its own will, and to render it docile in the hands of God.

If perchance in your excitement, some emotion too nearly allied to depraved nature, should have escaped you, be not discouraged; go straight on; quietly bear the humiliation of your fault before God, without being delayed by the smarting of self-love at the betrayal of its weakness. Proceed confidently, without being troubled by the anguish of a wounded pride that cannot bear to

see itself imperfect. Your fault will be of service in causing you to die to self, and to become nothing before Him.

The true method of curing this defect is to become dead to the sensitiveness of self-love, without hindering the course of grace, which had been a little interrupted by this transitory unfaithfulness.

The great point is to renounce your own wisdom by simplicity of walk, and to be ready to give up the favor, esteem, and approbation of every one, whenever the path in which God leads you passes that way. We are not to meddle with things which God does not lay upon us, nor uselessly utter hard sayings which those about us are not able to bear.

We must follow after God, never precede Him; when He gives the signal, we must leave all and follow Him. If, after an absolute consecration to Him, and a conviction in conscience that he requires something of us, we hesitate, delay, lose courage, dilute what He would have us do, indulge fears for our own comfort or safety, desire to shield ourselves from suffering and obloquy, or seek to find some excuse for not performing a difficult and painful duty, we are truly guilty in his sight. God keep you from such unfaithfulness! Nothing is more dreadful than this inward resistance to Him; it is that sin against the Holy Ghost of which our Lord assures us that it shall not be forgiven, neither in this world, neither in the world to come. (Matt. xii. 32.)

Other faults committed in the simplicity of your good intentions, will be of service if they produce humility, and render you of less account in your own eyes. But resistance to the Spirit of God through pride and a pusillanimous worldly wisdom, tender of its own comfort in performing the work of God, is a fault which will insensibly quench the Spirit of Grace in your heart. God, jealous and rejected after so much mercy, will depart and leave you to your own resources; you will then turn round in a kind of circle instead of advancing with rapid strides along the King's highway; your inward life will grow dim and dimmer, without your being able to detect the sure and deep-seated source of your disease.

God would behold in you a simplicity which will contain so much the more of his wisdom as it contains less of your own; He desires to see you lowly in your own eyes, and as docile in his hands as a babe. He desires to create in your heart that child-like disposition so distasteful to the spirit of man, but so agreeable to the spirit of the Gospel, in spite of the infection of a scornful and contemptuous world.

By this very simplicity and lowliness He will heal all the remains of haughty and self-confident wisdom in you, and you shall say with David, And I will yet be more vile than this, and will be base in mine own sight, (1 Sam. vi. 22,) from the moment that you give yourself to the Lord.

XIX. ON THE ADVANTAGES OF SILENCE AND RECOLLECTION.

You must endeavor to be as silent as the proprieties of human intercourse will permit. This grace cherishes the presence of God, saves us many proud and rude expressions, and suppresses a great multitude of idle words and dangerous judgments of our neighbor. Silence humbles our spirit, and gradually detaches it from the world; it constitutes in the heart a sort of solitude like that you so much long after, and will supply all your wants in the many perplexities that surround you. If we never unnecessarily open our mouths, we may enjoy many moments of communion even when unavoidably detained in society.

You desire to be at liberty, that you may pray to God; and God, who knows so much better than we do, what we really want, sends perplexity and restraint, that you may become mortified. This trial from the hand of God, will be far more serviceable to you, than the self-sought sweetness of prayer. You know very well that constant retirement is not necessary, in order to love God. When He gives you the time, take it and profit by it, but until then, wait in faith, well persuaded that what He orders is best.

Frequently raise your heart to Him in abstraction from the world; speak only when obliged to; bear with patience whatever happens to cross you. You are already acquainted with religion, and God treats you according to your

necessity; you have more need of mortification than of illumination. The only thing I fear for you in this state, is wanderings, and you may avoid those by silence. Only be faithful in keeping silence, when it is not necessary to speak, and God will send grace to preserve you from dissipation when it is.

When you are not permitted to enjoy long seasons of leisure, economize the short ones; ten minutes thus faithfully employed before God, in the midst of your distractions, will be as valuable to you as whole hours devoted to Him, in your more unoccupied moments. Farther, these little odds and ends of time, will amount to quite a sum in the course of the day, and present this advantage, that God will very likely have been more in mind than if you had given it to Him all at once. Love, silence, suffering, yielding our own pleasure to the will of God, and to the love of our neighbor, such is our portion; too happy in bearing the burden which God himself lays upon us in the order of his Providence!

The crosses which originate with ourselves, are not near as efficient in eradicating self-love, as those which come in the daily allotments of God. These latter contribute no ailment for the nourishment of our own wills, and as they proceed immediately from a merciful Providence, they are accompanied by grace sufficient for all our needs. We have nothing to do, then, but to surrender ourselves to God each day, without looking farther; He will carry is in his arms as a tender mother bears her child. Let us believe, hope, and love with all the simplicity of babes; in every necessity turning a loving and trusting look towards our Heavenly Father. For what says the Scripture, "Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee!" (Isaiah xlix. 15.)

XX. PRIVATION AND ANNIHILATION, A TERROR EVEN TO THE SPIRITUALLY-MINDED.

There is scarce any one who desires to serve God, but does so for selfish reasons; we expect gain and not loss, consolation and not suffering, riches and not poverty, increase and not diminution. But the whole interior work is of an

opposite character; to be lost, sacrificed, made less than nothing, and despoiled of an excessive delight, even in the gifts of God, that we may be forced to cling to Him alone.

We are like a patient eagerly desiring returning health, who feels his own pulse forty times a day, and requires his physician to prescribe frequent doses of various remedies, and to give him a daily assurance that he is getting better. Such is almost the only use we make of our spiritual conductors. We travel in a little round of every-day virtues, never gathering sufficient courage to pass generously beyond it, and our guides, like the doctor, flatter, console, encourage and strengthen our selfish sensitiveness, and administer pleasant remedies, to the effects of which we soon become insensible.

The moment we find ourselves deprived of the delights of grace, that milk for babes, we are at once in despair; a manifest proof that we were looking to the means, instead of to the end, and solely for selfish gratification.

Privations are meat for men; by them the soul is rendered hardy, is separated from self, and offered in a pure sacrifice to God; but we give up all, the moment they commence. We cannot but think that everything is going to ruin, when, in fact, the foundations are just beginning to be solidly laid. Nothing would give us more delight than that God should do all his pleasure with us, provided it should always be to magnify and perfect us in our own eyes. But if we are not willing to be destroyed and annihilated, we shall never become that whole burnt offering, which is entirely consumed in the blaze of God's love.

We desire to enter into a state of pure faith, and retain our own wisdom! To be a babe, and great in our own eyes! Ah! what a sad delusion!

XXI. ON THE PROPER USE OF CROSSES.

We are hardly to be persuaded of the goodness of God in loading those whom He loves with crosses. Why, we say, should He take pleasure in causing us to suffer? Could he not render us good without making us miserable? Yes, doubtless, He could, for all things are possible with God. He holds in his

omnipotent hands the hearts of men, and turns them as He will; as the skill of the workman can give direction to the stream on the summit of a hill. But able as He was to save us without crosses, He has not chosen to do it; as he has not seen fit to create men at once in the full vigor of manhood, but has suffered them to grow up by degrees amid all the perils and weaknesses of infancy and youth. In this matter, He is the Master; we have only to adore in silence the depths of His wisdom, without comprehending it. Nevertheless, we see clearly that we never could become wholly good without becoming humble, unselfish, and disposed to refer everything to God, without any restless self-reflective acts.

The work of grace, in detaching us from self and destroying our self-love, could not be otherwise than painful, without a miracle. Neither in his gracious nor providential dealings does God work a miracle lightly. It would be as great a wonder to see a person full of self become in a moment dead to all self-interest and all sensitiveness, as it would be to see a slumbering infant wake in the morning a fully-developed man. God works in a mysterious was in grace as well as in nature, concealing his operations under an imperceptible succession of events, and thus keeps us always in the darkness of faith. He not only accomplishes his designs gradually, but by means that seem the most simple, and the most competent to the end, in order that human wisdom may attribute the success to the means, and thus his own working be less manifest; otherwise every act of God would seem to be a miracle, and the state of faith, wherein it is the will of God that we should live, would come to an end.

This state of faith is necessary, not only to stimulate the good, causing them to sacrifice their reason in a life so full of darkness, but also to blind those who, by their presumption, deserve such a sentence. They behold the works of God, but do not understand them; they can see nothing in them but the effects of material laws; they are destitute of true knowledge, for that is only open to those who distrust their own abilities; proud human wisdom is unworthy to be taken into the counsels of God.

God renders the working of grace slow and obscure, then, that he may keep us in the darkness of faith. He makes use of the inconstancy and ingratitude

of the creature, and of the disappointments and surfeits which accompany prosperity, to detach us from them both; He frees us from self by revealing to us our weaknesses, and our corruptions, in a multitude of backslidings. All this dealing appears perfectly natural, and it is by this succession of natural means that we are burnt as by a slow fire. We should like to be consumed at once by the flames of pure love, but such an end would scarce cost us anything; it is only an excessive self-love that desires thus to become perfect in a moment and at so cheap a rate.

Why do we rebel against the length of the way? Because we are wrapt up in self; and God must destroy an infatuation which is a constant hinderance to his work. Of what, then, can we complain? Our trouble is, that we are attached to creatures, and still more to self; God prepares a series of events which gradually detaches us from creatures, and separates us from self. The operation is painful, but is rendered necessary by our corruption, and the same cause makes it distressing; if our flesh were sound, the surgeon would use no knife; he only cuts in proportion to the depth of the wound, and the diseased condition of the parts; if we suffer greatly, it is because the evil is great; is the surgeon cruel because he cuts to the quick? Nay, on the contrary, it is both love and skill; he would treat in the same way his only and well-beloved son.

It is the same with God. He never afflicts us, if we may so say, except against his own inclination; his paternal heart is not gratified by the sight of our misery, but he cuts to the quick, that He may heal the disease in our souls. He must snatch away from us whatever we cling to too fondly, and all that we love irregularly and to the prejudice of his rights. He acts in this as we do by children; they cry because we take away the knife, which was their amusement, but might have been their death. We weep, we become discouraged, we cry aloud; we are ready to murmur against God, as children get angry with their mothers. But God lets us weep, and secures our salvation; He afflicts only to amend; even when He seems to overwhelm, He means nothing but good; it is only to spare us the evils we were preparing for ourselves. The things we now lament for a little space, would have caused us to mourn forever; what we think lost, was indeed

lost when we seemed to have it, but now God has laid it aside for us, that we may inherit it in the eternity so near at hand. He only deprives us of what we cherish, to teach us how to love it purely, solidly, and moderately, and to secure to us its eternal enjoyment in his own bosom; to do us a thousand times more good than we could ask or think of ourselves.

With the exception of sin, nothing happens, in this world, out of the will of God. It is He who is the author, ruler, and bestower of all; He has numbered the hairs of our head, the leaves of every tree, the sand upon the sea-shore, and the drops of the ocean. When He made the universe, his wisdom weighed and measured every atom. It is he that breathes into us the breath of life, and renews it every moment; He it is that knows the number of our days, and that holds in his all-powerful hand, the keys of the tomb to open or to shut.

What we admire, is as nothing in the eyes of God: a little more or less of life, is a difference that disappears in the light of eternity. What matter whether this fragile vessel, this clay tabernacle, be broken and reduced to ashes, a little sooner or later?

Ah! what short-sighted and deceitful views are ours! We are thrown into consternation at the death of a man in the prime of life. What a dreadful loss! exclaims the world. Who has lost anything? The dead? He has lost some years of vanity, illusion, and danger to his immortal soul; God has snatched him from the midst of his iniquities, and separated him from a corrupt world and his own weakness. The friends whom he has left? They are deprived of the poison of worldly felicity; they lose a perpetual intoxication; they get rid of the forgetfulness of God and themselves, in which they lay sunk – say, rather, they gain the bliss of detachment from the world, through the virtue of the cross. The same blow that saves the dying, prepares the survivors, by their suffering, to labor courageously for their own salvation. O! is it not true that God is good, tender, compassionate towards our misery, even when He seems to launch his thunders at us, and we are open-mouthed in our complaints of his severity!

What difference can we discover between two persons who lived a century ago? The one died twenty years before the other, but now they are both gone; the separation which then seemed so abrupt and so long, appears as nothing to us, and was, in fact, but short. Those things which are severed, shall soon be reunited, and no trace of the separation will be visible. We look upon ourselves as immortal, or at least as having a duration of ages. O folly and madness! those who die from day to day, tread upon the heels of those that are already dead; life flows like a torrent; that which is gone is but a dream, and even while we contemplate that which now is, it vanishes and is lost in the abyss of the past. So will it be with the future; days, months, and years, glide like the billows of a torrent, each hurrying along the other. A few moments more, and all is over! Alas! how short will that existence then appear, which now wearies us with its sad and tedious length!

The disgust of life is the result of the weakness of our self-love. The sick man thinks the night will never end, because he sleeps not, but it is no longer than others; we exaggerate all our sufferings by our cowardice; they are great, it is true, but they are magnified by timidity. The way to lessen them is to abandon ourselves courageously into the hands of God; we must suffer, but the end of our pain is to purify our souls, and make us worthy of Him.

XXII. ON THE INTERIOR OPERATIONS OF GOD TO BRING MAN TO THE TRUE END OF HIS CREATION.

In the beginning God attacked us in externals; little by little he withdrew such of his creatures as we loved too much, and contrary to his law. But this outward work, though essential in laying the foundation of the building, goes but a little way towards the completion of the whole edifice. The interior operation, although invisible, is beyond comparison, greater, more difficult, and more wonderful!

There comes a time, when God, having completely stripped us, having mortified the flesh as to the creatures to which it clung, commences an interior

work for the purpose of forcing from us our hold upon Self. External objects are now no longer the subjects of his spoliations: he would tear from us the I, which is the centre of our self-love. It was only for the sake of this I that we loved all the rest; and He now pursues it relentlessly and without cessation. To deprive a man of his clothing, would be harsh treatment enough; but that is nothing in comparison with the discipline which should strip off his skin and muscles, and reduce him to a skeleton of bones. Trim up the branches of a tree, and far from killing it, you even add to its vigor, and it shoots out again on every side; but attack the trunk, wither the root, and it fades, languishes and dies. It is the good will of God towards us, thus to make us die to self.

As to the external mortification of the senses, He causes us to accomplish it be certain courageous efforts against ourselves. The more the senses are destroyed by the courage of the soul, the more highly does the soul estimate its own virtue, and live by its own labor. But in process of time, God reserves for his own hand the work of attacking the soul in its depths, and depriving it finally of the last vestige of the life of Self. It is no longer the strength of the soul that is then employed against the things without, but its weakness that is turned against itself. It looks at self; it is shocked at what it sees: it remains faithful, but it no longer beholds its own fidelity. Every defect in its previous history rises up to view, and often new faults, of which it had never before even suspected the existence. It no longer finds those supports of fervor and courage which formerly nourished it. It faints; like Jesus, it is heavy even unto death. All is taken away but the will to retain nothing, and to let God work without reservation.

It has not even the consolation of perceiving that it has such a will. It is no longer a perceptible, designed will, but simple, without reflex acts, and so much the more hidden, as it is deeper and more intimate in the soul. In such a state, God sees to everything that is necessary to detach the soul from self. He strips it little by little, removing one after another all the investments in which is was wrapped.

The last operations, though not always the greatest, are, nevertheless, the most severe. Though the outside garments may be more costly than those

within, yet the removal of the latter is more painful than that of the former. During the first, we are consoled by reflecting upon what is left us; during the last, nought remains but bitterness, nakedness, and confusion.

I shall perhaps be asked, in what these deprivations consist; but I cannot say. They are as various as the characters of men. Each man suffers according to his necessity, and the designs of God. How is it possible to know what will be taken off from us, when we do not know what we have on? We cling to an infinity of things which we should never suspect; we only feel that they are a part of us when they are snatched away, as I am only conscious that I have hairs when they are pulled from my head. God develops to us, little by little, what is within us, of which we are, until then, entirely ignorant, and we are astonished at discovering in our very virtues, defects of which we should never have believed ourselves capable. It is like a grotto which appears perfectly dry, but in which the water suddenly sprout out from every point, even from those that were least suspended.

These spoliations are not commonly such as could have been anticipated. That which we expect, finds us prepared, and is scarce proper to hasten the death of self. God surprises us in the most unlooked-for quarters. They are nothings, but nothings which desolate us and crucify self-love. Great and striking virtues are no longer appropriate; they would nourish pride, and communicate a certain degree of strength and interior assurance contrary to the design of God, which is, to make us lose ground. Then it is a simple, single way; everything is commonplace. Others see nothing great, and the person himself discovers within, only what seems natural, weak, and feeble; but he would rather a hundred times, fast all his life on bread and water, and practice the greatest austerities, than suffer what is going on within him. Not because he enjoys a certain taste of fervor in austerities; not at all, that delight is gone; but he finds in the pliability which God requires in an infinity of little things, more of self-abandonment and death than there would be in great sacrifices.

Nevertheless, God never leaves the soul until He has rendered it supple and pliable, by twisting it all manner of ways. At one time the person must

speak frankly; at another be still; he must be praised, then blamed, then forgotten, and then examined anew; he must be low, he must be high, he must suffer condemnation without uttering a word in self-defence, and again he must speak well of himself. He must be willing to find himself weak, restless, and irresolute in the merest trifles; manifesting the waywardness of a little child; shocking his friends by his coldness; becoming jealous and suspicious without reason; even relating his most foolish jealousies to those in regard to whom he feel them; speaking with patience and labor to persons, contrary to their desire and his own, and without fruit; appearing artificial and faithless; in short, to find himself arid, languishing, weary of God, dissipated in mind, and so far separated from every gracious thought as to be tempted to despair. Such are examples of some of the spoliations which now desolate myself; but there is an infinity of others which God apportions to each one according to his own wise purposes.

Let no one tell me that these are only empty imaginations. Can we doubt that God acts immediately in the soul? that He so acts as to make it die to self? that, after having subdued the grosser passions, He attacks all the subtle resources of self-love within, especially in those souls who have generously and without reserve delivered themselves up to the operations of his grace? The more He would purify them, the more He exercises them interiorly. The world has neither eyes to see nor ears to hear these trials; but the world is blind; its wisdom is dead; it cannot coexist with the Spirit of truth. "The things of God," says the Apostle, "knoweth no man but the Spirit of God;" "the Spirit searcheth the deep things of God." (1 Cor. ii. 10,11.)

We are not, at first, accustomed to this interior supervision, which thus tends to raze us to the foundation. We are willing to be silent and recollected; to suffer all things; to be at the disposal of Providence, like a man passively trusting himself to the current of a river; but we dare not yet risk listening to the interior voice, calling us to the sacrifices which God is preparing. We are like the child Samuel, who did not yet know the Lord; when the Lord called, he thought it was Eli, but he was told that he had been dreaming, and that no one

spoke to him. Just so, we are uncertain whether it may not be some imagination which would carry us too far. Often the high-priest Eli, that is, our spiritual advisers, tell us that we have been dreaming, and bid us lie down again. But God does not leave us, and continues to wake us, until we lend an ear to what He has to say.

If it were a matter of visions, apparitions, revelations, extraordinary illuminations, miracles, things contrary to true teaching, we should be right in not being detained by them. But when God has led us to a certain point of abandonment, and we subsequently have an interior conviction that He still desires us to give up certain innocent things, the tendency of all which is only to make us more simple and more profoundly dead to self, can it be an illusion to yield to such drawings? Probably no one follows them without good counsel. The repugnance which our wisdom and self-love manifest to them, is a sufficient evidence that they are of grace; for we see that we are only hindered from following them by selfish considerations. The more we fear to do these things, the more we have need to do them; for it is a fear which arises only from delicacy, want of pliability and attachment either to our pleasures or our views. We must die to all the sentiments of the natural life. Thus every pretext for retreat is cut off by the conviction in the depths of the soul, that the sacrifices required will assist in causing us to die.

Ease and promptness in yielding to these movements, are the means by which souls make the greatest advances. Those who are ingenuous enough never to hesitate, soon make incredible progress. Others argue, and never fail to find a sufficient reason for not following the interior monitor. They are willing and not willing; they want to wait for certainties; they search about for advisers, who will bid them not do what they are afraid of doing; they stop at every step, and look back; then languish in irresolution, and insensibly estrange the Spirit of God. At first they grieve Him by their hesitation; then they irritate Him by formal resistance, and finally quench his operations by repeated opposition.

While they thus resist, they find pretexts both to conceal and justify the resistance; but they insensibly grow dry; they lose their simplicity, and, make

what effort they may to deceive themselves, they are not at peace; there is always at the bottom of the conscience, a feeling of reproach that they have been wanting toward God. But as God becomes more distant, because they are departing from Him, the soul becomes hardened by degrees. It is no longer peaceful; but it no longer seeks true peace; on the contrary, it wanders farther and farther from it, by seeking it where it is not; like a dislocated bone, a continual source of pain, and out of its natural position, yet, it manifests no tendency to resume its place, but, on the contrary, binds itself fast in its false relations.

Ah! how much to be pitied is that soul which is just beginning to reject the secret invitations of God, when he demands that it shall die to all! At first, it is but an atom; but the atom becomes a mountain, and soon forms a sort of chaos between it and God. We play deaf when God demands a lowly simplicity; we are afraid to listen; we should be glad enough to be able to convince ourselves that we had not heard; we say so, but are not persuaded. We get into a tumult; we doubt all our past experience; and the graces which had served the most effectually to make us humble and simple before God, begin to look like illusions. We seek without, for spiritual advisers who may calm the trouble within; we readily find them, for there are so many, gifted even with much knowledge and piety, who have yet but little experience.

In this condition, the more we strive to recover, the sicker we get. We are like the wounded deer, bearing in his side the fatal arrow; the more he struggles through the woods to be delivered of his enemy, the more deeply he buries it in his body. Alas! "Who hath hardened himself against Him and hath prospered." (Job ix. 4.) Can God, who is Himself the true Peace, leave that heart peaceful which opposes itself to his designs? Such a person is like one with an unknown disorder. Physicians employ their art in vain to give him any solace. You behold him sad, depressed, languishing; no food, no remedy can avail to do him good; he dies day by day. Can we wonder that, wandering from the true way, we should ceaselessly continue to stray farther and farther from the right course?

But, as you will say, the commencement of these things is a small matter; true, but the end is deplorable. In the sacrifice which we made when we devoted ourselves wholly to God, we reserved nothing and felt happy in so doing, while we were looking at things with a general view and at a distance; but when God takes us at our word and accepts our offer in detail, we are made aware of a thousand repugnances, the existence of which we had not so much as suspected before. Our courage fails; frivolous excuses are suggested to flatter our feeble and tempted souls; then we hesitate and doubt whether it is our duty to obey; we do only the half of what God requires of us, and we mix with the divine influence a something of self, trying still to secure some nutriment for that corrupt interior which wills not to die. A jealous God retires: the soul begins to shut its eyes, that it may not see that it has no longer the courage to act, and God leaves it to its weakness and corruption, because it will be so left. But think of the magnitude of its error!

The more we have received of God, the more ought we to render. We have received prevenient love and singular grace: we have received the gift of pure and unselfish love, which so many pious souls have never tasted; God has spared nothing to possess us wholly; He has become the interior Bridegroom; He has taken pains to do everything for his bride – but He is infinitely jealous. Do not wonder at the exacting nature of his jealousy! What is its object? Is it talents, illuminations, the regular practice of external virtues? Not at all; He is easy and condescending in such matters. Love is only jealous about love; the whole of his scrutiny falls upon the state of the will. He cannot share the heart of the spouse with any other; still less can He tolerate the excuses by which she would convince herself that her heart is justly divided; this it is that lights the devouring fires of his jealousy. As long, O spouse! as pure and disinterested love shall guide thee, so long the Bridegroom will bear with inexhaustible patience all thy wrong doing through weakness or inadvertence, without prejudice to the purity of thy love; but from the moment that thou shalt refuse anything that God asks, and begin to deceive thyself in the refusal, from that moment He will regard thee as a faithless spouse, and one seeking to conceal her infidelity!

How many souls, after having made great sacrifices, fall into these ways! False wisdom is the source of the whole difficulty; it is not so much through defect of courage as through excess of reason, that we are arrested at this point. It is true that when God has called souls to this state of absolute sacrifice, he treats them in accordance with the gifts He has lavished upon them; He is insatiable for deaths, losses, renunciation; He is jealous of his own gifts even, because the excellence of the blessings secretly breeds within us a sort of self-condfidence. All must be destroyed, every vestige must perish! We have abandoned everything – and He comes now to take everything, leaving us absolutely nothing. If there be the smallest thing to which we cling, however good it may appear, there He comes sword in hand, and cuts into the remotest corner of the soul. If we are still fearful in any recess, to that spot He comes, for He always attacks us in our weakest points. He pushes hard, without giving us time to breathe. Do you wonder? Can we be dead while we yet breathe? We desire that God would give us the death-stroke; but we long to die without pain; we would die to our own will by the power of the will itself; we want to lose all and still hold all. Ah! what agony, what distress, when God has brought us to the end of our strength! We faint like a patient under a painful surgical operation. But the comparison is nought, for the object of the surgeon is to give us life – that of God to make us die.

Poor souls! weak in spirit! how these last blows overwhelm you! The very apprehension of them makes you tremble and fall back! How few are there who make out to cross the frightful desert! Scarcely shall two or three behold the promised land! Woe to those from whom God had reason to expect everything, and who do not accept the grace! Woe to him who resists the interior guidance! strange sin, that against the Holy Spirit! Unpardonable either in this world or in the next, what is it but resistance to the divine monitor within? He who resists the Spirit, striving for his conversion shall be punished in this world by affliction, and in the next by the pains of hell. Happy is he who never hesitates; who fears only that he follows with too little readiness; who would rather do too much against self than too little! Blessed is he who, when asked for a sample,

boldly presents his entire stock, and suffers God to cut from the whole cloth! happy he who, esteeming himself as nothing, puts God to no necessity of sparing him! Thrice happy he whom all this does not affright!

It is thought that this state is a painful one; it is a mistake; here is peace and liberty; here the heart, detached from everything, is immeasurably enlarged, so as to become illimitable; nothing cramps it; and in accordance with the promise, it becomes, in a certain sense, one with God himself.

Thou only O my God! canst give the peace which is then enjoyed! The less timid the soul is in the sacrifice of itself, the greater liberty does it acquire! At length, when it no longer hesitates to lose all and forget self, it possesses all. It is true that it is not a conscious possession, so that the soul addressed itself as happy, for that would be to return to self after having quitted it forever; but it is an image of the condition of the blessed, who will be always ravished by the contemplation of God, without having a moment, during the whole of eternity, to think of themselves and their felicity. They are so satisfied in these transports, that they will be eternally rejoicing, without once saying to themselves that they are happy.

Thou grantest to those souls who never resist thee, O bridegroom of souls! even in this life, a foretaste of this felicity. They will all things and nothing. As it is things created which hem up the heart, these souls, being restrained by no attachment to the creature, and no reflections of self, enter as it were into thine immensity! Nothing stops them; they become continually more and more lost; but though their capacity should increase to an infinite extent, Thou wouldst fill it; they are always satisfied. They do not say that they are happy, but feel that they are so; they do not posses happiness, but their happiness possesses them. Let any one ask them at any moment, Do you will to suffer what you suffer? Would you have what you have not? They will answer without hesitation and without reflection, I will to suffer what I suffer, and to want that which I have not; I will everything which God wills; I will nothing else.

Such, my God, is true and pure worship in spirit and in truth. Thou seekest such to worship Thee, but scarce findest them! There are few but seek self in thy gifts, instead of seeking Thee alone in the cross and in spoliation. Most seek to guide Thee instead of being guided by Thee. They give themselves up to Thee, that they may become great, but withdraw when they are required to become little. They say they are attached to nothing, and are overwhelmed by the smallest losses. They desire to possess Thee, but are not willing to lose self, that they may be possessed by Thee. This is not loving Thee; it is desiring to be loved by Thee. O God, the creature knows not to what end Thou hast made him; teach him, and write in the depths of his soul, that the clay must suffer itself to be shaped at the will of the potter!

XXIII. ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

Christian Perfection is not that rigorous, tedious, cramping thing that many imagine. It demands only an entire surrender of everything to God from the depths of the soul, and the moment this takes place, whatever is done for Him becomes easy. They who are God's without reserve, are in every state content; for they will only what He wills, and desire to do for Him whatever he desires them to do; they strip themselves of everything, and in this nakedness find all things restored an hundred fold. Peace of conscience, liberty of spirit, the sweet abandonment of themselves and theirs into the hand of God, the joy of perceiving the light always increasing in their hearts, and finally the freedom of their souls from the bondage of the fears and desires of this world, these things constitute that return of happiness which the true children of God receive an hundred fold in the midst of their crosses, while they remain faithful.

They are sacrificed, it is true, but it is to that which they love best; they suffer, but they will to endure all that they do receive, and prefer that anguish to all the false joys of the world; their bodies are subject to excruciating pain; their imaginations are troubled; their minds become languid and weak, but the

will is firm and peacefully quiet in the interior of the soul, and responds a joyful Amen! to every stroke from the hand that would perfect the sacrifice.

What God requires of us, is a will which is no longer divided between Him and any creature; a simple, pliable state of will which desires what He desires, rejects nothing but what He rejects, and wills without reserve what He wills, and under no pretext wills what He does not. In this state of mind, all things are proper for us; our amusements, even, are acceptable in his sight.

Blessed is he who thus give himself to God! He is delivered from his passions, from the opinions of men, from their malice, from the tyranny of their maxims, from their cold and miserable raillery, from the misfortunes which the world attributes to chance, from the infidelity and fickleness of friends, from the artifices and snares of enemies, from the wretchedness and shortness of life, from the horrors of an ungodly death, from the cruel remorse that follows sinful pleasures, and finally from the everlasting condemnation of God!

The true Christian is delivered from this innumerable multitude of evils, because, putting his will into the hands of God, he wills only what He wills, and thus finds comfort in the midst of all his suffering in the way of faith, and its attendant hope.

What weakness it is, then, to be fearful of consecrating ourselves to God, and of getting too far into so desirable a state!

Happy those who throw themselves, as it were, headlong, and with their eyes shut, into the arms of "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort!" (2 Cor. i. 3.) Their whole desire then, is to know what is the will of God respecting them; and they fear nothing so much as not perceiving the whole of his requirements. So soon as they behold a new light in his law, they are transported with joy, like a miser at the finding of a treasure.

No matter what cross may overwhelm the true child of God, he wills everything that happens, and would not have anything removed which his Father appoints; the more he loves God, the more is he filled with content; and

the most stringent perfection, far from being a burthen, only renders his yoke the lighter.

What folly to fear to be too devoted to God! to fear to be happy! to fear to love the will of God in all things! to fear to have too much courage under inevitable crosses, too much consolation in the love of God, and too great a detachment from the passions which make us miserable!

Let us refuse, then, to set our affections upon things of the earth that we may set them exclusively upon God. I do not say, that we must abandon them entirely; for if our lives be already moral and well ordered, we have only to change the secret motive of our actions into Love, and we may continue almost the same course of life. God does not overturn our conditions nor the duties attached to them, but we may go on doing that now for the service of God which we did formerly to satisfy the world, and to please ourselves. There will only be this difference: instead of being harassed by pride, by overbearing passion, and by the malicious censures of the world, we shall act with liberty, with courage, and with hope in God. We shall be animated with confidence; the expectation of things eternal, which advance as things temporal recede from us, will support us in the midst of suffering; the love of God, who will cause us to perceive how great is his love toward us, will lend us wings to fly in his ways, and to raise us above all our miseries. Is this hard to believe? Experience will convince us. "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" says the Psalmist. (Ps. xxxiv. 8.)

The Son of God says to every Christian without exception, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. xix. 24.) The broad way leadeth unto destruction; we must walk in the strait way, though there be few that travel therein. It is only the violent who take the Kingdom by force. We must be born again, renounce and hate ourselves, become children, be poor in spirit, mourn that we may be comforted, and not be of this world, which is cursed because of offences.

Many are affrighted at these truths, and their fear arises from this: that while they know the exacting nature of religion, they are ignorant of its gifts,

and of the spirit of love which renders everything easy. They are not aware that religion leads to the highest perfection, while bestowing peace through a principle of love that smooths every rough place.

They who are in truth and indeed wholly consecrated to God, are ever happy. They prove that the yoke of our Redeemer is easy and his burden light; that in Him is the peace of the soul, and that He gives rest to them that are weary and heavy laden, according to his own blessed promise. But how unhappy are those poor, weak souls, who are divided between God and the world! They will and they do not will; they are lacerated at once by their passions and their remorse; they are afraid of the judgments of God and of the opinions of men; they dislike the evil, but are ashamed of the good; they suffer the pains of virtue, without enjoying its consolations. Ah! could they but have a little courage, – just enough to despise the vain conversation, the cold sneers, and the rash judgments of men, – what peace would they not enjoy in the bosom of God!

It is dangerous to our salvation, unworthy of God and of ourselves, and destructive even of our peace of mind, to desire to remain always in our present position. Our whole life is only given us that we may advance with rapid strides towards our heavenly country. The world recedes like a deceptive shadow, and eternity already approaches to receive us. Why do we linger and look behind, while the light of the Father of Mercies is shining upon us from before? Let us make haste to reach the Kingdom of God.

All the vain pretexts which are used to cover our reservations toward God are instantly dissipated by the first commandment of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." (Luke x. 27.) Notice how many expressions are here brought together by the Holy Spirit, to forestall all the reservations the soul might make to the prejudice of this jealous Love; not only with the whole extent and strength of the soul, but with all the intensity of the intellect. How then can we conclude that we love Him if we cannot make up our minds to receive his law, and to apply ourselves at once to fulfil all his blessed will?

They who fear that they shall discover too clearly what this love demands, are very far indeed from possessing the active and incessant affection required by this commandment.

There is but one way in which God should be loved, and that is to take no step except with Him and for Him, and to follow, with a generous self-abandonment, everything which He requires.

They who live in some self-denial, but have still a wish to enjoy a little of the world, think that this is a small matter; but they run the risk of being included in the number of those lukewarm ones whom God will spue out of his mouth. (Rev. iii. 16.)

God is not pleased with the souls that say, "thus far will I go and no farther." Should the creature prescribe laws to the Creator? What would a master say of his servants, or a king of his subjects, who should be willing to serve him, but only after their own fashion? who should be afraid of becoming too much interested in his service and his interests, and who should be ashamed publicly to acknowledge themselves attached to him? Or rather, what will the King of kings say to us if we serve Him in this wicked manner?

The time is not far distant; it is near, it is even at hand; let us hasten to anticipate it; let us love that eternal beauty which never grows old, and which preserves in endless youth those who love nought but it; let us despise this miserable world which is already falling to pieces on every side! Have we not beheld for years, that they, who to-day are high in honor and in the esteem of men, to-morrow, surprised by death, are laid side by side in the tomb? This poor world, the object of so much insane attachment, we are daily about to leave; it is but misery, vanity and folly; a phantom, – the very fashion of which passeth away! (1 Cor. vii. 31.)

XXIV. THE WAY OF NAKED FAITH AND PURE LOVE IS BETTER AND MORE CERTAIN THAN THAT OF ILLUMINATIONS AND SENSIBLE DELIGHTS.

Those who are attached to God, only so far as they enjoy pleasure and consolation, resemble those who followed the Lord, not to hear his teaching, but because they did eat of the loaves and were filled. (John vi. 26.) They are ready to say with Peter, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles; (Mark ix. 5); but they know not what they say. After being intoxicated with the joys of the mountain they deny the Son of God and refuse to follow him to Calvary. Not only do they desire delights, but they seek illuminations also; the mind is curious to behold, while the heart requires to be filled with soft and flattering emotions. Is this dying to self? Is this the way in which the just shall live by faith? (Heb. x. 38.)

They desire to have extraordinary revelations, which may be regarded as supernatural gifts, and a mark of the special favor of God. Nothing is so flattering to self-love; all the greatness of the world at once could not so inflate the heart; these supernatural gifts nourish in secret the life of nature. It is an ambition of the most refined character, as it is wholly spiritual; but it is merely ambition; a desire to feel, to enjoy, to posses God and his gifts, to behold his light, to discern spirits, to prophesy, in short, to be an extraordinarily gifted person; for the enjoyment of illuminations and delights, leads the soul little by little towards a secret coveting of all these things.

Yet the apostle shows us a more excellent way, (1 Cor. xii. 31,) for which he inspires us with a holy emulation; it is the way of charity which seeketh not her own, (1 Cor. xiii. 5,) and desires not to be clothed upon, if we may adopt the apostle's language, but suffers herself to be unclothed. She is less in search of pleasure than of God, whose will she longs to fulfil. If she finds pleasure in devotion, she does not rest in it, but makes it serve to strengthen her weakness, as a convalescent uses a staff to aid in walking, but throws it aside on his restoration. In the same way the tender and child-like soul that God fed with milk in the beginning, suffers itself to be weaned when He sees it is time that it should be nourished upon strong meat.

We must not be ever children, always hanging upon the breast of heavenly consolations; we must put away childish things with St. Paul. (1 Cor. xiii. 11.)

Our early joys were excellent to attract us, to detach us from gross and worldly pleasures by others of a purer kind, and to lead us into a life of prayer and recollection; but to be constantly in a state of enjoyment that takes away the feeling of the cross, and to live in a fervor of devotion, that continually keeps paradise open, this is not dying upon the cross and becoming nothing.

This life of illumination and sensible delights, is a very dangerous snare, if we become so attached to it as to desire nothing farther; for he who has no other attraction to prayer, will quit both it and God, whenever this source of his gratification is dried up. St. Theresa says, you know, that a vast number of souls leave off praying at the very moment when their devotion is beginning to be real. How many are there who, in consequence of too tender rearing in Jesus Christ, and too great fondness for the milk of his word, go back and abandon the interior life as soon as God undertakes to wean them! We need not be astonished at this, for they mistake the portico of the temple for the very sanctuary itself; they desire the death of their gross external passions, that they may lead a delicious life of self-satisfaction within. Hence so much infidelity and disappointment, even among those who appeared the most fervent and the most devoted; those who have talked the loudest of abandonment, of death to self, of the darkness of faith and of desolation, are often the most surprised and discouraged, when they really experience these things, and their consolation is taken away. O how excellent is the way pointed out by John of the Cross, who would have us believe without seeing, and love without desiring to feel!

This attachment to sensible delights, is the fruitful source of all our illusions; souls are earthly in desiring something tangible, as it were, before they can feel firm. But this is all wrong; it is these very things of sense that produce vacillation; we think, while the pleasure lasts, that we shall never desert God; we say in our prosperity, that we shall never be moved (Ps. xxx. 6.); but the moment our intoxication is over, we give up all for lost, thus substituting our own pleasure and imagination in place of God. Naked faith, alone, is a sure guard against illusion. When our foundation is not upon any imagination, feeling, pleasure, or extraordinary illumination; when we rest upon God only in pure

and naked faith, in the simplicity of the gospel receiving the consolations which He sends, but dwelling in none; abstaining from judging, and ever obedient; believing that it is easy to be deceived, and that others may be able to set us right; in short, acting every moment with simplicity and an upright intention, following the light of the faith of the present moment; then we are indeed in a way that is but little subject to illusion.

Experience will demonstrate, better than anything else, how much more certain this path is than that of illuminations and sensible delights. Whoever will try it, will soon find that this way of naked faith, rigidly followed, is the profoundest and most complete death of self. Interior delights and revelations indemnify our self-love for all its external sacrifices, and cherish a secret and refined life of nature; but to suffer ourselves to be stripped within and without at once, without by Providence, and within by the night of pure faith, this is a total sacrifice, and a state the farthest possible from self-deception.

Those, then, who seek to guard against being deceived by a constant succession of emotions and certainties, are by that very course exposing themselves most surely to such a result. On the other hand, those who follow the leadings of the love that strips them and the faith that walks in darkness, without seeking any other support, avoid all the sources of error and illusion. The author of the Imitation of Christ (book iii.) tells you, that if God takes away your inward delights, it should be your pleasure to remain pleasureless. O how beloved of God is a soul thus crucified, that rests calmly upon the cross, and desires only to expire with Jesus! It is not true to say that we are afraid of having lost God, on being deprived of feeling; it is impatience under the trial, the restlessness of a pampered and dainty nature, a search for some support for self-love, a weariness of abandonment, and a secret return to self, after our consecration to God. O God, where are they who stop not in the road to death? If they persevere unto the end, they shall receive a crown of life.

XXV. ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

The true source of all our perfection is contained in the command of God in Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." (Gen. xvii. 1.)

The presence of God calms the soul, and gives it quiet and repose even during the day, and in the midst of occupation – but we must be given up to God without reserve.

When we have once found God, we have nothing to seek among men; we must make the sacrifice of our dearest friendships; the best of friends has entered into our hearts, that jealous Bridegroom who requires the whole of it for himself.

It takes no great time to love God, to be refreshed by his presence, to elevate our hearts to Him, or to worship Him in the depths of our soul, to offer to Him all we do and all we suffer; this is the true kingdom of God within us, which cannot be disturbed.

When the distraction of the senses and the vivacity of the imagination hinder the soul from a sweet and peaceful state of recollection, we should at least be calm as to the state of the will: in that case, the will to be recollected is a sufficient state of recollection for the time being. We must return toward God, and do everything which He would have us do with a right intention.

We must endeavor to awake within ourselves, from time to time, the desire of being devoted to God in all the extent of our powers; in our intellect, to know him and think on him, and in our will, to love him. We must desire too, that our outward senses may be consecrated to him in all their operations.

Let us be careful how we voluntarily engage, either externally or internally, in matters which cause such distraction of the will and intellect, and so draw them out of themselves that they find difficulty in re-entering and finding God.

The moment we discover that anything causes excessive pleasure or joy within us, let us separate our heart from it, and, to prevent it from seeking its repose in the creature, let us present it to God, the true object of love, the sovereign good. If we are faithful in breaking up all attachment to the creature, that is, if we prevent its entering into those depths of the soul which our Lord

reserves for Himself, to dwell there and to be there respected, adored, and loved, we shall soon experience that pure joy which He never fails to give to a soul freed and detached from all human affections. [3]

Whenever we perceive within us anxious desires for anything, whatever it may be, and find that nature is hurrying us with too much haste to do what is to be done, whether it be to say something, see something, or to do something, let us stop short, and repress the precipitancy of our thoughts and the agitation of our actions – for God has said, that his Spirit does not dwell in disquiet.

Be careful not to take too much interest in what is going on around you, nor to be much engaged in it – it is a fruitful source of distraction. As soon as we have found what it is that God requires of us in anything that comes up, let us stop there and separate ourselves from all the rest. By that means we shall always preserve the depths of the soul free and equable, and rid ourselves of many things that embarrass our hearts, and prevent them from turning easily toward God.

An excellent means of preserving our interior solitude and liberty of soul, is to make it a rule to put an end, at the close of every action, to all reflections upon it, all reflex acts of self-love, whether of a vain joy or sorrow. Happy is he whose mind contains only what is necessary, and who thinks of nothing except when it is time to think of it! so that it is God who excites the impression, by calling us to perform his will as soon as it is exhibited, rather than the mind laboriously foreseeing and seeking it. In short, let us be accustomed to recollect ourselves during the day and in the midst of our occupations, by a simple view of God. Let us silence by that means all the movements of our hearts, when they appear in the least agitated. Let us separate ourselves from all that does not come from God. Let us suppress our superfluous thoughts and reveries. Let us utter no useless word. Let us seek God within us, and we shall find Him without fail, and with Him, joy and peace.

While outwardly busy, let us be more occupied with God than with everything else. To be rightly engaged, we must be in his presence and employed

for Him. At the sight of the Majesty of God, our interior ought to become calm and remain tranquil. Once a single word of the Saviour suddenly calmed a furiously agitated sea: one look of his at us, and of ours toward Him, ought always to perform the same miracle within us.

We must often raise our hearts to God. He will purify, enlighten, and direct them. Such was the daily practice of the sacred Psalmist: "I have set the Lord always before me." (Ps. xvi. 8.) Let us often employ the beautiful words of the same holy prophet, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" (Ps. lxxiii. 25.)

We must not wait for a leisure hour, when we can bar our doors; the moment that is employed in regretting that we have no opportunity to be recollected, might be profitably spent in recollection. Let us turn our hearts toward God in a simple, familiar spirit, full of confidence in him. The most interrupted moments, even while eating or listening to others, are valuable. Tiresome and idle talk in our presence, instead of annoying, will afford us the delight of employing the interval in seeking God. Thus all things work together for good to them that love God.

We must read according to our necessity and desire, but with frequent interruptions, for the purpose of recollection. A word or two, simple and full of the Spirit of God, will be to us as hidden manna. We forget the words, but the effect remains; they operate in secret, and the soul is fed and enriched.

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[3] The reader will not understand by this, that the soul, in a state of true abandonment, does not exhibit affection for those about it. As, by that process, it commences to see God as He is, it also begins to be like Him, and is all love. Its whole existence, like that of God, may be summed up in the single word "Love." But its love is divine, not human; its affection for all creatures of God, in their respective relations, is higher, and deeper, and holier than it ever was before. – Editor.

XXVI. ON CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD.

The essence of virtue consists in the attitude of the will. This is what the Lord would teach us when he said, "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke xvii. 21.) It is not a question of extensive knowledge, of splendid talents, nor even of great deeds; it is a simple matter of having a heart and loving. Outward works are the fruits and consequences of loving, and the spring of all good things is at the bottom of the soul.

There are some virtues which are appropriate to certain conditions, and not to others; some are good at one time, and some at another; but an upright will is profitable for all times and all places. That kingdom of God which is within us, consists in our willing whatever God wills, always, in everything, and without reservation; and thus his kingdom comes; for his will is then done as it is in Heaven, since we will nothing but what is dictated by his sovereign pleasure.

Blessed are the poor in spirit! Blessed are they who are stripped of everything, even of their own wills, that they may no longer belong to themselves! How poor in spirit does he become who has given up all things to God! But how is it that our will becomes right, when it unreservedly conforms to that of God? We will whatever He wills; what He does not will, we do not; we attach our feeble wills to that all-powerful one that regulates everything. Thus nothing can ever come to pass against our wishes; for nothing can happen contrary to the will of God, and we find in his good pleasure an inexhaustible source of peace and consolation.

The interior life is the beginning of the blessed peace of the saints, who eternally cry, Amen, Amen! We adore, we praise, we bless God in everything; we see Him incessantly, and in all things his paternal hand is the sole object of our contemplation. There are no longer any evils; for even the most terrible that come upon us, work together for good, as St. Paul says, to those that love God. (Rom. viii. 28.) Can the suffering that God destines to purify and make us worthy of himself, be called an evil?

Let us cast all our cares, then, into the bosom of so good a Father, and suffer Him to do as He pleases. Let us be content to adopt his will in all points, and to abandon our own absolutely and forever. How can we retain anything of our own, when we do not even belong to ourselves? The slave has nothing; how much less, then, should we own anything, who in ourselves are but nothingness and sin, and who are indebted for everything to pure grace! God has only bestowed upon us a will, free and capable of self-possession, that we may the more generously recompense the gift by returning it to its rightful owner.

We have nothing but our wills only; all the rest belongs elsewhere. Disease removes life and health; riches make to themselves wings; intellectual talents depend upon the state of the body. The only thing that really belongs to us is our will, and it is of this, therefore, that God is especially jealous, for He gave it to us, not that we should retain it, but that we should return it to Him, whole as we received it, and without the slightest reservation.

If the least desire remain, or the smallest hesitation, it is robbing God, contrary to the order of creation; for all things come from Him, and to Him they are all due.

Alas! how many souls there are full of self, and desirous of doing good and serving God, but in such a way as to suit themselves; who desire to impose rules upon God as to his manner of drawing them to Himself. They want to serve and possess Him, but they are not willing to abandon themselves to Him, and be possessed by Him.

What a resistance they offer to Him, even when they appear so full of zeal and fervor! It is certain that in one sense, their spiritual abundance becomes an obstacle to their progress; for they hold it all, even their virtues, in appropriation, and constantly seek self, even in good. O how superior to such fervid and illuminated souls, walking always in virtue, in a road of their own choice, is that humble heart that renounces its own life, and every selfish movement, and dismisses all will except such as God gives from moment to moment, in accordance with his Gospel and Providence!

Herein lies the meaning of those words of the Lord; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. xvi. 24; Luke xiv. 33.) We must follow Jesus Christ, step by step, and not open up a path for ourselves. We can only follow Him by denying ourselves; and what is this but unreservedly abandoning every right over ourselves? And so St. Paul tells us; "Ye are not your own (1 Cor. vi. 19): no, not a thing remains that belongs to us! Alas for him that resumes possession of anything after once abandoning it!

To desire to serve God in one place rather than in another, in this way rather than in that, is not this desiring to serve Him in our own way rather than in his? But to be equally ready for all things, to will everything and nothing, to leave ourselves in his hands, like a toy in the hands of a child, to set no bounds to our abandonment, inasmuch as the perfect reign of God cannot abide them, this is really denying ourselves; this is treating Him like a God, and ourselves like creatures made solely for his use.

XXVII. GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR ATTAINING INWARD PEACE.

There is no peace to them that resist God: if there be joy in the world, it is reserved for a pure conscience; the whole earth is full of tribulation and anguish to those who do not possess it.

How different is the peace of God from that of the world! It calms the passions, preserves the purity of the conscience, is inseparable from righteousness, unites us to God and strengthens us against temptations. The peace of the soul consists in an absolute resignation to the will of God.

"Martha, Martha, thou are careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful." (Luke x. 41.) The pain we suffer from so many occurrences, arises from the fact that we are not entirely abandoned to God in everything that happens.

Let us put all things, then, into his hands, and offer them to Him in our hearts, as a sacrifice beforehand. From the moment that you cease to desire anything according to your own judgment, and begin to will everything just as God wills it, you will be free from your former tormenting reflections and anxieties about your own concerns; you will no longer have anything to conceal or take care of.

Until then, you will be troubled, vacillating in your views and enjoyments, easily dissatisfied with others and but little satisfied with yourself, and full of reserve and distrust. Your good intentions, until they become truly humble and simple, will only torment you; your piety, however sincere, will be the occasion of more internal reproach then of support or consolation. But if you will abandon your whole heart to God, you will be full of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Alas for you, if you will regard man in the work of God! In our choice of a guide, men must be counted as nothing; the slightest respect for their opinion dries up the stream of grace, and increases our indecision. We suffer and we displease God besides.

How can we refuse to bestow all our love upon God, who first loved us with the tender love of a Father, pitying our frailty, and well knowing the mire from which we have been dragged? When a soul is filled with this love, it enjoys peace of conscience, it is content and happy, it requires neither greatness nor reputation, nor pleasure, nor any of the perishing gifts of time; it desires only the will of God, and watches incessantly in the joyful expectation of its Spouse.

XXVIII. PURE LOVE ONLY CAN SUFFER ARIGHT AND LOVE ITS SUFFERINGS.

We know that we must suffer, and that we deserve it; nevertheless, we are always surprised at affliction, as if we thought we neither merited nor had need of it. It is only true and pure love that delights to endure, for nothing else is perfectly abandoned. Resignation induces us to bear pain, but there is a something in it which is afflicted in suffering, and resists. The resignation that

measures out its abandonment to God with selfish reflection, is willing to suffer, but is constantly examining to ascertain whether it suffers acceptably. In fact, the resigned soul is composed as it were of two persons; one keeping the other in subjection, and watching lest it should revolt.

In pure love, unselfish and abandoned, the soul is fed in silence on the cross, and on union with the crucified Saviour, without any reflections on the severity of its sufferings. There exists but a single, simple will, which permits God to see it just as it is, without endeavoring to behold itself. It says nothing, does nothing. What then does it do? It suffers. And is this all? Yea, all; it has nothing else to do but to suffer. Love can be heard easily enough, without speech or thought. It does all that it is required to do, which is, to have no will when it is stripped of all consolation. The purest of all loves is a will so filled with that of God, that there remains nothing else.

What a consolation is it to think that we are then rid of so many anxieties about our exercise of patience and the other virtues in the sight of those about us? It is enough to be humbled and abandoned in the midst of suffering. This is not courage; it is something both more and less; less in the eyes of the ordinary class of Christians, more in the eyes of pure faith. It is a humiliation which raises the soul into all the greatness of God; a weakness which strips it of every resource, to bestow upon it his omnipotence. "When I am weak," says St. Paul, "then I am strong; I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (2 Cor. xii. 10; Phil. iv. 13.)

It suffices then, to feed upon some short sentences suited to our state and our taste, with frequent interruptions to quiet the senses and make room for the inward spirit of recollection. We sometimes suffer, scarcely knowing that we are in distress; at other times we suffer, and know that we bear it ill, but we carry this second and heavier cross without impatience. True love goes ever straightforward, not in its own strength, but esteeming itself as nothing. Then indeed we are truly happy. The cross is no longer a cross when there is no self to suffer under it, and to appropriate its good and evil.

XXIX. INTERESTED AND DISINTERESTED LOVE HAVE EACH ITS APPROPRIATE SEASON.

Why do the gifts of God confer more pleasure when they exist in ourselves than when they are conferred upon our neighbor, if we are not attached to self? If we prefer to see them in our possession rather than in that of those about us, we shall certainly be afflicted when we see them more perfect in them than they are in ourselves; and this constitutes envy. What is our duty then? We must rejoice that the will of God is done in us, and that it reigns there not for our happiness and perfection, but for his own good pleasure and glory.

Now, take notice of two matters. The first is, that this distinction is not an empty subtlety; for God, in his desire to desolate the soul for its own perfection, causes it really to pass through these trials of self, and never lets it alone until He has deprived its love of selfish reflection and support. There is nothing so jealous, so exacting, and so searching as this principle of pure love; it cannot abide a thousand things that were imperceptible in our previous state; and what pious persons would call an unprofitable nicety, seems an essential point to the soul that is desirous of destroying self. As with gold in the furnace, the fire consumes all that is not gold, so it seems necessary that the heart should be melted with fervent heat, that the love of God may be rendered pure.

The second remark is, that God does not pursue every soul in this way in the present life. There is an infinite number of truly pious persons whom He leaves in some degree under the dominion of self-love; these remains of self help to support them in the practice of virtue, and serve to purify them to a certain point.

Scarce anything would be more injudicious or more dangerous than to deprive them of the contemplation of the grace of God in them as tending to their own personal perfection. The first class exercise disinterested gratitude; they are thankful to God for whatever He does in them, solely because He does it for his own glory; the second are also grateful, but partly because their own perfection is secured at the same time. If the former should endeavor to deprive

the latter of this mixed motive and this interior comfort in self, in reference to grace, they would cause them as much injury as they would an infant by weaning it before it was able to eat; to take away the breast, would be to destroy it. We must never seek to deprive a soul of the food which still contains nutriment for it, and which God suffers to remain as a stay to its weakness. To forestall grace is to destroy it. Neither must the latter condemn the former because they do not see them as much concerned as themselves about their own perfection in the grace ministered unto them. God works in every one as he pleases; the wind bloweth where it listeth, (John iii. 8,) and as it listeth. The forgetfulness of self in the pure contemplation of God, is a state in which God can do in our souls whatever most pleases Himself. The important point is, that those who are still in a measure supported by self, should not be too anxious about the state of such as are in pure love, nor should these latter endeavor to make the former pass through the trials peculiar to a higher state of grace before God calls them to it.

XXX. ON TRUE LIBERTY.

When we are no longer embarrassed by the restless reflections of self, we begin to enjoy true liberty.

False wisdom, on the other hand, always on the watch, ever occupied with self, constantly jealous of its own perfection, suffers severely whenever it is permitted to perceive the smallest speck of imperfection.

Not that the man who is simple minded and detached from self, fails to labor toward the attainment of perfection; he is the more successful in proportion as he forgets himself, and never dreams of virtue in any other light than as something which accomplishes the will of God.

The source of all our defects is the love of self; we refer everything to that, instead of to the love of God. Whoever, then, will labor to get rid of self, to deny him-self, according to the instructions of Christ, strikes at once at the root of every evil, and finds, in this simple abandonment of self, the germ of every good.

Then those words of Scripture are heard within and understood, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Cor. iii. 17.) We neglect nothing to cause the kingdom of God to come both within and without; but in the midst of our frailties we are at peace. We would rather die than commit the slightest voluntary sin, but we have no fear for our reputation from the judgment of man. We court the reproach of Christ Jesus, and dwell in peace though surrounded by uncertainties; the judgments of God do not affright us, for we abandon ourselves to them, imploring his mercy according to our attainments in confidence, sacrifice, and absolute surrender. The greater the abandonments, the more flowing the peace; and in such a large place does it set us, that we are prepared for everything; we will everything and nothing; we are as guileless as babes.

Our illumination from God discovers the lightest transgressions, but never discourages. We walk before Him; but if we stumble, we hasten to resume our way, and have no watchword but Onward!

If we would find God, we must destroy the remains of the old Adam within. The Lord held a little child in his arms, when He declared, "of such is the kingdom of Heaven." The sum of the principal directions is this: do not reason too much, always have an upright purpose in the smallest matters, and pay no attention to the thousand reflections by which we wrap and bury ourselves in self, under pretence of correcting our faults.

XXXI. ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF TIME.

I understand perfectly well that you do not ask at my hands any proof that it is incumbent upon us to employ all our time to good purpose; grace has long since convinced you of this. It is a pleasant thing to come in contact with those who can meet us half way; but, notwithstanding this, much remains to be done, and there is a wonderful distance between the conviction of the intellect, even combined with the good intention of the heart, and a faithful and exact obedience.

Nothing has been more common in ancient, as well as in modern times, then to meet souls who were perfect and holy, theoretically. (Matt. vii. 16,) "Ye shall know them by their fruits," says the Saviour. And this is the only rule that never deceives, when it is properly understood; it is that by which we must judge ourselves.

There is a time for everything in our lives; but the maxim that governs every moment, is, that there should be none useless; that they should all enter into the order and sequence of our salvation; that they are all accompanied by duties which God has allotted with his own hand, and of which He will demand an account; for from the first instant of our existence to the last, He has never assigned us a barren moment, nor one which we can consider as given up to our own discretion. The great thing is to recognize his will in relation to them. This is to be effected, not by an eager and restless seeking, which is much more likely to spoil everything, than to enlighten us as to our duty, but by a true submission to those whom God has set over us, and a pure and upright heart which seeks God in its simplicity, and heartily opposes all the duplicity and false wisdom of self, as fast as it is revealed. For we misemploy our time, not only when we do wrong or do nothing, but also when we do something else than what was incumbent on us at the moment, even though it may be the means of good. We are strangely ingenious in perpetually seeking our own interest; and what the world does nakedly and without shame, those who desire to be devoted to God do also, but in a refined manner, under favor of some pretext which serves as a veil to hide from them the deformity of their conduct.

The best general means to ensure the profitable employment of our time, is to accustom ourselves to living in continual dependence upon the Spirit of God and his law, receiving, every instant, whatever He is pleased to bestow; consulting Him in every emergency requiring instant action, and having recourse to Him in our weaker moments, when virtue seems to fail; invoking his aid, and rising our hearts to Him whenever we are solicited by sensible objects, and find ourselves surprised and estranged from God, and far from the true road.

Happy is the soul that commits itself, by a sincere self-abandonment, into the hands of its Creator, ready to do all his will, and continually crying, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do? Teach me to do thy will, for Thou art my God!" (Acts. ix. 6; Psalm cxliii. 10.)

During our necessary occupations, we need only pay a simple attention to the leadings of Divine Providence. As they are all prepared for us, and presented by Him, our only care should be to receive them with a child-like spirit, and submit everything absolutely to Him; our temper, our own will, our scruples, our restlessness, our self-reflections, our overflowing emotions of hurry, vain joy, or other passions which assault us according as we are pleased or displeased with the different events of the day. Let us be careful, however, not to suffer ourselves to be overwhelmed by the multiplicity of our exterior occupations, be they what they may.

Let us endeavor to commence every enterprise with a pure view to the glory of God, continue it without distraction, and finish it without impatience.

The intervals of relaxation and amusement are the most dangerous seasons for us, and perhaps the most useful for others; we must, then, be on our guard, that we be as faithful as possible to the presence of God. We must make use of all that Christian vigilance so much recommended by our Lord; raise our hearts to God in the simple view of faith, and dwell in sweet and peaceful dependence upon the Spirit of grace, as the only means of our safety and strength. This is especially necessary for such as are looked up to as in authority, and whose words may be the cause of so much good or evil.

Our leisure hours are ordinarily the sweetest and pleasantest for ourselves; we can never employ them better than in refreshing our spiritual strength, by a secret and intimate communion with God. Prayer is so necessary, and the source of so many blessings, that he who has discovered the treasure cannot be prevented from having recourse to it, whenever he has an opportunity.

I could add much more concerning these matters, and I may perhaps do so, if my present views do not escape me; but, if they do, it is of little consequence.

God gives others when He pleases; if He does not, it is a proof that they are not necessary; and if so, we should be well satisfied with their loss.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS.

FENELON.

"And I have declared unto them thy name and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them and I in them." – John xvii. 26.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS.

LETTER I. The advantage of humiliation.

I pray often to God that He would keep you in the hollow of his hand. The most essential point is lowliness. It is profitable for all things, for it produces a teachable spirit which makes everything easy. You would be more guilty than many others if you made any resistance to God on this point. On the one hand, you have received abundant light and grace on the necessity of becoming like a little child; and on the other, no one has had an experience fitter to humiliate the heart and destroy self-confidence. The great profit to be derived from an experience of our weakness, is to render us lowly and obedient. May the Lord keep you!

LETTER II. How to bear suffering so as to preserve our peace.

As to our friend, I pray God to bestow upon him a simplicity that shall give him peace. When we are faithful in instantly dropping all superfluous and restless reflections, which arise from a self-love as different as possible from charity, we shall be set in a large place even in the midst of the strait and narrow path. We shall be in the pure liberty and innocent peace of the children of God, without being found wanting either towards God or man.

I apply to myself the same counsel that I give to others, and am well persuaded that I must seek my own peace in the same direction. My heart is now suffering; but it is the life of self that causes us pain; that which is dead does not suffer. If we were dead, and our life were hid with Christ in God, (Col. iii. 3,) we should no longer perceive those pains in spirit that now afflict us. We should not only bear bodily sufferings with equanimity, but spiritual affliction also, that is to say, trouble sent upon the soul without its own immediate act. But the disturbances of a restless activity, in which the soul adds to the cross imposed by the hand of God, the burden of an agitated resistance, and an unwillingness to suffer, are only experienced in consequence of the remaining life of self.

A cross which comes purely from God, and is cordially welcomed without any self-reflective acts, is at once painful and peaceful; but one unwillingly received and repelled by the life of nature, is doubly severe; the resistance within is harder to bear than the cross itself. If we recognize the hand of God, and make no opposition in the will, we have comfort in our affliction. Happy indeed are they who can bear their sufferings in the enjoyment of this simple peace and perfect acquiescence in the will of God! Nothing so shortens and soothes our pains as this spirit of non-resistance.

But we are generally desirous of bargaining with God; we would like at least to impose the limits and see the end of our sufferings. That same obstinate and hidden hold of life, which renders the cross necessary, causes us to reject it in part, and by a secret resistance, which impairs its virtue. We have thus to go over the same ground again and again; we suffer greatly, but to very little purpose. The Lord deliver us from falling into that state of soul in which crosses are of no benefit to us! God loves a cheerful giver, according to St. Paul (2 Cor. ix. 7); ah! what must be his love to those who, in a cheerful and absolute abandonment, resign themselves to the entire extent of his crucifying will!

LETTER III. The beauty of the cross.

I cannot but wonder at the virtue that lies in suffering; we are worth nothing without the cross. I tremble and am in an agony while it lasts, and all my conviction of its salutary effects vanish under the torture, but when it is over, I look back at it with admiration, and am ashamed that I bore it so ill. This experience of my folly is a deep lesson of wisdom to me.

Whatever may be the state of your sick friend, and whatever the issue of her disease, she is blessed in being so quiet under the hand of God. If she die, she dies to the Lord; if she live, she lives to Him. Either the cross or death, says St. Theresa.

Nothing is beyond the necessity of the cross but the established kingdom of God; when we bear it in love, it is his kingdom begun, with which we must remain satisfied while it is his pleasure. You have need of the cross as well as I. The faithful Giver of every good gift distributes them to each of us with his own hand, blessed be his name! Ah! how good it is to be chastened for our profit!

LETTER IV. The death of self.

I cannot express to you, my dear sister, how deeply I sympathize with your afflictions; but my grief is not unmixed with consolation. God loves you, since He does not spare you, but lays upon you the cross of Jesus Christ. Whatever light, whatever feeling we may possess, is all a delusion, if it lead us not to the real and constant practice of dying to self. We cannot die without suffering, neither can we be said to be dead, while there is still any part in us which is alive. That death with which God blesses the soul, pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow. He who sees in us what we cannot see, knows full well where the blow should fall; He takes away that which we are most reluctant to give up. Pain is only felt where there is life, and where there is life, is just the place where death is needed. Our Father wastes no time by cutting into parts which are already dead; if He sought to continue life, He would do so, but He seeks to destroy, and this He can only accomplish by cutting into that which is quick and living. You need not expect Him to attack

those gross and wicked desires which you renounced forever, when you gave yourself away to Him, but he will prove you, perhaps, by destroying your liberty of soul, and by depriving you of your most spiritual consolations.

Would you resist? Ah! no! Suffer all things! This death must be voluntary, and can only be accomplished to that extent to which you are willing it should be. To resist death, and repel its advances, is not being willing to die. Give up voluntarily, then, to the good pleasure of God, all your reliances, even the most spiritual, whenever He may seem disposed to take them from you. What fearest thou, O thou of little faith? Dost thou fear that He may not be able to supply to thee from Himself, that succor which He takes away on the part of man? And why does He take it away, except to supply it from Himself, and to purify thee by the painful lesson? I see that every way is shut up, and that God means to accomplish his work in you, by cutting off every human resource. He is a jealous God; He is not willing you should owe what He is about to perform in you, to any other than to Himself alone.

Give yourself up to his plans – be led whither He will by his providences. Beware how you seek aid from man, when God forbids it – they can only give you what He gives them for you. Why should you be troubled that you can no longer drink from the aqueduct when you are led to the perennial spring itself from which its waters are derived?

LETTER V. Peace lies in simplicity and obedience.

Cultivate peace; be deaf to your too prolific imagination; its great activity not only injures the health of your body, but introduces aridity into your soul. You consume yourself to no purpose; peace and interior sweetness are destroyed by your restlessness. Think you God can speak in those soft and tender accents that melt the soul, in the midst of such a tumult as you excite by your incessant hurry of thought? Be quiet, and He will soon be heard. Indulge but a single scruple; to be scrupulously obedient.

You ask for consolation; but you do not perceive that you have been led to the brink of the fountain, and refuse to drink. Peace and consolation are only to be found in simple obedience. Be faithful in obeying without reference to your scruples, and you will soon find that the rivers of living water will flow according to the promise. You will receive according to the measure of your faith; much, if you believe much; nothing, if you believe nothing and continue to give ear to your empty imaginations.

You dishonor true love by the supposition that it is anxious about such trifles as continually occupy your attention; it goes straight to God in pure simplicity. Satan is transformed into an angel of light; he assumes the beautiful form of a scrupulous love and a tender conscience; but you should know by experience the trouble and danger into which he will lead you by vehement scruples. Everything depends upon your faithfulness in repelling his first advances.

If you become ingenuous and simple in your desires, I think you will have been more pleasing to God than if you had suffered a hundred martyrdoms. Turn all your anxieties toward your delay in offering a sacrifice so right in the sight of God. Can true love hesitate when it is required to please its well-beloved?

LETTER VI. The true source of peace is in the surrender of the will.

Remain in peace; the fervor of devotion does not depend upon yourself; all that lies in your power is the direction of your will. Give that up to God without reservation. The important question is not how much you enjoy religion, but whether you will whatever God wills. Humbly confess your faults; be detached from the world, and abandoned to God; love Him more than yourself, and his glory more than your life; the least you can do is to desire and ask for such a love. God will then love you and put his peace in your heart.

LETTER VII. True good is only reached by abandonment.

Evil is changed into good when it is received in patience through the love of God; while good is changed into evil when we become attached to it through the love of self. True good lies only in detachment, and abandonment to God. You are now in the trial; put yourself confidently and without reserve into his hand. What would I not sacrifice to see you once more restored in body, but heartily sick of the love of the world! Attachment to ourselves is a thousand times more infectious than a contagious poison, for it contains the venom of self. I pray for you with all my heart.

LETTER VIII. Knowledge puffeth up; charity edifieth.

I am happy to hear of your frame of mind, and to find you communicating in simplicity everything that takes place within you. Never hesitate to write me whatever you think God requires.

It is not at all surprising that you have a sort of jealous ambition to advance in the spiritual life, and to be intimate with persons of distinction who are pious. Such things are by nature very flattering to our self-love, and it eagerly seeks them. But we should not strive to gratify such an ambition by making great progress in the religious life, and by cultivating the acquaintance of persons high in honor; our aim should be to die to the flattering delights of self-love, by becoming humble and in love with obscurity and contempt, and to have a single eye to God.

We may hear about perfection without end, and become perfectly familiar with its language, and yet be as far from its attainment as ever. Our great aim should be, to be deaf to self, to hearken to God in silence, to renounce every vanity, and to devote ourselves to solid virtue. Let us speak but little and do much, without a thought as to whether we are observed or not.

God will teach you more than the most experienced Christians, and better than all the books that the world has ever seen. And what is your object in such an eager chase after knowledge? Are you not aware that all we need is to be poor in spirit, and to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified? Knowledge puffeth

up; it is only charity that can edify. (1 Cor. viii. 1.) Be content with charity, then, alone. What! is it possible that the love of God, and the abandonment of self for his sake, is only to be reached through the acquisition of so much knowledge? You have already more than you use, and need further illuminations much less than the practice of what you already know. O how deceived we are, when we suppose we are advancing, because our vain curiosity is gratified by the enlightenment of our intellect! Be humble, and expect not the gifts of God from man.

LETTER IX. We are not to choose the manner in which our blessings shall be bestowed.

You know what God requires of you; will you refuse? You perceive that your resistance to the drawings of his grace, arises solely from self-love: will you suffer the refinements of pride, and the most ingenious inventions of self, to reject the mercies of God? You who have so many scruples in relation to the passing thought, which is involuntary and therefore innocent, who confess so many things that should rather be dismissed at once, have you no scruples about your long-continued resistance to the Holy Spirit, because He has not seen fit to confer the benefits you desire, by a channel which was flattering to your self-love?

What matter if you received the gifts of grace as beggars receive bread? The gifts themselves would be neither less pure nor less precious. Your heart would only be the more worthy of God, if, by its humility and annihilation, it attracted the succor that He was disposed to send. Is this the way you put off self? Is this the view that pure faith takes of the instrument of God? Is it thus that you die to the life of self within? To what purpose are your readings about pure love, and your frequent devotions? How can you read what condemns the very depths of your soul? You are influenced not only be self-interest, but by the persuasions of pride, when you reject the gifts of God, because they do not come in a shape to suit your taste. How can you pray? What is the language of God

in the depths of your soul? He asks nothing but death, and you desire nothing but life. How can you put up to Him a prayer for his grace, with a restriction that He shall only send it by a channel demanding no sacrifice on your part but ministering to the gratification of your carnal pride?

LETTER X. The discovery and death of self.

Yes, I joyfully consent that you call me your father! I am so and will be always; there needs only on your part a full and confident persuasion of it, which will come when your heart is enlarged. Self-love now shuts it up. We are in a strait place, indeed, when we are enclosed in self, but when we emerge from that prison, and enter into the immensity of God and the liberty of his children, we are set at large.

I am rejoiced to find that God has reduced you to a state of weakness. Your self-love can neither be convinced nor vanquished by any other means, ever finding secret resources and impenetrable retreats in your courage and ingenuity. It was hidden from your eyes, while it fed upon the subtle poison of an apparent generosity, by which you constantly sacrificed yourself for others. God has forced it to cry aloud, to come forth into open day, and display its excessive jealousy. O how painful, but how useful, are these seasons of weakness? While any self-love remains, we are afraid of its being revealed, but so long as the least symptom of it lurks in the most secret recesses of the heart, God pursues it, and by some infinitely merciful blow, forces it into the light. The poison then becomes the remedy; self-love, pushed to extremity, discovers itself in all its deformity by a transport of despair, and disgraces all the refinements, and dissipates the flattering illusions of a whole life. God sets before your eyes your idol, self. You behold it, and cannot turn your eyes away; and as you have no longer power over yourself, you cannot keep the sight from others.

Thus to exhibit self-love without its mask is the most mortifying punishment that can be inflicted. We no longer behold it wise, discreet, polite, self-possessed, and courageous in sacrificing itself for others; it is no longer the

self-love whose nourishment consisted in the belief that it had need of nothing, and the persuasion that its greatness and generosity deserved a different name. It is the selfishness of a silly child, screaming at the loss of an apple; but it is far more tormenting, for it also weeps from rage that it has wept; it cannot be still, and refuses all comfort, because its venomous character has been detected. It beholds itself foolish, rude, and impertinent, and is forced to look its own frightful countenance in the face. It says with Job: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." (Job iii. 25.) For precisely that which it most fears is the most necessary means of its destruction.

We have no need that God should attack in us what has neither life nor sensibility. It is the living only that must die, and all the rest is nought. This, then, is what you needed, to behold a self-love convinced, sensitive, gross, and palpable. And now all you have to do, is to be quietly willing to look at it as it is; the moment you can do this, it will have disappeared.

You ask for a remedy, that you may get well. You do not need to be cured, but to be slain; seek not impatiently for a remedy, but let death come. Be careful, however, lest a certain courageous resolve to avail yourself of no remedy, be itself a remedy in disguise, and give aid and comfort to this cursed life. Seek no consolation for self-love, and do not conceal the disease. Reveal everything in simplicity and holiness, and then suffer yourself to die.

But this is not to be accomplished by any exertion of strength. Weakness is become your only possession; all strength is out of place; it only serves to render the agony longer and more distressing. If you expire from exhaustion, you will die so much the quicker and less violently. A dying life must of necessity be painful. Cordials are a cruelty to the sufferer on the wheel; he only longs for the fatal blow, not food, nor sustenance. If it were possible to weaken him and hasten his death, we should abridge his sufferings; but we can do nothing; the hand alone that tied him to his torture can deliver him from the remains of suffering life.

Ask, then, neither remedies, sustenance, nor death; to ask death, is impatience; to ask food or remedies, is to prolong our agony. What, then, shall we do? Let alone; seek nothing, hold to nothing; confess everything, not as a means of consolation, but through humility and desire to yield. Look to me, not as a source of life, but as a means of death. As an instrument of life would belie its purpose, if it did not minister to life, so an instrument of death would be falsely named, if, in lieu of slaying, it kept alive. Let me, then, be, or at least seem to you to be, hard, unfeeling, indifferent, pitiless, wearied, annoyed, and contemptuous. God knows how far it is from the truth; but he permits it all to appear; and I shall be much more serviceable to you in this false and imaginary character than by my affection and real assistance, for the point is not, how you are to be sustained and kept alive, but how you are to lose all and die.

LETTER XI. The sight of our imperfections should not take away our peace.

There is something very hidden and very deceptive in your suffering; for while you seem to yourself to be wholly occupied with the glory of God, in your inmost soul it is self alone that occasions all your trouble. You are, indeed, desirous that God should be glorified, but that it should take place by means of your perfection, and you thus cherish the sentiments of self-love. It is simply a refined pretext for dwelling in self. If you would truly derive profit from the discovery of your imperfections, neither justify nor condemn on their account, but quietly lay them before God, conforming your will to his in all things that you cannot understand, and remaining at peace; for peace is the order of God for every condition whatever. There is, in fact, a peace of conscience which sinners themselves should enjoy when awakened to repentance. Their suffering should be peaceful and mingled with consolation. Remember the beautiful word which once delighted you, that the Lord was not in noise and confusion, but in the still, small voice. (1 Kings xix. 11.)

LETTER XII. Living by the cross and by faith.

Everything is a cross; I have no joy but bitterness; but the heaviest cross must be borne in peace. At times it can neither be borne nor dragged; we can only fall down beneath it, overwhelmed and exhausted. I pray that God may spare you as much as possible in apportioning your suffering; it is our daily bread; God alone knows how much we need; and we must live in faith upon the means of death, confident, though we see it not, that God, with secret compassion, proportions our trials to the unperceived succor that He administers within. This life of faith is the most penetrating of all deaths.

LETTER XIII. Despair at our imperfection is a greater obstacle than the imperfection itself.

Be not concerned about your defects. Love without ceasing, and you shall be much forgiven, because you have loved much. (Luke vii. 47.) We are apt to seek the delights and selfish supports of love, rather than love itself. We deceive ourselves, even in supposing we are endeavoring to love, when we are only trying to see that we love. We are more occupied with the love, says St. Francis of Sales, than with the Well-beloved. If He were our only object, we should be all taken up with Him; but when we are employed in obtaining an assurance of his love, we are still in a measure busy with self. Our defects, regarded in peace and in the spirit of love, are instantly consumed by love itself; but considered in the light of self, they make us restless, and interrupt the presence of God and the exercise of perfect love. The chagrin we feel at our own defects, is ordinarily a greater fault than the original defect itself. You are wholly taken up with the less of the two faults, like a person whom I have just seen, who, after reading the life of one of the saints, was so enraged at his own comparative imperfection, that he entirely abandoned the idea of living a devoted life. I judge of your fidelity by your peace and liberty of soul; the more peaceful and enlarged your heart, the nearer you seem to be to God.

LETTER XIV. Pure faith sees God alone.

Be not anxious about the future; it is opposed to grace. When God sends you consolation, regard Him only in it, enjoy it day by day as the Israelites received their manna, and do not endeavor to lay it up in store. There are two peculiarities of pure faith; it sees God alone under all the imperfect envelopes which conceal Him, [4] and it holds the soul incessantly in suspense. We are kept constantly in the air, without being suffered to touch a foot to solid ground. The comfort of the present instant will be wholly inappropriate to the next; we must let God act with the most perfect freedom, in whatever belongs to Him, and think only of being faithful in all that depends upon ourselves. This momentary dependence, this darkness and this peace of the soul, under the utter uncertainty of the future, is a true martyrdom, which take place silently and without any stir. It is death by a slow fire; and the end comes so imperceptibly and interiorly, that it is often almost as much hidden from the sufferer himself, as from those who are unacquainted with his state. When God removes his gifts from you, He knows how and when to replace them, either by others or by Himself. He can raise up children from the very stones.

Eat then your daily bread without thought for the morrow; "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matt. vi. 34.) To-morrow will take thought for the things of itself. He who feeds you to-day, is the same to whom you will look for food to-morrow; manna shall fall again from heaven in the midst of the desert, before the children of God shall want any good thing.

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[4] The man that looks on glass, On it may stay his eye; Or, if he pleaseth, through it pass, And then the heavens espy. – Herbert. Pure faith cannot see the neighbor that succeeds, as he blindly thinks, in injuring us, nor the disease that attacks our bodies; that would be to stay its eye upon the glass, in which it would see a thousand flaws and imperfections that would annoy it and destroy its peace; it looks right through and discovers God; and what He permits, it cannot but joyfully acquiesce in. – Editor.

LETTER XV. Our knowledge stands in the way of our becoming wise.

Live in peace, my dear young lady, without any thought for the future; perhaps there will be none for you. You have no present, even, of your own, for you must only use it in accordance with the designs of God, to whom it truly belongs. Continue the good works that occupy you, since you have an attraction that way, and can readily accomplish them. Avoid distractions, and the consequences of your excessive vivacity, and, above all things, be faithful to the present moment, and you will receive all necessary grace.

It is not enough to be detached from the world; we must become lowly also; in detachment, we renounce the things without, in lowliness, we abandon self. Every shadow of perceptible pride must be left behind, and the pride of wisdom and virtue is more dangerous than that of worldly fortune, as it has a show of right, and is more refined.

We must be lowly-minded in all points, and appropriate nothing to ourselves, our virtue and courage least of all. You rest too much in your own courage, disinterestedness, and uprightness. The babe owns nothing; it treats a diamond and an apple alike. Be a babe; have nothing of your own; forget yourself; give way on all occasions; let the smallest be greater than you.

Pray simply from the heart, from pure love, and not from the head, from the intellect alone.

Your true instruction is to be found in spoliation, deep recollection, silence of the whole soul before God, in renouncing your own spirit, and, in the love of lowliness, obscurity, feebleness, and annihilation. This ignorance is the accomplished teacher of all truth; knowledge cannot attain to it, or can reach it but superficially.

LETTER XVI. Those who endeavor to injure us are to be loved and welcomed as the hand of God.

I sympathize, as I ought, in all your troubles, but I can do nothing else except pray God that He would console you. You have great need of the gift of his Spirit to sustain you in your difficulties, and to restrain your natural vivacity under the trials which are so fitted to excite it. As to the letter touching your birth, I think you should lay it before God alone, and beg his mercy upon him who has sought to injure you.

I have always perceived, or thought that I perceived, that you were sensitive on that point. God always attacks us on our weak side; we do not aim to kill a person by striking a blow at his insensible parts, such as the hair or nails, but by endeavoring to reach at once the noble organs, the immediate seats of life. When God would have us die to self, he always touches the tenderest spot, that which is fullest of life. It is thus that he distributes crosses. Suffer yourself to be humbled. Silence and peace under humiliation are the true good of the soul; we are tempted, under a thousand specious pretexts, to speak humbly; but it is far better to be humbly silent. The humility that can yet talk, has need of careful watching; self-love derives comfort from its outward words.

Do not suffer yourself to get excited by what is said about you. Let the world talk; do you strive to do the will of God; as for that of men, you could never succeed in doing it to their satisfaction, and it is not worth the pains. A moment of silence, of peace, and of union to God, will amply recompense you for every calumny that shall be uttered against you. We must love our fellows, without expecting friendship from them; they leave us and return, they go and come; let them do as they will; it is but a feather, the sport of the wind. See God only in them; it is He that afflicts or consoles us, by means of them, according as we have need.

LETTER XVII. Quietness in God our true resource.

Warmth of imagination, ardor of feeling, acuteness of reasoning, and fluency of expression, can do but little. The true agent is a perfect abandonment before God, in which we do everything by the light which He gives, and are

content with the success which He bestows. This continual death is a blessed life known to few. A single word, uttered from this rest, will do more, even in outward affairs, than all our most eager and officious care. It is the Spirit of God that then speaks the word, and it loses none of its force and authority, but enlightens, persuades, moves, and edifies. We have accomplished everything, and have scarce said anything.

On the other hand, if left to the excitability of our natural temperament, we talk forever, indulging in a thousand subtle and superfluous reflections; we are constantly afraid of not saying or doing enough; we get angry, excited, exhausted, distracted, and finally make no headway. Your disposition has an especial need of these maxims; they are as necessary for your body as your soul, and your physician, and your spiritual adviser should act together.

Let the water flow beneath the bridge; let men be men, that is to say, weak, vain, inconstant, unjust, false, and presumptuous; let the world be the world still; you cannot prevent it. Let every one follow his own inclination and habits; you cannot recast them, and the best course is, to let them be as they are and bear with them. Do not think it strange when you witness unreasonableness and injustice; rest in peace in the bosom of God; He sees it all more clearly than you do, and yet permits it. Be content to do quietly and gently what it becomes you to do, and let everything else be to you as though it were not.

LETTER XVIII. True friendships are founded only in God.

We must be content with what God gives, without having any choice of our own. It is right that his will should be done, not ours; and that his should become ours without the least reservation, in order that it may be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This is a hundred times more valuable an attainment than to be engaged in the view or consolation of self.

O how near are we to each other when we are all united in God! How well do we converse when we have but a single will and a single thought in Him who is all things in us! Would you find your true friends, then? Seek them only in

Him who is the single source of true and eternal friendship. Would you speak with or hear from them? Sink in silence into the bosom of Him who is the word, the life, and the soul of all those who speak and live the truth. You will find in Him not only every want supplied, but everything perfect, which you find so imperfect in the creatures in whom you confide.

LETTER XIX. The cross a source of our pleasure.

I sympathize with all your distresses; but we must carry the cross with Christ in this transitory life. We shall soon have no time to suffer; we shall reign with God our consolation, who will have wiped away our tears with his own hand, and from before whose presence pain and sighing shall forever flee away. While this fleeting moment of trial is permitted us, let us not lose the slightest portion of the worth of the cross. Let us suffer in humility and in peace; our self-love exaggerates our distresses, and magnifies them in our imagination. A cross borne in simplicity, without the interference of self-love to augment it, is only half a cross. Suffering in this simplicity of love, we are not only happy in spite of the cross, but because of it; for love is pleased in suffering for the Well-beloved, and the cross which forms us into his image is a consoling bond of love.

LETTER XX. The absence of feeling and the revelation of self no sufficient causes of distress.

I pray God that this new year may be full of grace and blessing to you. I am not surprised that you do not enjoy recollection as you did on being delivered from a long and painful agitation. Everything is liable to be exhausted. A lively disposition, accustomed to active exertion, soon languishes in solitude and inaction. For a great number of years you have been necessarily much distracted by external activity, and it was this circumstance that made me fear the effect of the life of abandonment upon you. You were at first in the fervor of your beginnings, when no difficulties appear formidable. You said with Peter, it is good for us to be here; but it is often with us as it was with him, that we know

not what we say. (Mark ix. 56.) In our moments of enjoyment, we feel as if we could do everything; in the time of temptation and discouragement, we think we can do nothing, and believe that all is lost. But we are alike deceived in both.

You should not be disturbed at any distraction that you may experience; the cause of it lay concealed within even when you felt such zeal for recollection. Your temperament and habits all conduce to making you active and eager. It was only weariness and exhaustion that caused you to relish an opposite life. But, by fidelity to grace, you will gradually become permanently introduced into the experience of which you have had a momentary taste. God bestowed it that you might see whither He would lead you; He then takes it away, that we may be made sensible that it does not belong to us; that we are neither able to procure nor preserve it, and that it is a gift of grace that must be asked in all humility.

Be not amazed at finding yourself sensitive, impatient, haughty, self-willed; you must be made to perceive that such is your natural disposition. We must bear the yoke of the daily confusion of our sins, says St. Augustine. We must be made to feel our weakness, our wretchedness, our inability to correct ourselves. We must despair of our own heart, and have no hope but in God. We must bear with ourselves, without flattering, and without neglecting a single effort for our correction.

We must be instructed as to our true character, while waiting for God's time to take it away. Let us become lowly under his all-powerful hand; yielding and manageable as often as we perceive any resistance in our will. Be silent as much as you can. Be in no haste to judge; suspend your decisions, your likes and dislikes. Stop at once when you become aware that your activity is hurried, and do not be too eager even for good things.

LETTER XXI. The imperfection of others to be borne in love.

It is a long while since I renewed the assurance of my attachment to you in our Lord. It is, nevertheless, greater than ever. I desire with all my heart that you may always find in your household the peace and consolation which you

enjoyed in the beginning. To be content with even the best of people, we must be contented with little and bear a great deal. Those who are most perfect, have many imperfections, and we have great faults, so that between the two, mutual toleration becomes very difficult. We must bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ, (Gal. vi. 2,) thus setting off one against the other in love. Peace and unanimity will be much aided by frequent silence, habitual recollection, prayer, self-abandonment, renunciation of all vain criticisms, and a faithful departure from the vain reflections of a jealous and difficult self-love. To how much trouble would this simplicity put an end! Happy he who neither listens to self nor to the tales of others!

Be content with leading a simple life, according to your condition. Be obedient, and bear your daily cross; you need it, and it is bestowed by the pure mercy of God. The grand point is to despise self from the heart, and to be willing to be despised, if God permits it. Feed upon Him alone; St. Augustine says that his mother lived upon prayer; do you do so likewise, and die to everything else. We can only live to God by the continual death of self.

LETTER XXII. The fear of death not taken away by our own courage, but by the grace of God.

I am not in the least surprised to learn that your impression of death becomes more lively, in proportion as age and infirmity bring it nearer. I experience the same thing. There is an age at which death is forced upon our consideration more frequently, by more irresistible reflections, and by a time of retirement in which we have fewer distractions. God makes use of this rough trial to undeceive us in respect to our courage, to make us feel our weakness, and to keep us in all humility in his own hands.

Nothing is more humiliating than a troubled imagination, in which we search in vain for our former confidence in God. This is the crucible of humiliation, in which the heart is purified by a sense of its weakness and unworthiness. In his sight shall no man living be justified (Psalm cxliii. 2); yea,

the heavens are not clean in his sight, (Job xv. 15,) and in many things we offend all. (James iii. 2.) We behold our faults and not our virtues; which latter it would be even dangerous to behold, if they are real.

We must go straight on through this deprivation without interruption, just as we were endeavoring to walk in the way of God, before being disturbed. If we should perceive any fault that needs correction, we must be faithful to the light given us, but do it carefully, lest we be led into false scruples. We must then remain at peace, not listening to the voice of self-love, mourning over our approaching death, but detach ourselves from life, offering it in sacrifice to God, and confidently abandon ourselves to Him. St. Ambrose was asked, when dying, whether he was not afraid of the judgments of God; "We have a good master," said he, and so must we reply to ourselves. We need to die in the most impenetrable uncertainty, not only as to God's judgment upon us, but as to our own characters. We must, as St. Augustine has it, be so reduced as to have nothing to present before God but our wretchedness and his mercy. Our wretchedness is the proper object of his mercy, and his mercy is all our merit. In your hours of sadness, read whatever will strengthen your confidence and establish your heart. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." (Psalm lxxiii. 1.) Pray for this cleanness of heart, which is so pleasing in his sight, and which renders Him so compassionate to our failings.

LETTER XXIII. Sensitiveness under reproof the surest sign we needed it.

I greatly desire that you may have interior peace. You know that it cannot be found, except in lowliness of mind, and lowliness is not real, except it be produced by God upon every proper occasion. These occasions are chiefly when we are blamed by someone who disapproves of us, and when we experience inward weakness. We must accustom ourselves to bearing both these trials.

We are truly lowly when we are no longer taken by surprise at finding ourselves corrected from without and incorrigible within. We are then like little children, below everything, and are willing to be so; we feel that our reprovers

are right, but that we are unable to overcome ourselves, in order to correct our faults. Then we despair of ourselves, and expect nothing except from God; the reproofs of others, harsh and unfeeling as they may be, seem to us less than we deserve; if we cannot bear them, we condemn our sensitiveness more than all our other imperfections. Correction cannot then make us more humble than it finds us. The interior rebellion, far from hindering the profit of the correction, convinces us of its absolute necessity; in truth, the reproof would not have been felt, if it had not cut into some living part; had death been there, we should not have perceived it; and thus the more acutely we feel, the more certainly we know that the correction was necessary.

I beg your forgiveness if I have said anything too harsh; but do not doubt my affection for you, and count as nothing everything that comes from me. See only the hand of God, which makes use of the awkwardness of mine, to deal you a painful blow. The pain proves that I have touched a sore spot. Yield to God, acquiesce in all his dealings, and you will soon be at rest and in harmony within. You know well enough how to give this advice to others; the occasion is important, critical. O what grace will descend upon you, if you will bear, like a little child, all the means God employs to humiliate and dispossess you of your senses and will! I pray that he may so diminish you that you can no longer be found at all.

LETTER XXIV. Imperfection only is intolerant of imperfection.

It has seemed to me that you have need of more enlargedness of heart in relation to the defects of others. I know that you cannot help seeing them when they come before you, nor prevent the opinions you involuntarily form concerning the motives of some of those about you. You cannot even get rid of a certain degree of trouble which these things cause you. It will be enough if you are willing to bear with those defects which are unmistakable, refrain from condemning those which are doubtful, and not suffer yourself to be so afflicted by them as to cause a coolness of feeling between you.

Perfection is easily tolerant of the imperfections of others; it becomes all things to all men. We must not be surprised at the greatest defects in good souls, and must quietly let them alone until God gives the signal of gradual removal; otherwise we shall pull up the wheat with the tares. God leaves, in the most advanced souls, certain weaknesses entirely disproportioned to their eminent state. As workmen, in excavating the soil from a field, leave certain pillars of earth which indicate the original level of the surface, and serve to measure the amount of material removed – God, in the same way, leaves pillars of testimony to the extent of his work in the most pious souls.

Such persons must labor, each one in his degree, for his own correction, and you must labor to bear with their weaknesses. You know from experience the bitterness of the work of correction; strive then to find means to make it less bitter to others. You have not an eager zeal to correct, but a sensitiveness that easily shuts up your heart.

I pray you more than ever not to spare my faults. If you should think you see one, which is not really there, there is no harm done; if I find that your counsel wounds me, my sensitiveness demonstrates that you have discovered a sore spot; but if not, you will have done me an excellent kindness in exercising my humility, and accustoming me to reproof. I ought to be more lowly than others in proportion as I am higher in position, and God demands of me a more absolute death to everything. I need this simplicity, and I trust it will be the means of cementing rather than of weakening our attachment.

LETTER XXV. We should listen to God and not to self-love.

I beseech you not to listen to self. Self-love whispers in one ear and the love of God in the other; the first is restless, bold, eager, and impetuous; the other is simple, peaceful, and speaks but a few words in a mild and gentle voice. The moment we attend to the voice of self crying in our ear, we can no longer hear the modest tones of holy love. Each speaks only of its single object. Self-love entertains us with self, which, according to it, is never sufficiently well

attended to; it talks of friendship, regard, esteem, and is in despair at everything but flattery. The love of God, on the other hand, desires that self should be forgotten, that it should be trodden under foot and broken as an idol, and that God should become the self of espoused souls, and occupy them as others are occupied by self. Let the vain, complaining babbler, self-love, be silenced, that in the stillness of the heart we may listen to that other love that only speaks when addressed.

LETTER XXVI. Absolute trust the shortest road to God.

I have no doubt but that God constantly treats you as one of his friends, that is, with crosses, sufferings, and humiliations. The ways and means of God to draw souls to Himself, accomplish his design much more rapidly and effectually than all the efforts of the creature; for they destroy self-love at its very root, where, with all our pains, we could scarce discover it. God knows all its windings, and attacks it in its strongest holds.

If we had strength and faith enough to trust ourselves entirely to God, and follow Him simply wherever He should lead us, we should have no need of any great effort of mind to reach perfection. But as we are so weak in faith, as to require to know all the way without trusting in God, our road is lengthened and our spiritual affairs get behind. Abandon yourself as absolutely as possible to God, and continue to do so to your latest breath, and He will never desert you.

LETTER XXVII. The time of temptation and distress is no time to form resolves.

Your excessive distress is like a summer torrent, which must be suffered to run away. Nothing makes any impression upon you, and you think you have the most substantial evidence for the most imaginary states; it is the ordinary result of great suffering. God permits you, notwithstanding your excellent faculties, to be blind to what lies immediately before you, and to think you see clearly what does not exist at all. God will be glorified in your heart, if you will be faithful in

yielding to his designs. But nothing would be more injudicious than the forming of resolutions in a state of distress, which is manifestly accompanied by an inability to do anything according to God.

When you shall have become calm, then do in a spirit of recollection, what you shall perceive to be nearest the will of God respecting you. Return gradually to devotion, simplicity, and the oblivion of self. Commune and listen to God, and be deaf to self. Then do all that is in your heart, for I have no fear that a spirit of that sort will permit you to take any wrong step. But to suppose that we are sane when we are in the very agony of distress, and under the influence of a violent temptation of self-love, is to ensure our being led astray. Ask any experienced adviser, and he will tell you that you are to make no resolutions until you have re-entered into peace and recollection. You will learn from him that the readiest way to self-deception is, to trust to ourselves in a state of suffering, in which nature is so unreasonable and irritated.

You will say that I desire to prevent you doing as you ought, if I forbid your doing it at the only moment when you are capable of it. God forbid! I neither desire to permit nor hinder: my only wish is so to advise you that you shall not be found wanting toward God. Now it is as clear as day, that you would fall in that respect, if you took counsel at the hands of a self-love wounded to the quick, and an irritation verging upon despair. Would you change anything to gratify your self-love, when God does not desire it? God forbid! Wait, then, until you shall be in a condition to be advised. To enjoy the true advantages of illumination, we must be equally ready for every alternative, and must have nothing which we are not cheerfully disposed at once to sacrifice for His sake.

LETTER XXVIII. Who has love, has all.

I have thought frequently, since yesterday, on the matters you communicated to me, and I have increasing confidence that God will sustain you. Though you take no great pleasure in religious exercises, you must not

neglect to be faithful in them, as far as your health will permit. A convalescent has but little appetite, but he must eat to sustain life.

It would be very serviceable to you, if you could occasionally have a few minutes of Christian converse with such of your family as you can confide in, and, as to the choice, be guided in perfect liberty by your impressions at the moment. God does not call you by any lively emotions, and I heartily rejoice at it, if you will but remain faithful; for a fidelity, unsustained by delights, is far purer, and safer from danger, than one accompanied by those tender feelings, which may be seated too exclusively in the imagination. A little reading and recollection every day, will be the means of insensibly giving you light and strength for all the sacrifices God will require of you. Love Him, and I will acquit you of everything else; for everything else will come by love. I do not ask from you a love tender and emotional, but only that your will should lean towards love, and that, notwithstanding all the corrupt desires of your heart, you should prefer God before self and the whole world.

LETTER XXIX. Weakness preferable to strength, and practice better than knowledge.

I am told, my dear child in our Lord, that you are suffering from sickness. I suffer with you, for I love you dearly; but I cannot but kiss the hand that smites you, and I pray you to kiss it lovingly with me. You have heretofore abused your health and the pleasures derived from it; this weakness and its attendant pains are the natural consequence of such a course.

I pray God only that He may depress your spirit even more than your body, and while He comforts the latter according to your need, that He may entirely vanquish the former. O how strong we are when we begin to perceive that we are but weakness and infirmity! Then we are ever ready to believe that we are mistaken, and to correct ourselves while confessing it; our minds are ever open to the illumination of others; then we are authoritative in nothing, and say the most decided things with simplicity and deference for others; then we do

not object to be judged, and submit without hesitation to the censure of the first comer. At the same time, we judge no one without absolute necessity; we speak only to those who desire it, mentioning the imperfections we seem to have discovered, without dogmatism, and rather to gratify their wishes than from a desire to be believed or create a reputation for wisdom.

I pray God that He may keep you faithful to his grace, and that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. i. 6.) We must bear with ourselves with patience and without flattery, and remain in unceasing subjection to every means of overcoming our thoughts and inward repugnances; we shall thus become more pliable to the impressions of grace in the practice of the gospel. But let this work be done quietly and peacefully, and let it not be entered upon too eagerly, as though it could all be accomplished in a single day. Let us reason little, but do much. If we are not careful, the acquisition of knowledge will so occupy this life that we shall need another to reduce our acquirements into practice. We are in danger of believing ourselves advanced towards perfection in proportion to our knowledge [5] of the way; but all our beautiful theories, far from assisting in the death of self, only serve to nourish the life of Adam in us by a secret delight and confidence in our illumination. Be quit then of all trust in your own power and in your own knowledge of the way, and you will make a great stride towards perfection. Humility and self-distrust, with a frank ingenuousness, are fundamental virtues for you.

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[5] This seems one of the most common as well as most serious mistakes to which spiritual persons are liable. God gives the knowledge and desires us to put it in practice; but the moment we see it, we are so carried away with delight, that we forget that there is anything else to be done; whereas we have comparatively slender reason to rejoice until it is put in vital operation in the life. Ye see, says the Saviour, but do not perceive; ye hear, but do not understand. Food, lying undigested in the stomach, is not only of no service to the body, but, if not removed, will become a serious injury; it is only when it is assimilated and

mingled with the blood, and when it appears by its good effects in our hands, feet, head, and trunk, that it can be said to have become our own. To have a divine truth in the intellect, is indeed matter of thanksgiving; but it will avail only to our condemnation, if it be not also loved in the heart and acted in the life. Let us remember that it is not the knowledge of the way that God desires in us, but the practice of it; not light, but love. For though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge – and have not charity – I am nothing. (1 Cor. xiii. 2.) – Editor.

LETTER XXX. Beware of the pride of reasoning; the true guide to knowledge is love.

Your mind is too much occupied with exterior things, and still worse, with argumentation, to be able to act with a frequent thought of God. I am always afraid of your excessive inclination to reason; it is a hinderance to that recollection and silence in which He reveals Himself. Be humble, simple, and sincerely abstracted with men; be recollected, calm, and devoid of reasonings before God. The persons who have heretofore had most influence with you, have been infinitely dry, reasoning, critical, and opposed to a true interior life. However little you might listen to them, you would hear only endless reasonings and a dangerous curiosity, which would insensibly draw you out of Grace and plunge you into the depths of Nature. Habits of long standing are easily revived; and the changes which cause us to revert to our original position are less easily perceived, because they are natural to our constitution. Distrust them, then; and beware of beginnings which, in fact, include the end.

It is now four months since I have had any leisure for study; but I am very happy to forego study, and not to cling to anything, when providence would take it away. It may be that during the coming winter I shall have leisure for my library, but I shall enter it then, keeping one foot on the threshold, ready to leave it at the slightest intimation. The mind must keep fasts as well as the body. I have no desire to write, or speak, or to be spoken about, or to

reason, or to persuade any. I live every day aridly enough, and with certain exterior inconveniences which beset me; but I amuse myself whenever I have an opportunity, if I need recreation. Those who make almanacs upon me, and are afraid of me, are sadly deceived. God bless them! I am far from being so foolish as to incommode myself for the sake of annoying them. I would say to them as Abraham said to Lot: Is not the whole land before thee? If you go to the east, I will go to the west. (Gen. xiii. 9.)

Happy he who is indeed free! The Son of God alone can make us free; but He can only do it by snapping every bond; and how is this to be done? By that sword which divides husband and wife, father and son, brother and sister. The world is then no longer of any account; but, as long as it is anything to us, so long our freedom is but a word, and we are as easily captured as a bird whose leg is fastened by a thread. He seems to be free; the string is not visible; but he can only fly its length, and he is a prisoner. You see the moral. What I would have you possess is more valuable than all you are fearful of losing. Be faithful in what you know, that you may be entrusted with more. Distrust your intellect, which has so often misled you. My own has been such a deceiver, that I no longer count upon it. Be simple, and firm in your simplicity. "The fashion of this world passeth away." (1 Cor. vii. 31.) We shall vanish with it, if we make ourselves like it by reason of vanity; but the truth of God remains forever, and we shall dwell with it if it alone occupies our attention.

Again I warn you, beware of philosophers and great reasoners. They will always be a snare to you, and will do you more harm than you will know how to do them good. They linger and pine away in discussing exterior trifles, and never reach the knowledge of the truth. Their curiosity is an insatiable spiritual avarice. They are like those conquerors who ravage the world without possessing it. Solomon, after a deep experience of it, testifies to the vanity of their researches.

We should never study but on an express intimation of Providence; and we should do it as we go to market, to buy the provision necessary for each day's wants. Then, too, we must study in the spirit of prayer. God is, at the

same time, the Truth and the Love. We can only know the truth in proportion as we love – when we love it, we understand it well. If we do not love Love, we do not know Love. He who loves much, and remains humble and lowly in his ignorance, is the well-beloved one of the Truth; he knows what philosophers not only are ignorant of, but do not desire to know. Would that you might obtain that knowledge which is reserved for babes and the simple-minded, while it is hid from the wise and prudent. (Matt. xi. 25.)

LETTER XXXI. The gifts of God not to be rejected on account of the channel that brings them.

I am glad you find in the person of whom you speak, the qualities you were in search of. God puts what He pleases where He pleases. Naaman could not be healed by all the waters of Syria, but must apply to those of Palestine. What does it matter from what quarter our light and help come? The source is the important point, not the conduit; that is the best channel which most exercises our faith, puts to shame our human wisdom, makes us simple and humble, and undeceives us in respect to our own power. Receive, then, whatever He bestows, in dependence upon the Spirit that bloweth where it listeth. We know not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. (John iii. 8.) But we need not seek to know the secrets of God; let us only be obedient to what He reveals.

Too much reasoning is a great distraction. Those who reason – the indevout wise – quench the inward spirit as the wind extinguishes a candle. After being with them for awhile, we perceive our hearts dry, and our mind off its centre. Shun intercourse with such men; they are full of danger to you.

There are some who appear recollected, but whose appearance deceives us. It is easy to mistake a certain warmth of the imagination for recollection. Such persons are eager in the pursuit of some outward good, to which they are attached; they are distracted by this anxious desire; they are perpetually occupied in discussions and reasonings, but know nothing of that inward peace and silence, that listens to God. They are more dangerous than others, because

their distraction is more disguised. Search their depths, and you will find them restless, fault-finding, eager, constantly occupied without, harsh and crude in all their desires, sensitive, full of their own thoughts, and impatient of the slightest contradiction; in a word, spiritual busy-bodies, annoyed at everything, and almost always annoying.

LETTER XXXII. Poverty and spoliation the way of Christ.

Everything contributes to prove you; but God who loves you, will not suffer your temptations to exceed your strength. He will make use of the trial for your advancement. But we must not look inwards with curiosity to behold our progress, our strength, or the hand of God, which is not the less efficient because it is invisible. Its principal operations are conducted in secrecy, for we should never die to self, if He always visibly stretched out his hand to save us. God would then sanctify us in light, life, and the possession of every spiritual grace; but not upon the cross, in darkness, privation, nakedness and death. The directions of Christ are not, if any one will come after me, let him enjoy himself, let him be gorgeously apparelled, let him be intoxicated with delight, as was Peter on the mount, let him be glad in his perfection in me and in himself, let him behold himself, and be assured that he is perfect; on the contrary, his words are; If any one will come after me, I will show him the road he must take; let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me in a path beside precipices, where he will see nothing but death on every hand. (Matt. xvi. 24.) St. Paul declares that we desire to be clothed upon, and that it is necessary, on the contrary, to be stripped to very nakedness, that we may then put on Christ.

Suffer Him, then, to despoil self-love of every adornment, even to the inmost covering under which it lurks, that you may receive the robe whitened by the blood of the Lamb, and having no other purity than his. O happy soul, that no longer possesses anything of its own, nor even anything borrowed, and that abandons itself to the Well-beloved, being jealous of every beauty but his? O spouse, how beautiful art thou, when thou hast no longer anything of thing

own! Thou shalt be altogether the delight of the bridegroom, when He shall be all thy comeliness! Then He will love thee without measure, because it will be Himself that He loves in thee.

Hear these things and believe them. This pure truth shall be bitter in your mouth and belly, but it shall feed your heart upon that death which is the only true life. Give faith to this, and listen not to self; it is the grand seducer, more powerful than the serpent that deceived our mother. Happy the soul that hearkens in all simplicity to the voice that forbids its hearing or compassionating self!

LETTER XXXIII. The will of God our only treasure.

I desire that you may have that absolute simplicity of abandonment that never measures its own extent, nor excepts anything in the present life, no matter how dear to our self-love. All illusions come, not from such an abandonment as this, but from one attended by secret reservations.

Be as lowly and simple in the midst of the most exacting society as in your own closet. Do nothing from the reasonings of wisdom, nor from natural pleasure, but all from submission to the Spirit of life and death; death to self, and life in God. Let there be no enthusiasm, no search after certainty within, no looking forwards for better things, as if the present, bitter as it is, were not sufficient to those whose sole treasure is the will of God, and as if you would indemnify self-love for the sadness of the present by the prospects of the future! We deserve to meet with disappointment when we seek such vain consolation. Let us receive everything in lowliness of spirit, seeking nothing from curiosity, and withholding nothing from a disguised selfishness. Let God work, and think only of dying to the present moment without reservation, as though it were the whole of eternity.

LETTER XXXIV. Abandonment not a heroic sacrifice, but a simple sinking into the will of God.

Your sole task, my dear daughter, is, to bear your infirmities both of body and mind. When I am weak, says the Apostle, then am I strong; strength is made perfect in weakness. We are only strong in God in proportion as we are weak in ourselves; your feebleness will be your strength if you accept it in all lowliness.

We are tempted to believe that weakness and lowliness are incompatible with abandonment, because this latter is represented as a generous act of the soul by which it testifies its great love, and makes the most heroic sacrifices. But a true abandonment does not at all correspond to this flattering description; it is a simple resting in the love of God, as an infant lies in its mother's arms. A perfect abandonment must even go so far as to abandon its abandonment. We renounce ourselves without knowing it; if we knew it, it would no longer be complete, for there can be no greater support than a consciousness that we are wholly given up.

Abandonment consist, not in doing great things for self to take delight in, but simply in suffering our weakness and infirmity, in letting everything alone. It is peaceful, for it would no longer be sincere, if we were still restless about anything we had renounced. It is thus that abandonment is the source of true peace; if we have not peace, it is because our abandonment is exceedingly imperfect.

LETTER XXXV. Daily dying takes the place of final death.

We must bear our crosses; self is the greatest of them; we are not entirely rid of it until we can tolerate ourselves as simply and patiently as we do our neighbor. If we die in part every day of our lives, we shall have but little to do on the last. What we so much dread in the future will cause us no fear when it comes, if we do not suffer its terrors to be exaggerated by the restless anxieties of self-love. Bear with yourself, and consent in all lowliness to be supported by your neighbor. O how utterly will these little daily deaths destroy the power of the final dying!

LETTER XXXVI. Suffering belongs to the living, not the dead.

Many are deceived when they suppose that the death of self is the cause of all the agony they feel, but their suffering is only caused by the remains of life. Pain is seated in the living, not the dead parts; the more suddenly and completely we expire, the less pain do we experience. Death is only painful to him who resist it; the imagination exaggerates its terrors; the spirit argues endlessly to show the propriety of the life of self; self-love fights against death, like a sick man in the last struggle. But we must die inwardly as well as outwardly; the sentence of death has gone forth against the spirit as well as against the body. Our great care should be that the spirit die first, and then our bodily death will be but a falling asleep. Happy they who sleep this sleep of peace!

LETTER XXXVII. The limits of our grace are those of our temptation.

I sympathize sincerely with the sufferings of your dear sick one, and with the pain of those whom God has placed about her to help her bear the cross. Let her not distrust God, and He will proportion her suffering to the patience which He will bestow. No one can do this but He who made all hearts, and whose office it is to renew them by his grace. The man in whom He operates, knows nothing of the proper proportions; and, seeing the extent, neither of his future trials, nor of the grace prepared to meet them, he is tempted to discouragement and despair. Like a man who had never seen the ocean, he stands, at the coming in of the tide, between the water and an impassable wall of rock, and thinks he perceives the terrible certainty that the approaching waves must surely engulf him; he does not see that he stands within the point, at which God, with unerring finger, has drawn their boundry-line, and beyond which they shall not pass.

God proves the righteous as with the ocean; he stirs it up, and makes its great billows seem to threaten our destruction, but He is always at hand to say, thus far shalt thou go and no farther. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." (1 Cor. x. 13.)

LETTER XXXVIII. Resisting God, an effectual bar to grace.

You perceive, by the light of God, in the depth of your conscience, what grace demands of you, but you resist Him. Hence your distress. You begin to say within, it is impossible for me to undertake to do what is required of me; this is a temptation to despair. Despair as much as you please of self, but never of God; He is all good and all powerful, and will grant you according to your faith. If you will believe all things, all things shall be yours, and you shall remove mountains. If you believe nothing, you shall have nothing, but you alone will be to blame. Look at Mary, who, when the most incredible thing in the world was proposed to her, did not hesitate, but exclaimed; "be it unto me according to thy word." (Luke i. 38.)

Open, then your heart. It is now so shut up, that you not only have not the power to do what is required of you, but you do not even desire to have it; you have no wish that your heart should be enlarged, and you fear that it will be. How can grace find room in so straitened a heart? All that I ask of you is, that you will rest in a teachable spirit of faith, and that you will not listen to self. Simply acquiesce in everything with lowliness of mind, and receive peace through recollection, and everything will be gradually accomplished for you; those things which, in your hour of temptation, seemed the greatest difficulties, will be insensibly smoothed away.

LETTER XXXIX. God speaks more effectually in the soul, than to it.

Nothing gives me more satisfaction than to see you simple and peaceful. Simplicity brings back the state of Paradise. We have no great pleasures, and suffer some pain; but we have no desire for the former, and we receive the latter with thanksgiving. This interior harmony, and this exemption from the fears and tormenting desires of self-love, create a satisfaction in the will, which is above all the joys of intoxicating delights. Dwell, then, in your terrestrial

paradise, and take good care not to leave it from a vain desire of knowing good and evil.

We are never less alone than when we are in the society of a single faithful friend; never less deserted, than when we are carried in the arms of the All-powerful. Nothing is more affecting than the instant succor of God. What He sends by means of his creatures, contracts no virtue from that foul and barren channel; it owes everything to the source. And so, when the fountain breaks forth within the heart itself, we have no need of the creature. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath, in these last days, spoken unto us by his Son." (Heb. i. 1,2.) Shall we then feel any regret that the feeble voice of the prophets has ceased? O how pure and powerful is the immediate voice of God in the soul! It is certain whenever Providence cuts off all the channels.

LETTER XL. The circumcision of the heart.

Our eagerness to serve others, frequently arises from mere natural generosity and a refined self-love; it may soon turn into dislike and despair. But true charity is simple, and ever the same towards the neighbor, because it is humble, and never thinks of self. Whatever is not included in this pure charity, must be cut off.

It is by the circumcision of the heart that we are made children and inheritors of the faith of Abraham, in order that we may, like him, quit our native country without knowing whither we go. Blessed lot! to leave all and deliver ourselves up to the jealousy of God, the knife of circumcision! Our own hand can effect nothing but superficial reforms; we do not know ourselves, and cannot tell where to strike; we should never light upon the spot that the hand of God so readily finds. Self-love arrests our hand and spares itself; it has not the courage to wound itself to the quick. And besides, the choice of the spot and the preparation for the blow, deaden its force. But the hand of God strikes in unexpected places, it finds the very joint of the harness, and leaves nothing

unscathed. Self-love then becomes the patient; let it cry out, but see to it that it does not stir under the hand of God, lest it interfere with the success of the operation. It must remain motionless beneath the knife; all that is required is fidelity in not refusing a single stroke.

I am greatly attached to John the Baptist, who wholly forgot himself that he might think only of Christ; he pointed to Him, he was but the voice of one crying in the wilderness to prepare the way, he sent Him all his disciples, and it was this conduct, far more than his solitary and austere life, that entitled him to be called the greatest among them that are born of women.

The end.

Method of Prayer

by

Madame Guyon

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SHORT AND VERY EASY