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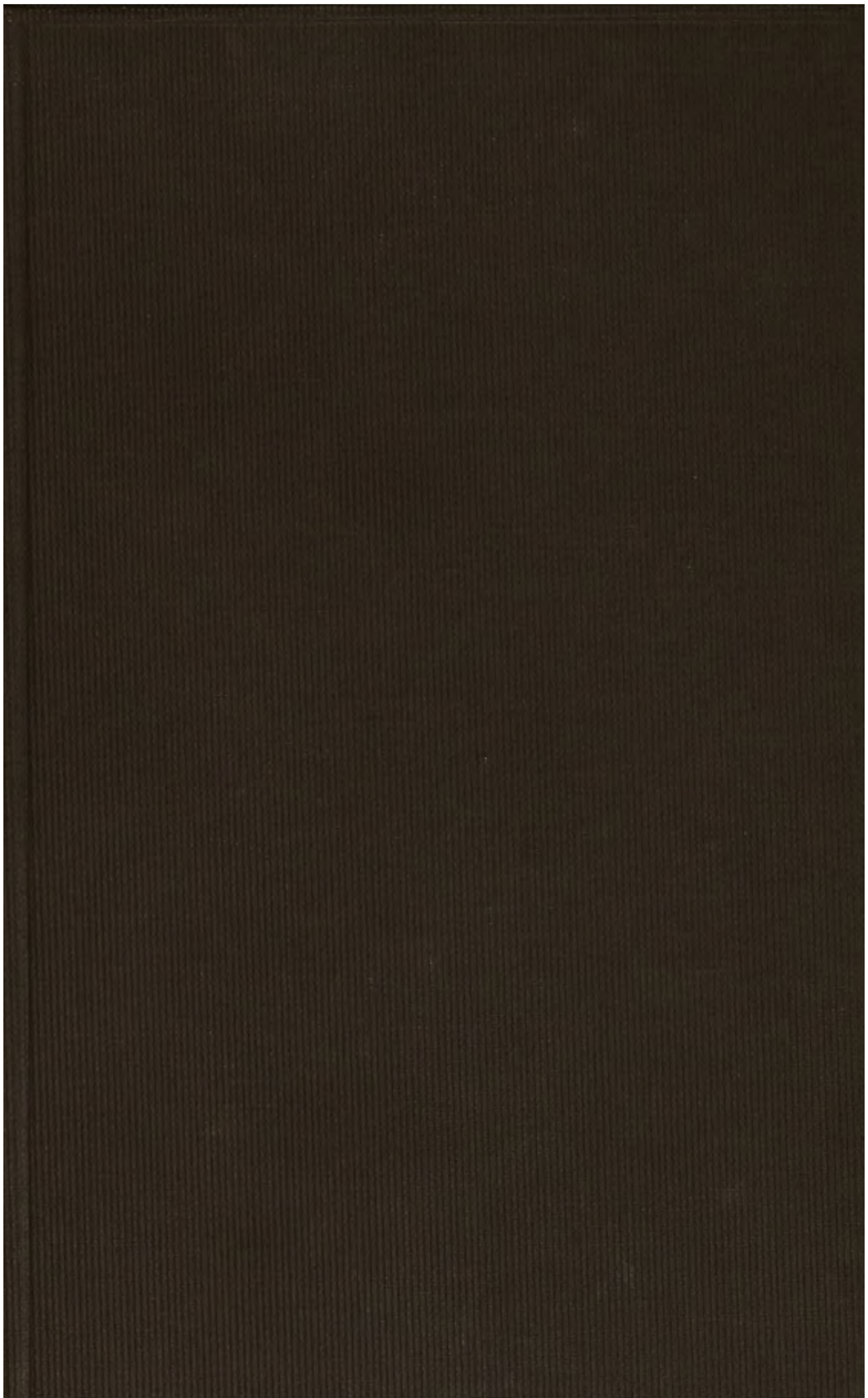
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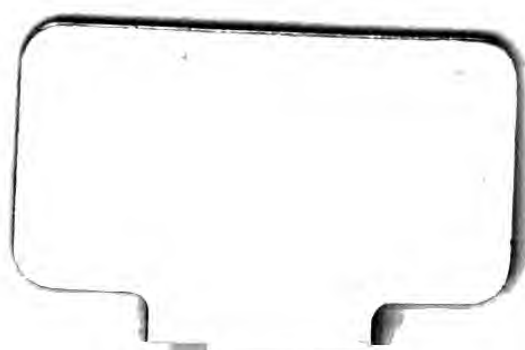
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THE WORKS OF LOUIS DE BLOIS
COMMONLY CALLED LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS



III.—A MIRROR FOR MONKS



A MIRROR FOR MONKS

(SPECULUM MONACHORUM)

By **LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS**

In an Old Anonymous Translation (Paris, 1676)

Revised and Edited by

DOM ROGER HUDLESTON, O.S.B.

Monk of Downside Abbey

With an Introduction by the Same

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INTRODUCTION

LOUIS DE BLOIS, one of the ten children of Adrian de Blois, Sieur of Jumigny, and Catharine, née Barbanson, his wife, was born at Donstienne, near Liège, province of Hainault, Flanders, in October, 1506.

While still a child he entered the household of the Archduke Charles—afterwards the Emperor Charles V—as one of his pages; but left it, when only fourteen years old, to enter the Benedictine Abbey of Liessies, in Hainault, where he received the monastic habit on October 25, 1520, and made his profession a year later.

The Abbot of Liessies at this date was Gilles Gippus, an elderly man of high moral character, but the standard of discipline in the Abbey was low; for, like many another monastic house at that period, Liessies had gradually declined into a relaxed observance of the holy Rule. The community, however, was not without members who longed to restore a stricter way of life, and one of these was the Novice-Master, Dom Jean Meurisse. This good monk soon realised that, in Louis de Blois, he had a novice of exceptional character, and to his careful training Bloisius

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owed the firm grasp of monastic principle which enabled him, in later life, to achieve the "Reform" that made Liessies a model amongst the monasteries of the sixteenth century.

His noviciate over and his vows taken, Blossius was sent to study at the University of Louvain, returning doubtless to his monastery during the long summer vacations. In 1527 Abbot Gilles—who was now more than seventy years old and in failing health—being anxious lest, in the event of his death, some less worthy member of the community might be chosen to succeed him, took the unusual course of proposing to his monks that Blossius should be elected as his Coadjutor with right of succession.

The proposal must have seemed a startling one to the monks of Liessies, for the Abbot's nominee was only twenty-one years old, and not yet ordained priest: and their acceptance of the scheme is the best testimony to the reputation that Blossius had already acquired among his brethren. The election took place while Blossius himself was absent at Louvain, the first news he had of it being the formal document announcing to him his election as Abbot-Coadjutor! The appointment was confirmed by a Bull of Pope Paul III, and, on the death of Abbot Gilles in 1530, Blossius

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returned from Louvain to succeed him as thirty-fourth Abbot of Liessies, being ordained priest and blessed as Abbot in November of the same year.

From the first Blossius realised that the great work of his life would be to reform the observance in his monastery, but he knew that the task was one of great difficulty, requiring the utmost gentleness and tact. The monks of Liessies had lived all their monastic life under easy, relaxed conditions. Blossius himself was one of the youngest in the community, and any attempt to enforce a stricter way of living might arouse opposition, and possibly cause a schism in the monastery.

No doubt also Blossius knew—what all canonists admit—that a mitigation of the observance in a monastery may come about quite lawfully; *e.g.*, by permission of the Holy See: by decree of the Superiors of the Order itself, so far as they are empowered to modify the Rule and its observance: and even by prescription or custom lawfully established, so long as such relaxations do not affect or alter in their nature the vows taken by the religious. On the other hand, the abolition of abuses in respect of obligations to which religious are bound by vow, is not “reform” in the proper sense of the word at all, since such obligations cannot be modi-

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fied by custom or prescription, but are always binding in conscience.

It seems clear, however, from the way in which Blossius went to work, that the monks of Liessies were not guilty of anything amounting to definite breach of vows, for his biographers tell us that, during the early years of his reign as Abbot, he bore the defects of his subjects with tolerance, rather than risk any internal conflict, or grave disturbance in the minds of his brethren: a thing he could not have done had the observance been so relaxed as to involve serious or general breach of vows.

In some countries—in France, for example—the custom of nominating courtiers, princes, or prelates as Abbots of monasteries *in commendam*, who merely absorbed the revenues of the houses which they left to go to ruin, had brought monastic life to the lowest ebb, and the monks themselves into contempt. In the Low Countries, however, as in England, this system was almost unknown, so the relaxed observance at Liessies cannot have been due to such a cause.

It would seem rather to have come about gradually as the result of prolonged civil disturbance, coupled with the intellectual upheaval and steady increase of luxury, among ecclesiastics and laymen alike, which charac-

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terised the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Vocations were getting scarcer, and a custom had grown up of sending monks out to the priories and cells belonging to the greater abbeys, where, left to themselves, perhaps for many years, in circumstances which made conventual life impossible, the monks inevitably came to adopt a way of living differing little from that of laymen in the world. The influence of such members was bound to tell upon the community at large. "What is the use," they might ask, "of training up our novices to strict discipline, when, after a few years in the monastery, they will be transplanted into conditions which make it impossible for them to continue such a mode of life?"*

Blosius seems to have realised at once that the only way to remedy such a state of things was to build up in his monks, gradually and slowly, a sound monastic spirit, to which such ideas would be essentially repugnant. "For eight years," as the Bollandists put it in their *Life*, "he had recourse to the divine goodness and opened his heart to God, imploring him to melt the dispositions of those who would not listen to his just remon-

* Some interesting letters exist, which passed between Blosius and Philip de Croy, Duke of Arschot, dealing with this matter of the smaller priories.

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strances." Then an event occurred which, at first sight, looked as if it would ruin all his hopes, but which, through God's providence, produced in the end a directly opposite result.

In 1537, Francis I of France had invaded Flanders, then governed by Mary of Austria, Queen of Hungary, as Regent of her brother, the Emperor Charles V. Several small towns along the frontier were captured by the French troops, and it seemed not unlikely that Liessies also might fall into their hands.* The prospect filled Blosius with alarm. Should he and his monks remain and face the risk of capture; and if they did so, what would be the effect upon his work of reform? The danger was considerable, and his predecessor, Abbot Gippus—who had been called upon to face the same difficulty at an earlier date—had erected two small houses of refuge, at Ath and Mons, to which the monks of Liessies might retire in such an emergency. In the end Blosius decided that it would be safest to leave Liessies, and after doing what he could to secure the Abbey from damage by appointing

* At this date, it must be remembered, the frontier of Flanders ran further south than it does to-day, so that Douay, Arras, and other towns, now French, belonged to Charles V.

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trustworthy guardians for it, he called upon his community to accompany him to Ath. Out of the whole number three only agreed to do so. The rest—little desirous of reform—preferred to take refuge in other monasteries: so, with his community reduced to three in number, Blossius retired to Ath.

Most men, in the Abbot's place, would have been discouraged by such a desertion, but Blossius, from the first, seems to have seen the finger of God in his changed circumstances. On arriving at Ath, he greeted the humble priory, not as a place of exile, but as a refuge full of hope; and he at once began to instruct his tiny community in the Rule of St Benedict, which they now set themselves to observe, so far as their circumstances permitted, with the most minute exactness.

It was not long before the little band of refugees began to attract attention by the sanctity of their lives, and others came to Ath to submit themselves to the same discipline—among them some of the brethren from Liessies, moved to shame by their example. The holy Abbot, encouraged by these first successes, and hoping in time to win back the rest of his scattered flock, now conceived the plan of reducing Liessies to the rank of a priory only, transferring the

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abbacy to Ath, where a new monastery might be constructed, secure from foreign invasion. By this scheme, also, he could leave the less docile of his monks at Liessies, whilst he built up at Ath a new community prepared to lead a life of strict observance.

On the other hand, opposition to him was not wanting, even violence being resorted to by his enemies, who actually devastated the gardens of the priory, and cut the channels supplying it with water, in the hope of driving Blossius and his monks to leave Ath.

Ignoring these acts of malice, and encouraged by the progress of his community, which increased rapidly in numbers, the Abbot redoubled his efforts. He worked continually and with ardour, examining the works of the Fathers that his work might be based upon the rock of authority, translating them, and collecting materials for the treatise which was to be at once his *apologia* to his adversaries and the manifesto of his ideals to the world. What those ideals were, may be learned from this book, **THE MIRROR FOR MONKS.**

Meanwhile the war ran its course, and, when peace was made, those of the Liessies community who had not joined Blossius at Ath returned to the Abbey. But they found themselves in a dilemma. If, on the one

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hand, they continued to live without their Abbot, they proved themselves to be in a state of hopeless relaxation, and ran the risk of seeing their monastery suppressed by authority. On the other hand, they dreaded the severe Rule and strict discipline which prevailed at Ath, and were afraid lest they might be compelled to submit to so drastic a reform.

As a way out of this perplexity they drew up a petition, addressed to Charles V, praying him to exert his authority and bring back Blossius with his religious to Liessies, the sad state of which they next described. They promised further that, if the Abbot would mitigate somewhat the severity of his Rule, they would submit themselves voluntarily to his authority; and concluded the whole by expressing their high regard for his personal character and sanctity.

The petition was well received, and, soon afterwards, Charles V issued orders to Blossius, telling him to return to Liessies. His command caused the Abbot much misgiving. "He treated the question maturely," say his biographers, "between God and his own soul. After long reflection, he decided that it would be most to God's glory if he gave way to the wishes of his religious at Liessies and to the orders of the Emperor.

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He wrote, therefore, to the monks at the old monastery, saying that, since they were now convinced of the necessity for reform, they would be well advised to accept his, which he was prepared to moderate so far as certain grave men of known learning, whom he would consult, should advise. By this gracious promise, Louis won the goodwill of those who had hitherto opposed him."

Blosius now returned to Liessies, and there, with the help of the learned men already mentioned, he drew up a series of Statutes or Constitutions, regulating in detail the observance to which the community should henceforth be bound. These, the Statutes of his Reform, were promulgated by him in the year 1539, and were subsequently approved and confirmed by a Bull of Pope Paul III, dated April 8, 1545.

Thus, after fifteen years of struggle, Blosius secured the end for which he had been working ever since he had become Abbot of Liessies; indeed, he did more than this. For the observance which he established in his monastery, and the Statutes in which it was crystallised, came to be regarded as a model, and thus exercised a wide influence on the Constitutions of the reformed Benedictine Congregations, founded in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

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The work here translated was first published in the year 1538, by Bartholomew Gravius, at Louvain, under the title: *SPECULUM MONACHORUM, a DACRYANO ordinis Sancti Benedicti Abbate conscriptum, ante hac nunquam excusum.*

The pseudonym of DACRYANUS—The Weeper—was adopted by Blosius, out of humility, to conceal the true authorship: for there is no doubt at all that the book is his own work. Oddly enough, however, it gave rise to a controversy in literary circles, and a number of writers, among them the distinguished scholars Marguérin de la Bigne and Antoine Possevin, maintained positively that the work dated from the eighth century, and was written by a Benedictine Abbot named Dacryanus, of whose life and work nothing more had survived!

The work, which was Blosius' first publication, takes the form of a treatise on perfection in the cloister, addressed to a monk of the name of Odo, in reply to his request for "a Spiritual Mirror or looking-glass." Nothing is known of Odo's identity, and it is more than likely that he never existed, the "request" being merely a literary artifice and Odo a lay-figure, set up to give the reply a more direct and personal appeal.

The book achieved an immediate success.

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Charles V was so charmed with it that he carried a copy with him on all his journeys: Philip II recommended it to his daughter on his deathbed: and saints and theologians have vied with one another in praising it. From the first it has taken rank as one of the classics of monastic literature. It has been reprinted again and again, in the original Latin, and has been translated into almost every language of Western Europe.

It must not be assumed, however, that the book appeals to monks and religious only; the truth is far otherwise, as the Abbé de Lamennais has pointed out in the preface to his French edition, published in 1820.

“It would be a great mistake,” he writes, “to suppose, on account of its title, that the book is of use to those only for whom it seems to have been principally composed. There is no Christian, whatsoever his state of life, who may not read it and meditate upon it with profit. All the precepts of the spiritual life, and all the counsels that lead men to perfection, are here brought together, and, we do not fear to add, are put before us with a charm of manner that renders them attractive, without any touch of the scholastic dryness which too often mars the best works of this character. We know of none, not even excepting the *Imitation of Christ*—superior

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as it is in other respects—which unites sweetness, tenderness, vivacity of feeling and unaffected naïvety of expression, in the same degree. One sees and feels throughout that the author is himself profoundly penetrated by the truths he utters, *for the heart of the wise instructeth his mouth, and shall add grace unto his lips.*”*

Further recommendation is needless, nor does the scheme of the work require explanation; the reader will be well advised, however, if he read carefully the Analytical Table of Contents—added to the earlier editions by the editors of the definitive edition of the Works of Blossius—which will enable him to grasp at the outset the plan of the entire work.

The English translation, here reprinted, was published at Paris in 1676, without printer's name or anything to indicate by whom it was translated; though there can be little doubt that it is the work of some English Catholic, not improbably a monk of the English Benedictine Congregation. In its original *format* the book is a little 12mo of 226 pages, illustrated with nine curious engravings of a symbolic character, most of which contain an incident from the Passion of Christ, with some scene of worldly frivolity set beneath it by way of contrast. These

* Prov. xvi 23.

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engravings are unsigned, and their connection with the text is so little apparent, that one might well suppose them to have been inserted by the binder, were it not that, in some cases, the *verso* of the plate is printed with a page of text. This edition is extremely rare; the copy of it in the library of Downside Abbey is the only one that I have ever seen.

The translator evidently made his version from one of the earlier editions of the Latin text, since he divides the book into twelve chapters, without headings. In preparing this edition, however, I have followed the authoritative edition of Blosius' Works—published at Antwerp, in 1631, by Abbot Antony de Winghe—the editors of which divide the work into eight chapters only, with analytical headings and subdivisions to each, whereby the argument of the whole is made clear and easy to follow. I have also added a translation of some notes which appear in the Antwerp edition, besides adding a few of my own: the latter distinguished by the signature [ED.].

Besides this, I have ventured to modify the old translation in a number of places, to bring it nearer to the Latin original, and have added the references to Scripture. The spelling has been modernised, and the punctuation brought into line with current usage; in the

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original the punctuation is quite amazingly perverse, almost as if it were intended to mislead the reader as to the meaning.

In the year 1871, Sir John Duke Coleridge, then Solicitor-General, was shown a copy of the Paris edition of 1676 by his friend Mr. Richmond, and was so attracted by it that he issued a "very limited" reprint of it in modern spelling—London, privately printed on hand-made paper, pp. xii + 100—copies of which he "placed in the hands of those few persons" whom he "thought might feel interested in the matter." Some of these—he names Dr. Newman, Mr. Gladstone, and his father, Sir John Taylor Coleridge, as among the number—urged him to publish the book; and accordingly he did so, in a reprint from different type, calling it "Second Edition" (London: C. J. Stewart, 1872, pp. xii + 100).

This edition has long been out of print and unobtainable, while the privately printed edition, is, of course, a great rarity. In view of this I cannot resist putting on record the following remarkable coincidence.

In June, 1925, a few weeks after I had undertaken, at the request of Messrs. Burns Oates and Washbourne, to edit this series of the *Spiritual Works of Louis de Blois*, I had occasion to go to Liverpool on business. There

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I chanced to visit a well-known Catholic repository, and while the attendant who served me retired to a store to get what I wanted, the manager suggested that I might care to see a number of volumes, recently purchased by the firm as the nucleus of a second-hand book department, which was being added to their business. He then showed me into a little room at the back of the shop, its walls covered with shelves, filled with a miscellaneous mass of volumes that overflowed in piles on the floor.

The first shelf I looked at contained a copy of Sir J. D. Coleridge's "Second Edition" of 1872; and, in one of the piles on the floor, I found a copy of his privately printed edition of 1871, in which—as if to perfect my good fortune—there were MS. inscriptions by himself and his publisher, Mr. Stewart, which showed that this was the identical copy from which the 1872 edition had been reprinted. Did the holy Abbot Blosius guide my footsteps, or was it merely a delightful coincidence? For my part, I like to think it was the former, but—be that as it may—I secured both the volumes!

G. ROGER HUDLESTON, O.S.B.

ST WULSTAN'S,
LITTLE MALVERN,
February 13, 1926.

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A MIRROR FOR MONKS

CHAPTER I

THAT A MONK MUST DILIGENTLY CONSIDER
FOR WHAT REASON HE HAS ENTERED
UPON A STRICT WAY OF LIFE

1. The author's humble apology for undertaking this work.
2. That a constant mortifying of himself is the labour befitting a true monk.
3. The character of a false monk is made manifest by his evil habits.
4. Against all which things a true monk must wage war without ceasing.

1. You desire of me, beloved Brother Odo, a spiritual mirror or looking-glass, wherein you may behold yourself, and exactly see both your beauty and deformity. This request of yours is somewhat strange. Certainly, I think that you know me not; for if you did, whence doth it happen, that you request a spiritual thing of a carnal man? Nevertheless, lest I might seem to neglect, or rather to contemn your request, behold I send what our penury hath been able to afford you. Accept therefore of this short instruction, by reading whereof you may peradventure

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slenderly learn what you are and what you are not, or certainly what you ought to be.

2. First and foremost, therefore, I admonish you often and seriously to consider the end of your coming into a monastery; namely, that being dead to the world and yourself, you may live to God alone. Strive therefore with might and main to accomplish that for which you came; learn strongly to despise all sensible things, and manfully to break, and no less wholesomely to forsake yourself. Make haste to mortify the passions and vicious affections that are in you.

Busy yourself in repressing the unstable wanderings of your heart; strive to overcome the weariness, idleness* and irksomeness of your infirm mind. Spend your daily labour in these things; let this be your glorious contention and healthful affliction. Be not

* *Acediam*—Greek ἀκηδία—spiritual sloth or sluggishness. In spiritual writers the term *acedia* is a favourite one, denoting, *first*, the mental prostration induced by fasting or other physical causes; *secondly*, spiritual sloth and sluggishness in general. The subject is dealt with at length by Cassian, *Institutes*, X, and *Conferences*, V, iii sq. Cf. also St Thomas, ii^a. ii^{ae}, q. xxxv, for a full discussion of its nature and character. In medieval English the word was transliterated as “acedy” and “accidie”; cf. Chaucer, *Persones Tale*, “Now wol I speke of the sinne of accidie or slouth.”—[Ed.]

MORTIFICATION

remiss; but arise, watch, look about you, and expose yourself wholly, lest you be evilly partial to yourself. God requireth thus much of you; so doth your state.

You are called a monk: see that you be truly what you are called. Do the work of a monk. Labour earnestly in beating down and casting forth vice. Be always armed against the frowardness of nature, against the haughtiness of mind, against the pleasures of your flesh, and the enticements of sensuality.

3. Understand well what I say. If you permit pride, boasting, vainglory, self-complacence to domineer over your reason, you are no monk.

If you frowardly follow your own sense, and dare despise every humble office, you are not what you are called—you are no monk.

If, as much as in you lieth, you repel not envy, hatred, maliciousness, indignation; if you reject not rash suspicions, childish complaints, and wicked murmurings, you are no monk.

If, a contentious and earnest strife being risen between you and another, you do not presently treat of a reconciliation, and what wrong soever hath been done you do not presently pardon sincerely, but seek for revenge, and retain a voluntary private grudge, and not a true and sincere affection in your

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heart, or if outwardly you show signs of disaffection—nay if, when occasion and necessity requireth, you defer to help him that hath injured you, you are no monk, you are no Christian, you are abominable before God.*

If, having done amiss, you are ashamed regularly to accuse yourself, and freely to confess your fault; if, being blamed, reproved, and corrected, you be not patient and humble, you are no monk.

If you neglect readily and faithfully to obey your ghostly Father in all things that be not sinful; if you refuse to reverence him as God's vicar, and sincerely to love him, you are no monk.

If you willingly withdraw yourself from the divine Office and other conventual acts, if you assist not watchfully and reverently in the service of God, you are no monk.

If, neglecting internal things, you take care only about things external, and with a certain dry custom move your body but not your heart to the works of religion, you are no monk.

If you give not yourself to holy reading and other spiritual exercises, if you have your mind so possessed or weighed down with transitory matters that you seldom lift yourself up to things eternal, you are no monk.

* Cf. St Thomas, *ii^a. ii^{ae}*, q. xxv, a. 8 and 9.

THE FALSE MONK

If you desire delicate and superfluous meats, and intemperately long after the drinking of wine beyond the measure of a cup, especially if you be in health, and have beer or other convenient drink sufficiently, you are no monk.

If foolishly you require precious apparel, soft beds, and other solaces of the flesh which agree not with your state and profession; if, loving corporal rest, you refuse to undergo labour and affliction for God's sake, you are no monk.

If you cannot endure solitude and silence, but are delighted with idle speaking and inordinate laughter, you are no monk.

If you love to be with seculars, if you desire to wander out of the monastery through the villages and cities, you are no monk.

If you presume to take any small matter, to send, receive, or keep any things without the knowledge or permission of your Superior, you are no monk.

If you esteem not the ordinations* of holy religion, though never so little, and willingly do transgress them, you are no monk.

To conclude: If you seek any other thing in the monastery but God, and with might

* *Ordinationes*—*i.e.*, all things prescribed by the Rule, Constitutions, and Customs of the monastery.
—[ED.]

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and main aspire not to perfection of life, you are no monk.

4. As I have said, therefore, that you may truly be what you are called, and may not wear the habit of a monk in vain, do the work of a monk. Arm yourself against yourself, fight manfully against yourself, and as much as in you lieth overcome and subdue yourself. If presently you find not the peace you desire; if, I say, as yet you cannot be at rest, but are troubled and assailed by brutish motions and turbulent passions: yea, if so be by God's permission, for your own profit, throughout your whole life you shall have to do battle with such enemies, despair not, be not effeminately dejected, but, humbling yourself before God, stand and be steadfast in your place, and skirmish stoutly; for even the vessel of election, St Paul, endured temptations all his lifetime, in which he was buffeted by the angel of Satan. When often he besought our Lord to be freed from this trouble he obtained it not, for that it was not expedient for him; but our Lord answered his prayer: *My grace is sufficient for thee, for power is perfected in infirmity.** And so afterwards St Paul did gratefully endure the scourge of temptation. Being comforted by the example of this most strong and invincible champion,

* 2 Cor. xii 9.

STRIVE MANFULLY

faint not in temptation, but endure manfully, remaining fixed and immovable in thy holy purpose; for without doubt, this labour of yours is grateful to God, although the same seem hard and insufferable to you. Go through this spiritual martyrdom with an invincible mind. Doubt not, although you be a thousand times wounded, and as often trod under foot, if you stand to it, if you give not ground to your enemy and like a coward cast not away your weapons, you shall receive a crown. Do according to your ability, and commend the rest to God's disposing, saying: *As thy will is in heaven, so be it done.** Let the divine will and ordination be your chief consolation. Which way soever you turn yourself, wheresoever you are, you shall find tribulations and temptations as long as this life lasteth; which, that you may patiently endure, you ought always to be prepared.

But you are happy, if by grace you have proceeded so far that all grief and affliction whatsoever become truly pleasing to you for God's sake.

* 1 Machab. iii 60.

CHAPTER II

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE AT EACH PERIOD OF THE DAY: AND FIRST OF THE DIVINE OFFICE AND OF DEVOTION OR DRYNESS IN PRAYER

1. How a monk should behave on first rising for Matins,
2. And when reciting the Hours, and during the sacred psalmody.
3. How distractions and dryness in prayer should be borne.
4. An apt distinction of the servants of God, as faithful, tepid, and unfaithful.

1. **WHAT** think you, Brother, is my glass big enough? Or is not this yet sufficient for you, but you yet desire to hear in more express terms, more abundantly and fully, how to compose yourself within and without, or how, according to reason, you ought to order every day before God? Hear then. As soon as you are awake and ready to rise for Matins, devoutly arm yourself with the sign of the Cross, and briefly pray to God that he will vouchsafe to blot out the stains of sin in you, and be pleased to help you. Then, casting all vain imaginations out of your mind, think upon some other thing that is spiritual, and conceive as much purity of heart as you can, rejoicing in yourself that you are called up to

THE DIVINE OFFICE

the praise and worship of your Creator. But if frailty of body, if heaviness of sleep, if conturbation of spirit depress you, be not out of heart, but be comforted and force yourself, overcoming all impediments with reason and willingness; for *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.** Certainly, according to the labour which you undergo for the love of God, such shall be your recompense and reward.† Being come off from your bed, commend and offer yourself, both body and soul, to the Most High; make haste to the choir, as to a place of refuge and the garden of spiritual delights. Until divine Office begins, study to keep your mind in peace and simplicity, free from troubles and the multiplicity of uncertain thoughts; collecting a goodly and sweet affection towards your God by sincere meditation or prayer.

2. In the performance of the divine Office have a care to pronounce and hear the holy words reverently, perfectly, thankfully, and attentively, that you may taste that your Lord is sweet, and may feel that the Word of God hath incomprehensible sweetness and power. For whatsoever the Holy Ghost hath dictated is indeed the life-procuring food, and the delightful solace of a chaste, sober, and humble

* Matt. xi 12.

† Cf. 1 Cor. iii 14.

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soul. Remember, therefore, to be there faithfully attentive, but avoid too vehement cogitations and motions of mind, especially if your head be weak: lest being hurt or wearied, confounded and straitened internally, you shut the sanctuary of God against yourself. Reject, likewise, too troublesome care, which commonly bringeth with it pusillanimity and restlessness, and persevere with a gentle, quiet, and watchful spirit in the praises of God, without singularity.

3. But if you cannot keep your heart from wanderings, be not dejected in mind; but patiently endeavour, patiently do what lieth in your power, committing the rest to the divine will. Persevere in your goodly affection towards God, and even your very defects—which you are no way able to exclude—will in a manner beget you consolation. For as the earth, which is of a convenient nature, doth by the casting of dung, oftentimes more faithfully send forth her seeds; so a mind of goodwill, out of the defects which by constraint it sustaineth, shall in due time receive the most sweet fruit of divine visitation, if it endure them with patience.

And what profit do you reap by being impatient? Do you not heap calamity upon calamity? Do you not show your want of

DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER

true humility, and display in yourself a pernicious self-love?*

As long as you do reverently assist, and are ready with a prompt desire of will to attend, you have satisfied God, even if your attention sometimes wanders; neither will he impute an inordinate instability to you, if so be by your negligence you give not consent unto it, and before the time of prayer you set a guard over your senses. If you cannot offer a perfect dutifulness, offer at least a good will: offer a right intent in the spirit of humility, and so the devil shall find no occasion to cavil against you. Although you have nothing else to offer but a readiness, in body and spirit, to serve our Lord in holy fear, be sure of it that you shall not lose your reward. But, woe to your soul, if you be negligent and remiss, and care not to give attendance; for it is written: *Cursed is the man that doth the work of God negligently.*† Be diligent, that you may perform what you are able, if you be not able to perform what you desire. Upon this

* *Proprietas*.—I have used “self-love” throughout to translate this word, instead of “propriety,” as in the original edition of 1676, since that term has now changed its meaning. In some passages “self-seeking” would suit the original, but no single phrase quite conveys the Latin, except perhaps the French *amour propre*.—[ED.]

† Jer. xlviii 10.

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security, be not troubled when impediments happen, and you be not able to perform as much as you would. When, I say, distraction of your senses, dejection of mind, dryness of heart, grief of head, or any other misery or temptation afflicteth you, beware you say not: "I am left, our Lord hath cast me away, my duty pleaseth him not." These are words befitting the children of distrust. Endure, therefore, with a patient and joyful mind all things for his sake that hath called and chosen you, firmly believing that he *is near to those that are of a contrite heart*.* For if, humbly and without murmuring, you carry the burden laid upon you, no mortal tongue can tell what a deal of glory you heap up for yourself in the life to come. You may truly say unto God: *I am become as a beast before thee, and I am always with thee*.† Believe me, Brother, if being replete with internal sweetness, and lifted up above yourself, you fly up to the third heaven, and there converse with angels, you shall not do so great a deed as if, for God's sake, you affectuously endure grief and banishment of heart; being made conformable to our Saviour when, in extreme sorrow, anguish, fear, and adversity, he cried unto his Father: *Thy will be done*.‡ Who

* Ps. xxxiii 19.

† Ps. lxxii 23.

‡ Matt. xxvi 42.

UNFAITHFUL SERVANTS

also, being thrust through his hands and feet, hanging on the Cross, had not *whereon to lean his head*.* Who also most lovingly endured for thee all the griefs and disgraces of his most bitter Passion. Therefore, in holy longanimity, contain yourself, and expect in silence until it shall please the Most High to dispose otherwise. And certainly in that day it shall not be demanded of you how much internal sweetness you have here felt; but how faithful you have been in the love and service of God.

4. Among those that are called the servants of God, many serve him unfaithfully, few indeed faithfully. Unfaithful servants, as long as they have sensible devotion and present grace of tears, do serve God with alacrity, they pray willingly, joyfully go about good works, and seem to live in deep peace of heart; but as soon as God hath thought it good to withdraw that devotion, you shall see them to be troubled, to chafe, to become malicious and impatient, and at last neither willing to be at their prayers nor other divine exercises. And because they feel not internal consolations as they desire, they perniciously betake themselves to things that are external and contrary to the spirit, whereby it is manifest that they seek not purely God but God's gifts, to abuse them for their own

* Matt. viii 20.

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pleasure. For if they did love God purely, and did not viciously rest in his gifts, they would remain peaceable in God, those gifts being taken away; and would not then turn out of the way to unlawful consolations. Therefore they are unfaithful, because in adversity they keep not touch with God. *They believe for awhile, and shrink back in time of trial.** They would have all things to go on their side, and endure nothing that goeth against them. If God grant those pleasant things that they would have, they serve him; if he deny them, they leave him—nay, in prosperity even they serve not God, but themselves; and in all things would rather have their own will done than God's. They place sanctity in internal sweetness and consolation, rather than in the perfect mortification of vices; being ignorant that by the withdrawing of devotion it more certainly appeareth if a man truly love God, than by the infusion of it. For such sensible devotion is commonly more truly a natural than spiritual devotion.

But whatsoever it be, unless a man make use of it wisely, it is often wont to bring him that is so affected to a hidden kind of pride, a wicked complacence and a vain security, as we daily see in these unfaithful servants.

* Luke viii 3.

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

For as soon as they are tickled with this inward sweetness, they will forsooth begin to judge and despise others. They think themselves great saints and partakers of God's secrets; they expect and wonderfully long after divine revelations, and wish that some miracles were done by them or on them, by which others might take notice of the holiness which they think they have, but have not. Thus are they wont to vanish away in their own imaginations, who gape more after sensible grace than the Giver of grace.

But faithful servants behave themselves far otherwise, for they seek not themselves, but God, not their own consolation, but chiefly the will and honour of God; they always fly self-love; whether God be pleased to infuse or not to infuse the influence of internal sweetness, they are all one, and, persisting in equality of mind, they cease not to love and praise God. It is not internal darkness, nor difficulty of senses, nor coldness of affections, nor dryness of heart, nor dejection of mind, nor drowsiness of spirit, nor any straits of temptation: in a word, it is neither misery of adversity, nor success of prosperity, that is able to heave them out of their place. For although, peradventure, they feel in the inferior powers of the soul the oppression of inordinate sorrow proceeding from adversity,

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or the violence of sensual delight arising out of prosperity, they are not for all that dejected, because they strive to continue quiet in the reason or higher part of the soul, conforming their will to the divine will or permission, and grieving that they feel even the least contradiction of unseemly motions. Being *founded*, therefore, *on a firm rock*,* they persist steadfast in the love of God, seeing that their chief comfort is in his will. They are always devout, because with all their power they avoid and abhor whatsoever is displeasing to God, and may contaminate ever so little the purity of their heart; and, committing themselves in all chances to God, do still possess a pure, free, and quiet mind. This is the truest devotion and most acceptable to God.

The other sensible devotion, which is more familiar to novices or those that are lately converted, is not durable and sure, yet notwithstanding it is very profitable to us if we wisely make use of it. The faithful servants—for so I still call them, whom Christ calleth *not servants, but friends*†—faithful servants, I say, do seek after that effectual and most pleasant sweetness of grace also. They seek after the joy of our Lord's salvations;‡ they seek after his most lovely countenance and

* Matt. viii 25.

† John xv 15.

‡ Cf. Ps. l 14.

FAITHFUL SERVANTS

most sweet embraces, but they do this with a spiritual and bashful, not with a sensual greed, or childish lightness, or with a disturbing impatience.

They desire the gifts of God, not that they may be sensually delighted in them, but that, being made more fervent by them and more pure from all inordinateness, they may please their heavenly Bridegroom. They love the gifts of God, and willingly thank him for them; but yet they keep themselves, as it were, quiet and free from them, seeing they rest not in them. By grace they go forward to the Giver of Grace and Supreme Good, in whom only it is lawful for them to rest. They are truly happy, because by how much the less they cling to those gifts they receive so many the more.

And although they be never so much endowed with blessings from God, they lift not up their mind, they despise not others, but themselves. They despise themselves, I say, and acknowledge themselves unworthy of all spiritual grace, always keeping in mind that, whatsoever they have, it is of God's mere mercy, and that *of them more is exacted to whom more is given or committed.** And so continuing in holy fear, and by these gifts proceeding in humility, they confess

* Luke xii 48.

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themselves to be below the lowest. They rejoice and glory within themselves if, being oppressed with unjust infamy, reproaches, injuries, and uttermost scorn, they have imitated Christ; not if they could be elevated above themselves by excess of mind, or could see strange visions, or work most apparent miracles. They, presently making the sign of the Cross, repel the deceitful suggestions by which the devil endeavours to allure them to vainglory and self-complacence, in no way consenting to the subtleties of the wicked serpent. They do not confidently place their hope of salvation either in the number or in the merit of good works which they do, but put their trust in the freedom of the sons of God, which they have obtained by the blood of Christ.*

Let us, then, Brother, knowing the difference between faithful and unfaithful servants, endeavour to be of those which, perchance, you are not of, and strive to leave them of whom, peradventure, you are one. If you are of those you would not be of, and are not of those of whom you would be, grieve and humble yourself, for *God giveth grace to the humble.*† And certainly, if you humble yourself in the sight of our Lord, grieving that you are yet of the number of

* Cf. Gal. iv 31.

† James iv 6.

TEPID SERVANTS

the unfaithful, you have already in a manner passed into the lot of the faithful. Labour, persevere, fear not: you shall not be reprovèd with the unfaithful, but shall be received with the faithful.

There are others also that are bound to the divine service, and yet cannot be called either faithful or unfaithful servants of God; these a man may lawfully call the idle slaves of the devil. I mean those unhappy wretches that, making little or no account of devotion or the grace of God, and altogether neglecting their interior part, make a show, as though *they honour God with their lips, but their heart is far from him.** These, being plunged over head and ears in a sea of evil, think little of their own salvation. These are all one to-day as they were yesterday. They depart from the choir as they went thither—namely, unclean, tepid, apt to no goodness, wandering, dissolute, without fear, without reverence. By the divine praises, which with a polluted mouth they utter, they exasperate more than they please God. I would to God these had kept them in the world; for what do they in monasteries? why tread they on holy ground? why devour they the alms of the just? why pollute they the angelical schools of spiritual exercises with carnal delights? If their

* Isa. xxix 13.

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intent was to live uncleanly, they should have remained in a place of uncleanness and not have entered into places of purity. By living negligently in monasteries, they double the punishments of hell which their ill living in the world had deserved. But it is out of our way to speak more of these things; wherefore I return whence I strayed.

CHAPTER III

OF SPIRITUAL OCCUPATIONS OUT OF CHOIR TO BE UNDERTAKEN FROM TIME TO TIME

1. The day should be apportioned to certain works, that the mind grow not slack through idleness.
2. A vicious idleness and a slothful business to be alike avoided.
3. The duty and delight of devout reading.
4. Of the extent and manner of prayer in private.

1. THAT you may be settled in your private exercise, prescribe yourself somewhat to do and to be busied in every hour: but so that if at any time, either through obedience or any other reasonable cause or chance happening, you abbreviate your exercise or wholly overslip it, you be not inordinately vexed: for you ought chiefly to endeavour to attain to this, that in the liberty and purity of heart—rejecting all self-love—you may always persevere, peaceable and without trouble before God. For this is acceptable to our Lord above all other exercises, be they never so laborious and hard. Whatsoever, therefore, shall hinder this liberty in you, although it be spiritual and seem very profitable, occasion so requiring, leave it, as much as obedience doth permit. Endeavour, I say, to repel all restlessness of heart, which choketh true peace

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and perfect trust in God with all spiritual proceedings.

2. Give not place to vicious idleness at any time, for it destroyeth souls. Avoid also idle businesses—by idle I mean such as are unprofitable—neither marvel at this kind of speech. Give not place to vicious idleness at any time: for there is also a commendable idleness when the soul, fixed on God, and withdrawn from the noise and imaginings of sensible things, doth rest as it were idle in internal silence, and in the most blessed embracements of her Beloved; to which, if the hand of our Lord bring you, you shall profitably and happily be idle. Otherwise, always either read, or meditate, or pray, or take in hand something else that shall be serious and necessary.

3. Truly, if you will settle yourself with all diligence to the study of Scripture you will be wonderfully comforted, and every spiritual thing will begin to grow sweet unto you: and so it will come to pass that, being accustomed to holy delights, you will easily condemn those that are carnal, and your mind will be wonderfully strengthened in your good purpose. To the end, therefore, that you may merit so great a fruit, willingly and wisely give yourself to reading; that is to say, in reading seek spiritual consolation and profit

OF HOLY READING

and the love of God, not curiosity, not superfluous understanding and knowledge, not neatness and elegance of words. For the kingdom of God is not in elegance of speech,* but in holiness of life: which elegance of speech, nevertheless, as it is not over-carefully to be sought after if it be wanting, so it is not scornfully to be rejected by him that hath it, for it is also the gift of God. Receive all things with thanksgiving, and all things shall help you forward for your salvation.

Howbeit, be not troubled if many of those good things which you hear or read slip out of your memory. For as a vessel which often receiveth water remaineth clean, although the water poured in be presently poured out again: so likewise, if spiritual doctrine often run through a well-willing mind, although it abide not there, nevertheless it maketh and keepeth the mind clean and pleasing to God. Your chief profit consisteth not in committing the word of doctrine to memory, but rather that the effects of the doctrine and words remain in you: that is, by this doctrine to get an internal purity, and a ready mind to fulfil the commandments of God.

Learn to apply to yourself those things that are spoken against vice, for it is not safe to assert them against others with a fixed

* Cf. 1 Cor. ii 1.

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judgement of mind, lest, while you obstinately judge another, you defile or trouble your own conscience. Likewise, in all things which seem any way obscene, avoid as much as in you lieth even the very least allurement of any slippery motion. If by way of temptation they molest and trouble you importunately, contradict them with reason, deny any consent to them, and, making the sign of the Cross, direct your whole intention to God. For so without hurt you may escape this danger.

Furthermore, do not imitate those that observe no order in reading but read whatsoever cometh first to hand where they first open the book; such men like nothing which is not new and strange, for they loathe all things that are usual and stale, though never so profitable. Far be such instability from you, for it doth not recollect but distracteth the spirit: in truth he is dangerously sick that is tainted with this disease. Wisely bind your mind to a certainty of reading, and accustom yourself to go through with it, although sometimes it administer no matter of pleasure.

Read, I say, not confusedly or disorderly, but methodically. Read over again and again those things that are good. Nevertheless, in time of tribulation and spiritual poverty

OF HOLY READING

you may intermit what you have begun, and, according to your necessity, turn and apply yourself to other godly exercises which may be more consolatory.

For it is the opinion of the Fathers that it is good to go to prayer or meditation from reading, and again to have recourse to reading from prayer; that, prayer succeeding reading with a commendable vicissitude and reading succeeding prayer, loathsomeness may be taken away; and the mind being, as it were, fresh and lusty, may always be the more able for the proposed work, and greater fruit may thus be reaped of both. And what hindrance is there why a man should not make short prayers even in reading, and aspire to God by holy desires? There are many things that may serve either for reading or prayer or meditation: such are all the Scriptures, in which we hold conference with God.

4. Always prefer prayers in common before private ones, and judge them to be more profitable for you, although sometimes they may seem more barren and unsavoury. In like manner, esteem of all actions that are done in common and by rule, for above all things obedience ought to be in the first place. If, peradventure, you demand in what prayers and meditations you should chiefly exercise yourself in private: believe me, after having

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accused yourself and craved pardon for your sins, you shall chiefly beseech God to mortify your evil passions and vicious affections, and strip you quite clean of all inordinateness; and that he will be pleased to grant you grace joyfully and patiently to endure all tribulation and temptation. Ask of him profound humility and most fervent charity. Beseech him to vouchsafe always to direct, teach, illuminate, and protect you in all things. These things, in my judgement, are most necessary for you. And, indeed, they are most great and high, neither can they be obtained otherwise than by prayer. Persevere, therefore, continually knocking; and without doubt our Lord will at length open unto you, and will give you as much bread as your necessity shall require. But see you neglect not earnestly to give thanks for what you have received. For nothing displeaseth God more than forgetfulness and ingratitude for benefits received. And that you may the more willingly and sooner incline God's benignity unto you, pray attentively for the state of the whole Church, commending unto God all the faithful, both alive and dead, and every reasonable creature.

CHAPTER IV

THAT THE BEST MATTER FOR MENTAL PRAYER IS THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST'S LIFE AND PASSION

1. That of all exercises the most useful is meditation on the Life and the Passion of Jesus.
2. A form of such meditation as used by Blosius, but ascribed by him—through humility—to another.
3. Of the method and use of this prayer of aspirations and affections.
4. How a beginner should make use of this method.

1. WILL you further hear in what with profit you may exercise yourself? I will tell you. Singing of psalms is profitable, a godly meditating on other parts of Scripture is profitable, the consideration of creatures compared to their Creator is profitable.

All prayers, singing of hymns, thanksgiving, and holy meditations are profitable. But by consent of all, the remembrance of Christ's humanity, and especially of his most sacred Passion, is said to be most profitable and only necessary, and with justice. For it is the present extermination of passions and inordinate affections, a fit refuge in temptation and sure safeguard in dangers, a sweet refreshing in distress, a friendly rest from labour, a gentle repressing of distractions. It is the

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true door of sanctity, the only entry to contemplation, the sweet consolation of the soul, the unfailing flame of divine love, the salve of all adversities, the fountain of all virtues, from whence they flow to us. To conclude, it is the absolute example of all perfection, the haven, hope, trust, merit, and salvation of all Christians.

2. I knew a monk,* whose custom was to propose to himself every day some part of our Lord's Passion. Thus, for example, one day he would set before his eyes Christ's being in the Garden; and whithersoever he went that day, wheresoever he chanced to be, if not troubled with any other serious and necessary cogitation, whatsoever he did outwardly, he took a special care to direct his internal eye to our Lord suffering distresses in the Garden, and thus would he talk with his soul: "O my soul, behold thy God. Behold, daughter, attend, see, and consider, most dear! Behold thy God, behold thy Creator, behold thy Father, behold thy Redeemer and Saviour! behold thy refuge, behold thy defender and protector, behold thy hope, trust, strength, and health! Behold

* *i.e.*, Blossius himself. This method is also treated of by the Carthusian, Antonio de Molina (1560-1619 *circ.*) in his tractate *I de Oratione*, cap. 17, § 2.

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thy sanctification, purity, and perfection ! behold thy help, merit, and reward ! behold thy tranquillity, consolation, and sweetness ! Behold thy joy, thy delights, and thy life ! behold thy light, thy crown, and thy glory ! behold thy love and thy desire ! behold thy treasure and all thy good ! behold thy beginning and thy end ! Whither art thou scattered, thou wandering daughter ?* How long wilt thou leave the light and love darkness ? How long wilt thou forsake peace and involve thyself in troubles ! *Return, return, thou Sunamite, return !* † Daughter, return and recollect thyself, most dear ! leave many things and embrace one—for one thing is necessary for thee. Abide with thy Lord ; place thyself by thy God ; go not from thy Master ; *sit in his shadow whom thou lovest, that his fruit may be sweet to thy throat.* ‡ It is good for thee to be here, daughter. For hither the enemy cannot make his approach ; here are no snares, no dangers, no darkness. All things are here safe, all things calm. Reside here willingly, most dear. For here thou shalt be safe and free, thou shalt be merry and joyful. Here are roses, lilies, and violets ; here flowers of all virtues do smell most pleasantly. Here thou shalt see a

* Cf. Jer. xxxi 22. † Cantic. vi. 12.

‡ *Ibid.* ii 3.

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brightness sweetly enlightening all things with his rays. Here thou shalt find true consolation; here thou shalt find peace and rest. To conclude, here thou shalt find all good."

With such short sentences he would both sharply and sweetly spur forward his soul, and call her home when she was wandering abroad, and force her to apply herself to her chiefest good. Of these little sentences he would take sometimes more, sometimes fewer, sometimes only one, sometimes two, sometimes three, according to the fervour of his devotion and the pleasure of the Holy Ghost; and he would oftentimes iterate and repeat them.

He would also force his soul to the remembrance of those things which our Saviour did and suffered for her in the Garden, at one while exciting her to the considerations of our Saviour's unsearchable humility, mildness, patience, most fervent and incomprehensible charity; at another while to take compassion on our Lord of infinite majesty, so humbled and afflicted, and then again to thank him for so great benefits and piety; at another while to repay love with love, and anon to ask pardon for her sins, and then to beg this or that grace. He would often convert his speech to these or the like affectionate or fervent aspirations: "O my soul, when wilt

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thou be ready to follow the humility of thy Lord? when wilt thou imitate his mildness? when shall the example of his patience shine in thee? when wilt thou be better? when wilt thou be free from passions and vicious affections? when shall evil be destroyed in thee? when shall all inordinateness be blotted out in thee? when wilt thou peaceably and gently endure all tribulation and temptation? when wilt thou perfectly love thy God? when wilt thou intimately embrace him? when wilt thou be wholly swallowed up in his love? when wilt thou be pure, simple, and reserved before him? how long will it be ere thou be hindered no more from his most chaste embracings? Would that thou wert immaculate; and that thou didst fervently love thy God; and that thou didst inseparably cleave unto thy chiefest good."

And then directing the eye of his heart to heaven or to the depth of eternal light, he would frame these aspirations: "O my soul, where is thy God? where is thy love? where is thy treasure? where is thy desire? where is thy total good? when shalt thou see him? when shalt thou most happily enjoy him? when shalt thou freely praise him with all the citizens of heaven?" These and the like aspirations would he secretly speak, either mentally or with his lips, taking sometimes

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more, sometimes fewer, according to the internal motions of the Holy Ghost.

He would also often accuse his soul, that it was too slow, sluggish, tepid, ungrateful, hard, insensible, and unhappy. Again he would comfort it, being dejected with pusillanimity or fear, and would encourage it with these or the like words: "Despair not, my soul; take comfort, daughter, and be confident, most dear. If thou hast sinned and art wounded, behold thy God, behold thy Physician is ready to cure thee. He is most courteous and most merciful, and therefore willing; he is omnipotent, and therefore can pardon thy sins in a moment. Peradventure thou art afraid because he is thy Judge? but take heart, for he that is thy Judge is also thine Advocate. He is thine Advocate to defend and excuse thee, doing penance; he is, therefore, also thy Judge to save thee, not to condemn thee, being humbled. His mercy is infinitely greater than thine iniquity either is or can be. Which words I say not that, persevering in evil, thou shouldst make thyself unworthy of his mercy; but that, being averted from evil, thou shouldst not despair of indulgence and forgiveness. Thy God is most gentle, most sweet; he is wholly amiable, wholly desirable, and wonderfully loveth all things which he hath created. When thou

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thinkest of him, or conceivest him in thy memory, far be all imagination of terror, austerity, and bitterness from thee. When we say he is terrible, it is not in respect of himself, but of those that abuse his patience and defer to do penance : whose most bitter and poisonous sins, as contrary to his most sweet and pure goodness, he repelleth and punisheth. Let not thine imperfections discourage thee too much ; for thy God doth not despise thee because thou art imperfect and infirm, but loveth thee exceedingly because thou desirest and labourest to be more perfect. He will also help thee if thou persistest in thy good intention, and will make thee more perfect—yea, peradventure (which thou little hopest for), wholly fair and every way pleasing to him.”

Thus, and in innumerable other ways, would he friendly talk with his soul, and invite her by chaste speeches to the chaste love of her Beloved. He would also turn his speech to our Lord, and, aspiring to him by holy love, would say: “ O good Jesus, pious Pastor, sweet Master, King of eternal glory, when shall I be immaculate and truly humble before thee ? when shall I truly despise all sensible things for thee, and when shall I perfectly forsake myself ? when shall I be stripped of all self-love ? For, unless there were self-love, there would not be self-will

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in me: passions and inordinate affections would have no place in me. I should not seek myself in anything. Self-love only maketh the impediment and medium between thee and me; self-love only doth hinder thee from me. When, therefore, shall I cast off all self-love? When shall I freely resign myself to thy divine pleasure? When shall I serve thee with a clean, quiet, simple, and calm mind? When shall I perfectly enfold thee in the arms of my soul? When shall I love thee with most fervent desire? When shall all my tepidity and imperfection be swallowed up by the immensity of thy love? O my desire, my treasure, my total good, O my beginning and end, O my God, sweetness of my soul, my consolation, my life, my love! Oh, that my soul might enjoy thy most sweet embracings! Oh, that it were indissolubly bound with thy love! Would it were perfectly united to thee. *For what is to me in heaven, and besides thee what would I upon earth, thou God of my heart, and my portion for ever?** When shall the world be silent to me? When shall the impediments, troubles, and vicissitudes of this life cease to me? When shall my pilgrimage be ended? When shall my sojourning be consummated? When shall the miserable captivity of this

* Ps. lxxii 25, 26.

AFFECTIVE PRAYER

banishment be dissolved? When shall the shadow of mortality decrease and the day of eternity draw near? When shall I lay down the burden of this body and see thee? When shall I praise thee as do thy saints, without impediment, happily, and eternally? O my God, my love, my total good!"

3. He was often wont to use such aspirations, knowing that by the exercise of them the human spirit is more effectually united to the divine spirit, and that thereby man attaineth the sooner to the perfect mortification of himself. He had them ready everywhere; but if at any time he had more sufficient leisure, he would then—sitting as Mary Magdalen did—rejoice to linger in them more freely, and that more to the honour of God than to the inordinate pleasing of himself. He would not in the meantime omit, with a certain internal effusion of heart, by a sincere and sweet affection, to adore, bless, give thanks, and pray. Moreover, turning his speech to the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, as to a most merciful lady, and most liberal stewardess of heavenly treasures, he would redouble his pious complaints before her, and, with a holy importunity, extort a benediction.

Another day he would set before himself how our Saviour, betrayed by Judas, was taken: and concerning this point he would

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iterate his foresaid exercises, and so would go through with the Passion in order, and having ended would begin again. And about that part of the Passion which did represent Christ hanging on the Cross, he did not employ himself in order and in his proper day, but every day at least briefly—if so be he thought it convenient—exciting his soul to the earnest contemplation of these things. On every solemnity of our Saviour or the Blessed Virgin he would—if he thought it good—propose to the eyes of his mind the representation of that feast instead of part of our Lord's Passion, which otherwise was that day to be frequented, and would perform his internal exercises or friendly discourses with his soul about the work, cause, mystery, and joy of that festivity. He was also much delighted with singing the Psalms. And I know that, by the continued custom of this holy exercise, he reaped consolation and singular profit of his labours.

This have I set down for an example; imitate of it, if you please. For by this means you shall grow accustomed to apprehend the presence of God; by this means you shall begin to have your senses sober, watchful, exercised, and calm; by this means you shall prepare yourself a way to the highest contemplation and perfection. Thus, where-soever you are, you shall spend your time

A FORM FOR BEGINNERS

profitably: vague and unstable cogitations being cast forth out of the secret corners of your heart, and such as are serious being entertained in their place. You may frame yourself meditations and aspirations in other terms than we have done. If you perceive the looking in your book to hinder your mind, whereby you are the less able to reach God and to be united to him, lay aside your book. Again, if you perceive it doth further your exercise, make use of it, for I would that your devotion should be free to you, and that you should follow the grace of the Holy Ghost without confusion or anxiety. Moreover, by aspirations—as you may perceive by the above-written copies—we understand certain short ejaculatory prayers, or burning desires, and lively and loving affections to God.

4. He that hath not as yet undertaken the beginning of internal conversation and his own mortification, or hath at least but newly begun, ought not peradventure so precisely to follow this rule, but it shall be expedient for him to exercise himself for awhile according to this manner which I shall prescribe. Let him, therefore, every day propose to himself some part of our Saviour's Passion, and let him study to have recourse in mind to the same, whether he stand, go, sit, or rest, unless he have some other profitable or necessary

A MIRROR FOR MONKS

thing in his heart to treat of. And let him often discourse with his soul in the presence of Christ suffering, either thus, or after the like manner :

“ O my soul, behold thy God. Behold ungrateful, attend thou wretch, consider thou poor soul, behold thy God, behold thy Creator and Redeemer. Behold how the King of eternal glory humbled himself for thee; behold how the highest Majesty debased himself for thee; see what sorrows, bitterness, and indignities thy Saviour suffereth for thee; consider with what charity he loved thee, who undertook so great calamity and affliction for thee. Arise, my soul, *arise out of the dust, slip thy head out of the collar, thou captive daughter of Sion.** Arise, forsake the puddle of thy vices and leave the uncleanness of thy negligent life. How long wilt thou take pleasure in perils? How long wilt thou esteem anxiety and torments to be rest? How long wilt thou securely sleep in destruction? How long wilt thou willingly leave the right way and wander abroad, far and near, by unknown places? Return unto the Lord thy God, for he expecteth thee; make haste, be not slack, for he is ready to receive thee; he will meet thee with open arms, only defer not thou to return. Come to Jesus, and he will heal and

* Isa. lii 2.

A FORM FOR BEGINNERS

purify thee. Join thyself to Jesus, and he will illuminate thee. Adhere to Jesus, and he will bless and save thee."

Sometimes, also, let him more expressly upbraid his soul of ingratitude and perverseness, saying: "Alas! my soul, how ungrateful hast thou been to thy God. He hath bestowed innumerable and most admirable benefits upon thee, and thou still repayest evil for good. He hath created thee according to his own image and likeness; he hath endowed thee with immortality; he hath deputed heaven and earth and all things contained in them to thy commodity; he hath enriched thee with many gifts and graces; he hath brought thee to the light of the Catholic faith; he hath withdrawn thee from the dangerous waves of the world, and conveyed thee to the haven and tranquillity of a monastical life, where thou—as in a most sweet paradise of spiritual pleasures—might have infinite occasion of holy joy and good works; he hath patiently borne with thee grievously sinning, and hath preserved thee from the jaws of hell. The King hath been incarnate for thee; thy Creator for thy sake hath become thy Brother. Neither did he think it sufficient to be born for thee, wherefore also would he suffer for thy sake. He endured sorrow and distresses for thy sake; he was betrayed and taken for

A MIRROR FOR MONKS

thy sake; he was spit upon and buffeted for thy sake; he was scourged and wounded with a crown of thorns. For thy sake he was smitten with a reed and laden with the burthen of the Cross; for thy sake he was nailed to the Cross and drank vinegar; for thy sake he wept and shed his most holy blood; for thy sake he died and was buried. He hath adopted thee to be heir of the kingdom of heaven; he hath promised those things unto thee *which neither eye hath seen nor heart of man can comprehend*.* But thou hast left and condemned him who hath been so many ways beneficial to thee; thou hast cast away the holy fear of him that loved thee; thou hast shaken off his sweet yoke that hath elected thee; thou art become as one of the daughters of Belial; as an impudent harlot thou hast worshipped iniquities without modesty; thou hast compacted with death; thou hast given thy hand to the devil; thou hast been most prompt to all wickedness; thou hast heaped evil upon evil, and hast rejoiced to add worse to the worst. By thy wickedness thou hast again crucified Jesus Christ, who hath chosen thee for his spouse; thou hast renewed his wounds by thy crimes.

“Who will give thee groans and sighs? Who will give thee a spring of tears, that

* 1 Cor. ii 9.

A FORM FOR BEGINNERS

thou mayest night and day bewail thine ingratitude? O unhappy wretch, what wilt thou do? Oh, that thou hadst kept thyself in the state of innocency, and that thou hadst remained immaculate! Oh, that thou hadst not miserably defiled thyself with dishonesty! Oh, that thou hadst not gone astray from thy God! Thou hast lost thine innocency; thou art defiled; thou art become dishonest; thou hast gone astray from thy God. Alas! poor wretch, and what wilt thou do? To whom wilt thou fly? From whom wilt thou expect help? From whom but from him whom thou hast offended? He is most pitiful, most courteous, most merciful. Humble thyself, pour out thyself like water in his sight, and he will take pity on thee."

Sometimes let him turn his lamentations to our Lord with these or the like words: "Alas! my Lord Jesus, what have I done! How have I left thee! How have I despised thee! How am I become forgetful of thy name! How have I cast aside thy name! How have I cast aside thy fear! How have I trod thy law under my feet! How have I transgressed thy precepts! O me, my God! O me, my Creator! O me, my Saviour! O me, my life and my total good! Woe be to me, wretched creature! Woe be to me, woe be to me, because I have sinned! Woe

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be to me, because I have made myself like to a brute beast ! Woe be to me, because I am become more silly than a sheep. O good Jesus, O loving Shepherd, O sweet Master, help me. Set me on my feet, stretch forth thy hand to me, being in danger. Cleanse me from my filth, cure my wound, confirm my weakness, save me from destruction. I confess myself unworthy to tread on the earth, I am unworthy to behold the light, I am unworthy of thine aid and grace. For great is mine ingratitude; great, yea, too great, is the enormity of my sins. Nevertheless, thy mercy is infinitely greater. Therefore, O God, thou lover of mankind and my only hope, *have mercy on me according to thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of thy mercies take away mine iniquity.*"*

Sometimes, as if he had risen out of a dream, falling on his knees in the sight of our Lord, let him affectionately say: *Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.*† Or this: *O God, be propitious to me a sinner.*‡ Or that: *Have mercy on me, Jesus, Son of David.*§ Or that other: *O Lord, help me.*|| Solikewise let him pour forth his heart before the Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord, and all the saints of God, humbly suing for their intercession.

* Ps. l 1, 2.

† Matt. viii 2.

‡ Luke xviii 13. § Mark x 47. || Matt. xiv 30.

CHAPTER V

AN INSTRUCTION ON DAILY EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE AND EXPIATION OF SIN

1. Of the daily examination.
2. A meditation on the joys of eternal life.
3. Of the time to be spent in expiation of past sins.
4. How the capacity of the individual is to be considered with discretion,
5. And fervour restrained herein.
6. Of method and perseverance in undertaking all such exercises.

1. AND every day, or certainly very often, as occasion shall serve, let him recollect himself; and with a profound humility, firmly proposing amendment, let him call to mind and particularly confess before our Lord the sins of his life aforepassed, and especially those by which he hath grievously offended the divine goodness. But it will be indiscreet to dwell long upon those that belong to the frailty of the flesh, lest the remembrance of them, and the longer treating of the old sin, breed a new sin by unlawful delight. In which confession, contrition, and sensible devotion, let him accustom himself to lament more that he hath behaved himself contumeliously and ungratefully towards his Father

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and Creator, than that he hath brought himself in danger of eternal punishment.*

In the forms of lamentation and godly complaints which we have prescribed, he need not care for running over many sentences, but let him take what he will, and as many as he will, observing no order. If he make choice of only one, two, or three, whichsoever they be, and repeat them again and again, he shall do well. We would that he should do freely according to his devotion, and always avoid confusion and perplexity. I know one, that, being externally busied in his conversion to our Lord's Passion, among chaste discourses took delight to call to mind these few words, or the like: "O good Jesus, O pious Pastor, O sweet Master! good Jesus, have mercy on me! pious Pastor, direct me! sweet Master, teach me! my Lord, help me!" Another there was that did take delight to run over, sometimes more, sometimes fewer, of the aforesaid lamentations, and express them in diversity of words according to his affection.

Let our young beginner, as I have said, be free in these things, and let him stir himself

* Because sorrow of the latter kind is attrition only, based upon servile fear at least in part; whereas the former kind has its origin in love of God and filial fear. See St Thomas, *Summa*, Pars iii, Supp, q. 1, a. 3.

ETERNAL LIFE

to compunction and diligence in his spiritual purpose by meditating, if he please, upon death, purgatory, judgement, hell, and heaven. Which kind of meditation, by how much the nearer it draweth to liberal fear* and the love of God, by so much it is the more acceptable to our Lord, and more effectual for the purifying of the soul. Again, by how much the more it participateth of base and servile fear, by so much it is the less profitable. By liberal fear we fear to sin, lest we offend our most bountiful Lord God, and so lose his favour and familiarity. By servile fear we fear to do ill, lest we should undergo damnation and punishment. Nevertheless, it is good to be withdrawn from sinning by servile fear, but so that we stay not there, but pass on to liberal fear.

2. In meditating on eternal glory, let him go thus, or in the like manner, to work: " Oh, how blessed is the heavenly Jerusalem, the walls whereof consist of most precious stones; the gates thereof shine with the most divine pearls; the streets whereof are paved with most pure gold; the gardens similarly being decked with flowers most incomprehensibly flourishing. There the sound of joy is perpetual; there the canticle of gladness is ever sung by an unwearied choir; there the

* Or " filial fear "; see St Thomas, *loc. cit. supra.*

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rejoicing of exultation is always renewed; there the instruments of the saints do always resound; there cinnamon and balm incessantly breathe forth an unspeakable odour of sweetness. There is peace and rest overcoming all sense; there is temperateness and calmness beyond all human reach; there is eternal day and one spirit of all; there is sure security, secure eternity, eternal tranquillity, quiet happiness, happy sweetness, and sweet mirth; there *the just shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.**

“ Oh, what happiness is it to be among the choirs of angels, to have perpetual fellowship with the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, with the holy Confessors and Virgins, and with the most glorious Mother of God ! Not to fear, not to be sorrowful, not to be in anguish, not to be grieved, not to be troubled with tediousness, to endure no labour, no impediment, no loathsomeness, no necessity ! Oh, what a wealth of consolation, what a sea of delights, what an abundance of joys, what profundity of most pure pleasure will it be to behold that incircumscribable light, to see that most amiable brightness, to see that unspeakable glory of the most high Trinity, to see the God of gods in Sion, to see him *not in a riddle, but face to face,* † to see also the glorified humanity

* Matt. xiii 43.

† 1 Cor. xiii 12.

ETERNAL LIFE

of the only-begotten Son of God ! For if the visible bravery of the heavens be a beautiful sight, or to behold the glittering clearness of the stars, to see the glorious beauty of the sun, to see the shining of the pale-faced moon, to consider the grateful light of the air, to contemplate the elegant neatness of birds, flowers, grass, and colours, to listen to the sweet chanting of the nightingales and larks, to hear the melodious harmony of harp and lute, to smell the fragrant roses and lilies, to draw the breath that spices and perfume send forth, to taste the deliciousness of divers palate-pleasing fruits; if, I say, there be so great pleasure in these things, what a torrent of most sincere delight will it be perfectly to contemplate that immense beauty, and perfectly to taste that infinite sweetness from whence all beauty, all sweetness of things created floweth down to us. The spring-tide representeth unto us the state of eternal felicity, and the future resurrection; for when we see heaven, earth, trees, and all things else with a certain new grace to be decked with admirable ornaments; notwithstanding, there is greater difference between that which it representeth than between noon and midnight. Blessed, therefore, yea, thrice blessed, is that heavenly Jerusalem where nothing wanteth that may please, and whence all

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things are banished that may displease, where almighty God is happily praised for ever."

Let him learn purely to frequent the joys of this supernal city, to love and desire them, yet not so much for his own profit, as for the profit and honour of God. Although, indeed, the meditation of eternal life may be more sincerely practised by him that hath been a proficient in internal conversation, than by him that hath scarcely attained to the beginning of his own mortification, and knoweth better how to seek himself than God.

3. In our above-related meditation let a novice exercise himself continually for the space of one, three, or six months, yea, for a whole year or more; until he perceive within himself an absolute contempt of the world and himself, and beginneth to feel the fervent purpose of a spiritual life to take root in him. Some are with more difficulty, some more easily turned to the better. And some, whom it pleaseth God out of his most infinite favour most liberally to prevent, are presently changed. In the meantime he may also employ himself in thanksgiving, in praising God, and other prayers; but let his chief employment be in reasonable mourning for, and persecuting of his sins. Let him not be troubled if he cannot draw tears externally,

EXPIATION OF SINS

for he lacketh not tears internally that truly hateth all sin and iniquity.

Now after he hath in some measure reformed the image of God within himself by healthful bitterness of mourning and contrition, he may with greater confidence and profit imitate the above proposed example of exercise.

Therefore let him take courage, and fervently prepare himself for a more intimate familiarity with the heavenly Bridegroom. But as long as he is weak or cold he shall kindle in himself the fire of divine love by serious meditation on the Incarnation or Passion of the only-begotten Son of God, sweetly conferring with his soul concerning these things. By which meditation being once inflamed, let him compose himself by prayer and aspiration, desiring by them to unite his spirit to the chiefest good. If he often persist by this means to draw his heart to the love of God, he shall soon bring himself to such a pass that presently, at the first conversion of his mind or aspiration without any premeditation, he may be able to separate himself from creatures and their images, and plunge himself in the sweetness of divine love. Then he shall not so much need to remember each particular sin of his life past in his penance before God, and with sorrow to

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direct the insight of his heart unto him, for so might his freedom and affection towards good be hindered; but rather let him lovingly direct his heart to God himself, detesting whatsoever may separate or withdraw him from him. Yet we mean not that he should negligently forget his sins, but rather should so remember them that the remembrance hinder not a greater profit; therefore let him confess them daily to God, rather summarily than particularly.*

Truly we have a more present remedy against lesser sins when we turn to God by a sweet and effectual affection of love, than when we tediously busy ourselves in the consideration of them and severe punishment of them. Let him therefore cast them away into the bottomless depth of God's divine mercy and goodness, that, like a sparkle of fire in the midst of the sea, they may there perish. Let him endeavour to reject quite and clean all inordinate pusillanimity, and superfluous scruples of conscience, and perplexed diffidence, whensoever they arise. For unless they be presently lopped off they do divers ways choke up the alacrity of the

* On this matter of abiding sorrow for sin, see St Thomas, *Summa*, Pars iii, Supp., q. 4, a. 1 and 2; also St Augustine, *De vera et falsa paenitentia*, cap. 13.

DISCRETION

mind, and very much hinder our internal going forward.

4. Moreover, let him attempt nothing beyond his strength, but be content with his lot. If he cannot reach as far as he desireth, let him reach as far as he can. And unless he flatter himself, he may easily know what progress he is able to make. Nevertheless, the divine bounty is liberal, infusing itself wheresoever it findeth a mind worthily prepared.

Wherefore, if our spiritual practitioner* be not yet admitted to the sublimity of contemplation and to perfect charity, let him think himself as yet not prepared for the receipt of so great a good. For what good would it do him to receive that grace of which he knows not how to make good use? Let him make haste to pull up all vice by the root, that he may be the fitter. But still with this proviso, that he strive not beyond his strength. Let him not impatiently try to forerun God's grace, but humbly to follow it. Let him not, I say, violently force his spirit thither, whither he cannot reach; lest presuming, which he ought not, he tumble himself down headlong by his own violence, and being crushed be punished for his rashness. Let him so tend to perfection, that unbridled violence and

* *Asceta*, athlete.

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turbulent solicitude bear no part in his endeavours.

Let him attend the measure of grace given him, and withal remember that he shall far more easily, safely, quickly, and happily attain to the highest degree of contemplation—that is, to the comprehending of mystical divinity—if he be touched and rapt by the mere grace of God, than if he endeavour to attain unto it by his own labours. Let him always, therefore, observe a mean with discretion, lest by excess he run into defects.

5. The bread of tears is good, yet many, when they should refresh themselves, surfeit by it. For they insist so long in tears, and with so great confusion and agitation, that both spirit and body are fain to lie down under the too intense or extended exercise. We confess that many, by the discretion and the help of the Holy Ghost, can long and profitably mourn; and there are many again who, being, as it were, steeped in the torrent of pleasure which they take in God, do unseasonably urge and spur themselves forward to greater violence: desisting not from this indiscreet forcing of themselves until, being hurt and confounded, they fall and faint, and are thenceforth made unapt to receive the sweetness of grace. Wherefore the internal heat and violence is always so to be moderated,

RESTRAINT

that the spirit be not extinguished, but comforted by it.

They whose heads are of a good temper may more fervently and strongly insist in fervent aspirations; but they that have weak heads—especially if the weakness grow by indiscretion—are not able to exercise themselves otherwise than very gently and moderately. And such can scarcely sometimes admit a simple compunction of mind, or meditation, or reading, without hurt, yea, even though they lean their head upon something. So great is the calamity which the vice of indiscretion begetteth. But let them diligently, inasmuch as in them lieth, avoid this discommodity, and humbly pray to God for the restoring of that which they have spoiled themselves. If God be pleased to hear them, let them be thankful; if not, let them bless our Lord, and for his love learn, according to his pleasure, patiently to endure this misery, which they have brought upon themselves.

6. Let our internal practitioner also beware of all lightness of inconstancy and instability. Let him take in hand those exercises that are good; and let him go on with what he hath once begun, although it like him not; but so shall the pleasure of the Holy Ghost be followed in all, the decree of his own will and

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appointment being rejected. For the Holy Ghost doth divers ways as it were invite us, and is used to bring us by divers paths to the wine-cellar and bed-chamber of divine love; whose inspiration we must still observe and most readily follow, laying aside all self-love. Wherefore this our spiritual scholar shall often present himself to the Holy Ghost as a prepared instrument, and which way soever the Holy Ghost shall bend and direct him, let him presently follow. If at any time he shall be drawn or elevated up to a soaring contemplation and to the embrace of the Supreme Good, let him freely offer up himself; and if at such a moment the Passion of Christ, or any holy meditation and imagination occur to him, let him not stay at it, but with all expedition let him fly thither, whither he is called by the Spirit.

When he staggereth doubtfully in his purpose, not knowing how he ought to proceed in the enterprise he has begun, let him use the counsel of men that are prudent, expert, and humble; for so shall he profit more than if, relying upon himself, he proceed according to his own inventions.

But in the meantime let him not forget carefully to have recourse to the remedy of prayer, humbly beseeching that in all things he may be directed and illuminated by our

PERSEVERANCE

Lord; lest at any time being deceived he follow error instead of truth. And let him always remember that he can never perfectly be at leisure for God, unless his heart be free and clear from all things besides God.

CHAPTER VI

OF STRIVING WITH TEMPTATION AND DESOLATION, WHICH OFTEN OCCUR IN THE COURSE OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

1. That the soul of one who is making progress must prepare itself for desolation and the loss of sensible grace.
2. Idleness is to be avoided most carefully.
3. Method of resisting carnal temptations.
4. Pride and vainglory in the gifts of God must be shunned.

1. You have now heard, Brother, after a manner, how he should begin and how he should go forward in external exercises who desireth to attain to any excellent degree of a pure life. It shall be your part not only to hear and read these things, but also to put them into practice. But even if you do this and have help from above, so that you begin to be clear within, and that psalmodies and other offices of divine praise wax sweet unto you, search not too high, but be afraid. For although, your heart being enlarged, you do awhile run the way of God's commandments, you have not of yourself enlarged your heart, but God hath done it. And he that enlarged it can permit it, his grace being withdrawn, to be again coupled up and imprisoned. The

LOSS OF SENSIBLE GRACE

Sun of Justice hath shined on you, and certain scales being taken off, hath illuminated your mind; but who can hinder him from hiding himself if he be so pleased? Be you therefore ready: for he will hide himself; and his amiable brightness being once departed, your senses shall again be darkened and hindered.

Moreover, certain immissions by evil angels will toss the ship of your frail breast; yea, peradventure the temptation will be so strong that you will think all hell opposeth itself against you. You will seem to yourself to be wholly given over to Satan, and will not have list to open your mouth in God's praise. Neither shall this calamity endure a little while. Nor shall you only once, or thrice, or six, or ten times be laid hold on by it, but very often, and sometimes more vehemently than at others. But be not dejected at this; neither think it in anywise a punishment of your fault. For he hath permitted you to be tempted, that it may be manifest whether you truly love him, and that you may learn to pity others that are oppressed by temptations. He scourgeth and bruisseth you, that he may purge you from vice, and prepare you for more grace. He seemeth to leave you, as it were, for a time, that you wax not proud, but may always acknowledge that you can do nothing without him; yet, nevertheless, he

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doth not forsake you. He exerciseth you in these and the like adversities out of the unspeakable charity wherewith he loveth you. For the heavenly Spouse useth this kind of dispensation with a fervent soul converted unto him. He visiteth her solemnly in the beginning of her new purpose, to comfort and enlighten her, and after he hath recreated and allured her with his sweet smile, he draweth her after him, and lovingly meeteth her almost everywhere, with his milk feeding his new friend.

Afterwards he begins to administer to her the solid food of affliction, and plainly shows her how much she ought to endure for his name. Now she beginneth to be in a sea of troubles. Men molest her without, passions trouble her within. Punishments afflict her externally, internally she becometh dejected by pusillanimity. Externally she is grieved with infirmities, internally darkness overcasteth and cloudeth her. The external parts are oppressed, the internal dried up; one while the Bridegroom hideth himself from the soul, another while he discovereth himself unto her. Now he deserteth her, as it were, in the darkness and horror of death, and presently recalleth her to the sweetness of light, inso-much that it may be truly said of him that *he leadeth down to hell and bringeth back*

IDLENESS TO BE SHUNNED

*again.** By such means he trieth, purifieth, humbleth, teacheth, weans, draws, and adorns the soul. If he find her to be faithful in all things, of a good will and holy patience, and that, by long exercise and his grace, she doth mildly and affectionately endure all tribulations and temptations, then doth he more perfectly join her to himself, and similarly maketh her partaker of his secrets, and bindeth her far otherwise to him. This he did at the beginning of her conversion.

Be not therefore troubled when vehement temptation scourgeth you, but, as if you received a token of his love, remain faithful and invincible in your agonies, saying during this storm, with blessed Job: *Although he shall kill me I will trust in him.*† It will be somewhat hard for you to assist at the divine Office, by reason of the instability and cloudiness of your mind. Notwithstanding, be patient, and gently do what lieth in your power. The night will pass away, darkness will be dispersed, and light will take place again.

2. But as long as it is yet night take heed you are not found idle and negligent; if you have no list to pray, sing, or meditate, then read. If your mind loathe reading, write: or manfully exercise yourself for the time in

* 1 Kings ii 6.

† Job xiii 15.

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some other external work, in the meantime diligently rejecting the troubles of vain cogitations. If drowsiness do unseasonably molest you, so that it grievously depress you, you shall peradventure—time and place permitting—do better if somewhat pertinently, to the honour of God, you slumber a little, leaning your head somewhere, than if inexorably you resist it; for if by labour you think to drive it away, as long as you labour you shall be free, but that once past, on your betaking yourself to your spiritual exercises, it will easily return. If you sleep, let it not be deep nor long, so that it last no longer than one may say one, or two, or three psalms: for so your spirit, being, as it were, renewed, will arise with more expedition and alacrity.

They that know not how to behave themselves soberly in eating, drinking, and the custody of their senses, if they fly to this remedy it is to be feared lest they rather aggravate than alleviate this disease, and, falling into a deep and long sleep, miserably lose their time by sluggishness.

3. Watch carefully against those temptations by which the devil endeavoureth to incline the mind to those things that are indecent and vicious. Be sure to reject them in the very beginning, before they take possession of you within, for unless you repel the

CARNAL TEMPTATIONS

adversary at the first onset, if he get entrance he will presently clap bolts on your soul, and you, being destitute of liberty and force, will hardly be able to resist. But if you have behaved yourself negligently, and he fetter you, do not yield so, but deny your consent, and strive against him even by creeping on the ground, and pray to our Lord in the strength of your spirit, that, freeing your bonds, he will restore you to liberty, or at least preserve you from giving consent. But know that many times you shall more easily overcome the adversary suggesting any filthy, impious, and absurd things, if you contemn and set light by his barking, and so pass them over, than if you strive long with him, and with great labour endeavour to stop his wicked mouth. But if he overmuch importune you, and being repelled once or twice do still come on afresh, you must meet with him on plain terms, that, being overthrown on plain ground, he may fly away with disgrace.

Now, he setteth on us many ways, for sometimes he seeketh to ensnare us secretly, and under pretence of piety; sometimes he setteth upon us openly and with open fury; sometimes he creepeth in by little and little; sometimes he breaketh forth suddenly and unlooked for; sometimes he layeth siege to us by spiritual and internal means, sometimes

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by corporal and external adversaries or prosperities. Wherefore we must always have recourse to the aid of our Lord's Passion, and cry to God with tears.

4. But, as I have always said, soar not too high by reason of the grace which, peradventure, you have. *For what have you that you have not received? Why do you glory, as if you had not received?** Take heed, therefore, that by no means you open the window of your heart to the blast of vainglory or the air of self-complacence. See you brag not, see you boast not abroad of what you have received. But keep your secret to yourself, † let it abide with you, unless you happen to reveal it humbly and modestly to some intimate and secret friend for spiritual utility and consolation, or that you be compelled by obedience, or rather manifest necessity, or great profit. See that you believe not that you have received the gift of God by your own merits and labours, but rather judge yourself unworthy—as indeed you are—of all grace and consolation, and worthy of all confusion and dereliction. Compare not yourself with such as are inferior and imperfect, but rather compare yourself with those that are more holy: that, by consideration of their perfection, you may the better ac-

* 1 Cor. iv 7.

† Cf. Isa. xxiv 16.

VAINGLORY

knowledge your own imperfection. Humble and deject yourself; place yourself infinitely below all men. But you will say, "How can I do this, considering that many without fear or shame live most debauchedly, which I neither do nor will do? What! shall I cast myself below them? Shall I place them above me?" I say you shall.

For if you consider that these who to-day are so bad may to-morrow be more perfect than yourself, and that, if they had received the gifts that are granted you from above they would lead a far more holy life than yourself, and that you would sin more grievously than they if you were not prevented by a more abundant grace; I say, if you consider these things, you will easily observe how fit it were that you should prefer every sinner before yourself. Oh, if you did know the secret of God, how willingly would you give place to others; how gladly would you take the lowest place; how joyfully would you lay yourself at the feet of others; with what alacrity would you attend the sick; how devoutly would you honour all; how affectionately obedient would you be, without any delay or complaint.

But yet I require a more excellent thing of you—viz., that you place yourself not only below all men in your heart for God's sake but also below each creature, reputed your-

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self as most abject dust, esteeming yourself unworthy to tread on the earth or to enjoy the benefit of light. Look more exactly into yourself—how ungrateful, tepid, unstable, miserable, and vile you are—and by that means you will attain to that most humble submission of mind.

If the old enemy knock importunately at the door of your heart, putting into your conceit that you should think yourself somebody, that you should vainly glory and compare yourself with others, repel the subtle villainy, lock the doors against him, and although you feel some pestilent immissions, beware always of giving your consent. For if you consent, if you let in the impostor, and incline your mind to his unlawful allurements, you have broken your faith and vow, which you have made to the Bridegroom of your soul; you have polluted the bed of your Beloved, which before flourished; neither can you be admitted to his most blessed familiarity unless you cast out the adulterer and humble yourself exceedingly. And, peradventure, you shall not be received to favour unless you be first punished and afflicted for awhile, and until the filthy kisses which the impure spirit hath imprinted on your soul be razed out by the scourge of God. But enough hath been spoken of this.

CHAPTER VII

OF DISCIPLINE IN FOOD, CLOTHING, AND CONVERSATION*

1. A rule for bodily refection.
2. Of the monastic habit and clothing.
3. Of gravity in manners, and modesty in behaviour.
4. Of discreet moderation in speaking and in keeping silent.
5. How recreation and other external work may be intermingled with devotion.
6. All singularity must be avoided,
7. Likewise the censure of others' words or deeds,
8. And any undue attachment to creatures.
9. All defects must be burned out of the soul by fervour.

I. HITHERTO we have spoken of how you ought to assist at the divine Office, what internal exercises you should undertake, what rule is to be observed, what to be followed, what to be avoided in them. We will now pass to the rest that we have to speak of. As for corporal refections, beware of all excess, lest, being overladen, you be made inapt for all spiritual exercises. For it cannot be but that the belly, swelling by intemperance, must needs draw away the mind from God and those things that belong to salvation. Wine especially, if more largely used, although

* *Conversatio*, here used in the old sense for "conduct" in general, not "talk" merely.—[ED.]

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without drunkenness, is a great impediment. It inflameth the body, confoundeth the internal parts, and, distressing the alacrity of the spirit, stirreth up a beastly kind of sluggishness. In vain, therefore, doth that man aspire to a spiritual life that yieldeth to his belly; lop off, therefore, all vicious desires. Take no care whether your meat or drink be very delicate or sweet of itself. If it be man's meat, and reasonable, what need you desire more? You are a monk: come then to the table to refresh your body with God's gifts, not to nourish the pleasures of the flesh. Wherefore, if you are troubled about the goodness of your victuals, and do murmur—as I have already said, so I say again—you are no monk.

If Jesus were truly pleasing to your heart, what poor fare for his sake would not be pleasing to your palate. For Jesus is a most pleasant sauce, even to extreme poverty. Love him, and all manner of food will not be less, nay, will be more pleasing unto you than the delicious banquets of kings. Jesus, being hungry, for your sake was often fed with bare bread; Jesus, thirsting, for your sake drank vinegar and gall. Take your meat and drink continently, leisurely, and moderately, excluding all brutish greediness. Have a care even of the natural delight that

OF DIET AND CLOTHING

proceedeth from your needful refection. Do not reflect upon it, do not desire to feed your sensuality, for if you feed that, it will feed on you and pollute you within. And as you must often deny the flesh what it evilly desireth, so sometimes you must force it to receive what it desireth not. For sometimes it doth in a manner loathe that which natural necessity requireth.

Furthermore, beware that, while you refresh your body, your mind be not in the meantime hunger-starved. Therefore let the mouth of your heart feed on the word of God, and let your ears receive the wholesome doctrine and deeds of the saints. If you happen to sit at that table where there is no holy reading, do not thus deprive yourself of your spiritual food, but, as much as silence will permit, converse inwardly either with your soul or with God, and propose to yourself some godly thing to keep yourself doing.

2. As in your diet, so also be sober in your apparel. Reject, scorn, and detest whatsoever is contrary to monastical simplicity. Neither do you imitate those vain and wretched monks—that are ashamed of their estate and vocation, but not of their lewd life and conversation—who, if they are to go abroad and to come into the sight of seculars, will betray their foolishness and

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curiosity. They must, forsooth, have such and such clothes, and wear their cassock after this or that fashion. They are ashamed to wear their apparel according as religion doth ordain, and according to the Constitutions of their Superiors and ancestors. And coming abroad, not like humble monks, but like delicate and neat courtiers, by this prodigious sight they provoke wise men to sorrow and indignation, but find matter of mirth for the devil, evidently showing by this absurdity what they are within—viz., proud, wanton, and full of vainglory. Alas ! wretched monks, far wide from the scope of true religion.

O monks—not monks, but monsters ! O monks detestable, by being thus deluded by the devil's clothing. Is it this that you promised to God, when, by the most sacred vow of poverty, you solemnly renounced the world, with all the pomps and vanities thereof ? Is it this that the King of Kings hath taught you by his word ? Is it this that he hath showed by his example, when, being wrapped in base clouts, he had no other cradle than a manger ; when, likewise, he was apparelled in a white garment and a purple robe in scorn ? Is this to follow Jesus ? Is this to follow Jesus' footsteps ? O intolerable confusion ! O extremity of madness ! Look to yourself, Brother, that you become

MODESTY AND GRAVITY

not like these, but rather be content with plain apparel, whether you be within the monastery or without, for thus much your profession exacteth of you.

3. Everywhere, but especially during the divine Office, keep your eyes from wandering, neither lightly look about you either this way or that, unless necessity require, lest you chance to see something that may hinder you from attention and purity of heart. For although there be no fear of danger, yet monastical discipline requireth that, whether you rest or go, you use modestly to look down upon the ground. Never look curiously on the face of any woman.

Let not your gait be too swift or hasty, especially in the church, unless it happen of necessity that it must be so. Neither out of the church let it be overdone, or remiss, but modest and civil. In all things compose yourself to a laudable carriage of your whole body.

Let your looks before others be pleasing, with a decent gravity, behaving yourself courteously and affably towards all. And if against your will you happen to be over-sorrowful, so dissemble it that you seem not unpleasant and harsh, and so be troublesome to the rest. When you are forced to laugh, laugh sparingly and like a monk. Avoid

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over-loud laughter as a great impediment to you in your purpose, and as the destruction of your soul; knowing that vehement and immoderate laughter doth violate the cloisters of modesty, and, dispersing the interior powers of the soul, driveth the grace of the Holy Ghost out of your heart.

4. Above all things, love solitude, silence, and taciturnity. Be more ready always to hear than to speak. Be not hasty, nor turbulent, nor clamorous, nor contentious in words; but speak modestly, bashfully, courteously and without dissembling, what is true and right. Speak not, I say, too loud; nor yet so low that you cannot be understood, especially if the place, time, cause, or person to whom you speak require that you speak somewhat more loud than ordinary; for, as the voice of a monk should always be bashful, and for the most part low, according to the holy ordinations of religion, so also sometimes it ought to be reasonably loud. Affirm nothing obstinately, unless matter of faith or necessity of salvation constrain; but whensoever any contradicteth you, either yield or hold your peace. If neither ought to be done, affirm with modesty and humility what you know to be certain; for by this means you shall take away all occasion of irreligious contention. Let not your words be biting.

RECREATION AND LABOUR

Willingly speak not anything that may be either to your own credit or to others' discommendation. But if, out of necessity or utility, you speak any such thing, do it with a laudable modesty and a pure intention.

Abhor dissolute tales as the poison of the soul. As for jests—if they happen in your presence—albeit you suffer them, yet relate them not. Never consent to a tongue that speaketh foolishly, unseemly, and perniciously. Yea, if such things are spoken, do you, if it seem good, mildly and with reason find fault with the speaker; if you think it not good, yet at least cut off his speech honestly and endeavour to draw him to better discourse. If possible, give not your ear to backbiters.

5. The liberty of external recreation granted you, either by walking or otherwise, see you abuse not; that is, make such use of these that they hinder not your spiritual going forward, but rather further it. You may, indeed, to the honour of God slake your mind, but let it not loose: lest, whilst you wander abroad, being expelled out of yourself, some delight or passion contrary to the spirit lay hold on you, and disperse your interior senses and replenish them with bitterness. Therefore carefully learn, by a certain advised simplicity of mind, to abide within yourself: that, the noise of vain cogitations and the motion of

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inordinate affections being repressed, you may keep your heart in silence and liberty. Let God be your chief, yea, your whole thought and study, for it is not enough for you that he be your whole intention.

Likewise, in all external occupations endeavour that, with Martha, you not only, for the honour of God, perform your work prudently, devoutly, and with alacrity, but that also, in those works which you faithfully do to the honour of God, with Mary, you direct your mind, being freed from the tumult of cogitations and the confused imagination of sensible things, to God, or those things that are divine, especially if reasonable discourse or any other necessity hinder not. Martha, because she is distracted in her external actions and in her right intentions by the multiplicity of vain cogitations, and is troubled about many things, although peradventure she be not deformed, yet is she not comely enough. But Mary, because she knoweth how to forsake the troops of unstable cogitations, and persisting in unity and tranquillity of mind, doth strive to cleave to goodness itself, is of more perfect beauty.

Wherefore, howsoever you are externally occupied, love not only to be right and innocent with Martha, but also to be clear and simple with Mary. *Mary hath chosen the*

AVOID SINGULARITY

*better part, which shall not be taken away from her.** And you have chosen the same; which unless you keep, according to your power, you produce not fruit worthy your profession. Have therefore always a charitable simplicity of mind.

If you be yet a little one in Christ, and are not able to follow Mary, soaring so high in mind; imitate her humility, imitate her affectionately watering our Lord's feet with tears, imitate her most lovingly seeking our Lord in the sepulchre. For even in these she had simplicity of mind; she loved one thing, she thought on one thing, she sought one thing. But imitate her not for your own delight, but to please our Lord. For if by spiritual delectation you do principally seek yourself in these things, your soul is not the chaste spouse of Christ, but the most base servant of sin; I might say, the devil's impure hackney. You shall at length merit to be admitted to the apprehension of higher mysteries by these that are more low, if I may so call them, which, indeed, are not low, but of a wondrous height.

6. In all things that differ not from the sincerity of a monastical life, conform yourself to the Community, still avoiding vicious irregularity. And because you live among

* Luke x 42.

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monks that live laudably according to the sweet austerity of the Holy Rule,* be not singular in abstinence and watching; neither exceed the rest of the monks therein, unless by the revelation of the Holy Ghost you know it to be the will and pleasure of God. Neither attempt anything without the counsel and consent of your Superior, lest, while you presume of your own head to afflict your body beyond measure, you make yourself unable for good works, and wholly deprive yourself of the fruit of your labour. God requireth of you purity of heart, not the overthrow of your body, for he willeth that you should subject it to the spirit, not oppress it. Therefore, as well in external exercises as internal, temper the fervour of your mind with a holy discretion. If your will, being more slow to virtue and remiss, do, as it were, sleep, rouse it up, spur it forward. But if, having too much bridle, it run too fast, repress and check it.

7. Always stand fast with holy fear in the presence of God. And let these words always resound in the ears of your heart: *Look to thyself.*† Consider not over-curiously the deeds of others, what are their manners

* "The Holy Rule," a recognised term for the Rule of St Benedict.—[ED.]

† 1 Tim. iv 16.

TOLERANCE OF OTHERS

and behaviour, unless it belong unto thine office to do so. Let your curiosity and business be about yourself. Howbeit, think not in this that I would have you make no account of the excesses or sins of others, or neglect to amend them as much as in you lieth, or procure them to be amended. For we condemn curiosity, not charity and a holy zeal of justice. We discommend not what in this case is not against mature stability, or contrary to the sincere love of your neighbour.

The vices that you see in others, or hear of them, either think them to be simply not true, or interpret them in the better part; but if they be so manifest that no interpretation can qualify them, endeavour to separate your sight both of body and mind from them, and reflecting on your own sins, if you have leisure, humbly pray to God both for yourself and them. For so shall you more easily avoid unquiet suspicions and rash judgements. But beware that with consent of reason you rejoice not at another's sin, though of small moment, nor at any adversity; but mourn for your brother before our Lord, calling to mind that *we are members one of another,** all one body, and redeemed all with the same blood. Learn not to be angry, but to pity the defects of others, and patiently to bear with them,

* Eph. iv 25.

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whether they be defects of body or mind. For it is written, *Bear one another's burdens ; and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ.**

Let not the heavenly grace which you observe in others excite you to satanical envy, but to a faithful imitation and godly congratulation. And although you have not the spiritual good that you know another to be blessed with, yet rejoice in heart that God is honoured by it: thanking our Lord for it as readily as if it were your own. And, indeed, it will be to your own good, and you shall be crowned for another's as for your own. Nay, more; it shall become your own.

8. So order your mind that you desire not to please the world, nor fear to displease it. In a man, although he be very nearly allied to you, love nothing but good, or the grace and workmanship of good. And again, hate nothing but vice. Offend not God willingly, either for kinsmen, friends, or any other body's sake, though never so well deserving at your own hands; neither favour, flatter, or applaud anyone in any sin.

Do not earnestly desire the presence or speech of any man unless it be for some spiritual good; yet too great anxiety in this matter is not good either. Love all men, but spiritually, not sensually. For so it will come

* Gal. vi 2.

PURPOSE AMENDMENT

to pass, that you will not be inordinately troubled at the corporal absence of such as are virtuous or your friends, nor afflicted at the corporal presence of such as are vicious or your enemies. Nay, more, esteem no man your enemy, but love even your persecutors, as the most dear furtherers of your salvation.

Whatsoever you see, hear, or perceive in creatures to be delightful and worthy of singular admiration, either by their natural disposition or the art and industry of man, refer it simply to the praise of the great Creator, or to the use of eternal beatitude, that you may be delighted in our Lord. Always be afraid of sensual delectation, whencesoever it have its beginning. For if you seek yourself by that and cleave to it, you will be entangled and defiled.

9. Utterly detest the love of all sins, yea, even of the very least. But if, notwithstanding, peradventure you be overreached and fall out of frailty, afflict not yourself unreasonably with inordinate pusillanimity, but humbly confess your fault before our Lord: and, renewing your good purpose and piously taking heart, cast all your defects into the unsearchable profundity of his mercies or his most holy wounds. As long as you live in this clay building of your body, you may mortify in yourself the affections of lesser

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sins, but wholly to avoid slipping into them you cannot.*

Godly monks, although they slip sometimes, yea, very often, yet they hate sinning and beware of it, and grieve after they have offended; but perverse monks sin, nor do they hate sin, nor beware of it. For they take no pains to extinguish the affections of lesser faults, nor to avoid the occasion of them. They desire the liberty of a more loose life; they love to be absent from divine Office and other conventual acts; they desire delicate and superfluous meat and drink; they espy out opportunities of trifling; they affect inordinate laughter. They delight in secular businesses, to see vanities, to have curious things for their own use: self-complacence, foolish joy, idleness, vain talk, fables, fantastic behaviour, and such other vices are with them not at all, or scarcely, accounted faults; in their conscience they make no bones of them. For being made insensible, they think themselves whole when they are deeply wounded: and, therefore, neither care for lamenting their sins, nor amending their life. But what say they? "These," say they, "are no wounds, or if they be, they are very little ones, and as much as nothing."

* Cf. James iii 2.

PURPOSE AMENDMENT

O wretched monks ! O mad monks ! O Monks, not monks ! For although these wounds seem little, yet, because they are not afraid to receive them, and after receipt of them defer to cure them, they become mortal. I speak nothing of their falling into pride, rebellion, disobedience, murmurings, fury, detractions, hatred, envy, contempt, gluttony, with other hideous sins, and all by this negligence. Do not, Brother, do not imitate these; for they are not disciples of the Crucified, and the beloved friends of God; neither ever shall be, unless they leave off to be what they are. Look you better to yourself, leave, remove, cast aside whatsoever may anyway hinder you from the true love of God. By mortifying thyself in whatsoever way thou canst, as by a certain and compendious means, hasten unto perfection of life.

CHAPTER VIII

THAT PERFECT MORTIFICATION IS THE CERTAIN
AND ONLY SHORT WAY TO PERFECTION,
AND IN WHAT MANNER THE DAILY EXERCISE
MAY BEST BE CONCLUDED

1. Mortification of one's own will and humiliation are the shortest path to perfection.
2. The happy state of a soul which is truly free from self-love.
3. The monk is bound by his vows to aim at perfection.
4. An exhortation to sincere effort herein, to which the aid of God's grace is never lacking.
5. Points for examination of conscience before going to sleep, and the conclusion of the whole.

1. WILL you in few words know what this generality of mortification is? Will you know that only certain short cut to it? I will tell you; I will show you. Give ear therefore. Put off all self-love.* Behold this short way. Put off all self-love. And what is the meaning of this? Lay aside all your own will and all self-seeking; put off all the old man. But that you may the better understand what is spoken, I will propose the same a little more plainly.

Have you bound yourself to the observance of poverty? Why, then, be poor. Poor, how

* *Proprietas*, see note on p. 11, *supra*.

PURGE OUT SELF-LOVE

is that? Be poor in the desire of wealth and yet more in the passions of the mind, be poor in spirit. If you love and desire anything by self-love of affection and sensuality; if as yet you seek yourself in anything, you are yet self-willed, you are not yet truly poor; you cannot yet, with St Peter, say to God, *Lo we have left all, and have followed thee.** Strip yourself, leave all, put off all self-love. Whatsoever is not God, let it not abide in your heart by cleaving to it, or inordinately loving it. Be free from all things that are besides God; insomuch, that I would have you neither foolishly to rejoice for any good news, nor inordinately to be dejected for any bad; and whether you have not received what you yet have not, or have lost what you had, every way keep a stable and quiet state of mind. For God's sake utterly deny all sensible things, yea, even yourself. Which is as much as to say, mortify in yourself the force of concupiscence, delight, anger, and natural indignation; and as well in adversity as prosperity resign yourself over to God's divine pleasure, without any contradiction of will.

I have showed you that this short way and general mortification of yourself is none other than the general casting away of all self-love—

* Matt. xix 27.

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that is, a humiliation of yourself in all kinds. For, indeed, perfect humility itself is that shortest way, by which you go straightforward to the fort* of perfection. Now this fort is perfect charity, or purity. You will demand how you may know whether you have attained to that fort. I will give you manifest instructions. If always abiding in silence of heart, as in a most quiet haven, you affectionately direct and incline your mind towards God, being free from all inordinate care, affection, and earnest imagination of things that are below you, and, in a word, from all disquiet and tumult, so that your memory, your understanding, your will—that is, your whole spirit—shall possess the above-named fort, and be happily united to God. This is the sum of all perfection.

For although, while clothed with this corruptible flesh, we cannot always by present insight and memory retain the theory and speculation of God,† yet even here we ought always to have our intention fixed upon this; and hither, as to a mark, we ought carefully to recall our mind as often as we waste ourselves by unseasonable, light, and unsettled cogitations. As long as, by reading, meditat-

* *Arx*, citadel, fortress.—[ED.]

† *Dei theoriae et speculationi*, a conscious contemplation and recollection of God.—[ED.]

NEED OF FERVOUR

ing, hearing or speaking, we profitably and sincerely treat of any contemplative and spiritual matter, we are not separated from God. Neither when, occasion requiring, we do with the like sobriety and sincerity speak or think of external matters in their due time, do we go far from God.

2. Oh, what a brave philosopher, what a wise man, what an excellent divine shall I account you; oh, how happy and blessed, if you convey these things by your corporal ears into the ears of your heart, and, being stirred up to the true mortification of yourself, do lay the axe to the root of the tree. But what tree is this? It is self-love, of which we spake a little before. But what is the axe, then? It is the fervour of spiritual and internal exercise. But chiefly the daily handling of our Lord's Passion, and frequent aspirations to God, with prompt obedience and a reasonable sobriety of diet, are this axe. It is certainly a sharp axe, a blessed axe, a most grateful axe: an axe that bringeth with it all good and all purity, a golden axe, and decked with precious stones. But the tree is a cursed tree, a tree full of most bitter fruits, a tree of all evil, a tree that produceth and nourisheth all inordinateness, a tree of obscurity and darkness. This tree is in you, as also in all others, and as long as it abideth

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in you, you cannot have perfect light. If, therefore, you desire clearly to behold the bright beams of the Sun of Justice, cut down this tree and cast it from you. It is a very thick and hard tree, not to be cut down at the first blow, nor the first day, nor, perchance, the first year; no, nor peradventure in a long time together. Wherefore, perseverance and patience are requisite.

Now, as gold, if there be no let, naturally goeth downwards, and the flame of fire is carried upwards, so the mind that is purged and purified from the dross of self-love, and seeketh only the will of God, is naturally elevated to her beginning, which is God, and is more freely united to him. But the mind that is only purged of it in part, although she tend to her beginning, and be in some sort illustrated from above by the brightness of eternal light, yet, notwithstanding, because all impediment is not taken away, she cannot have free passage nor flow to, nor be swallowed up in the bottomless depth of eternal light; that is, she cannot freely be united to God, her principal and greatest good.

Furthermore, although God out of his bounty be pleased sometimes to lift up some to his love by a more easy way without many temptations, yet let no man, although enriched with spiritual gifts, easily believe that

GOD TRIETH HIS LOVERS

he hath attained to the perfect resignation of himself, unless in very deed he has endured many most grievous adversities, and has kept a perfect quietness and liberty of mind in the toleration of them. There are many that, as long as they feel no checks, no injuries, no losses, no temptations, no troubles, seem devout, patient, and humble; but, as soon as they are once touched by them, they proudly show, by murmuring, indignation, and impatience, how little they are mortified. Wherefore, before anyone can be thought to have attained to the true abnegation of himself, he must necessarily endure many adversities with a voluntary and quiet mind.

And as for him that hath been exactly tried by God in afflictions, let him think that he hath not yet gone so far as that he is able to endure them; for if he had, without doubt he should not want occasions of diverse tribulations. For God rejoiceth to adorn the soul more secretly and perfectly joined to him with manifold afflictions, as it were with so many precious pearls, and so to bring it to the true similitude of Jesus Christ. He, therefore, that, rejecting self-love in all things, conformeth his will to the divine will and ordinance, being equally prepared to undergo any adversity, confusion, and subtraction of internal sweetness for God's sake, as he would

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the affluence of any prosperity, honour, and devotion; he, I say, that is come to that pass, that he can endure all temptation and tribulation with a certain internal sweetness and joy, this man hath found a precious pearl; this man hath attained to the highest degree of perfection; he is everywhere, and in all occasions, united to God, and most sweetly poureth his soul to him. He doth purely, quietly, simply, joyfully, and sweetly walk all the day long in the light of our Lord's countenance, and can adhere to highest contemplation when he pleaseth with the same facility that he doth live and breathe. What in this vale of misery he may receive from heaven, and to what God will be pleased familiarly to admit him, it lieth not in our power to speak, for, indeed, they are things unspeakable. Let him that is such glorify God, and confess that Jesus Christ *hath raised up the needy from the earth, and lifted up the poor out of the dung,** since that of an impure man here on earth he hath made an angel like to God.

3. You will, peradventure, say: "Oh, this perfection is too much above me, therefore will I not stretch myself, nor endeavour to apprehend it, lest I should labour in vain." But my answer is, that if you do according to your words, you are no monk; for, although

* Ps. cxii 7.

AIM AT PERFECTION

you are not bound to attain to perfection, yet are you bound, as much as in you lieth, to endeavour to attain to it. Flatter yourself how you will, persuade yourself as you will, fain and pretend what excuses you will, you are bound with might and main to tend to perfection. It is even so and not otherwise. If hitherto you have been ignorant of it, henceforth ignorance cannot excuse you; you have bound and obliged yourself, and so you shall remain.

But you will say: "I cannot attain to such perfection." What mean you by this distrust? Are you ignorant that the divine power can do more than human infirmity can imagine? I confess that of yourself you cannot attain it, but God is able to bring you. Believe God, hope in God, not in yourself. Trust in the grace and help of God, not in your own endeavours. Nevertheless, that God may be with you, be not you wanting to yourself by sloth. Do what lieth in your power, put forth your hands, stretch out your arms, confirm your mind to the destruction of vice, to the perfect abnegation of yourself; recollect your heart, produce affection, elevate your mind to the contemplation of those things that are eternal, and accustom yourself everywhere to attend the presence of God: which that you may the better perform,

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propose to yourself every day according to the above demonstrated example some part of our Lord's Passion, and carefully cast your internal eyesight upon the same; in the meantime sweetly conversing with Jesus, or with your soul concerning him. Always, I say, busy your cogitations—as much as commodiously you may—in some divine matter. Let this be your scope; let this be the determination of your mind. Labour for this without rest with a quiet and pleasing care.

And although every moment—as I may say—you be distracted and stray from your intention, be not dejected; let not that breed pusillanimity, but be constant, and ever return to what you are resolved. By your indefatigable labour you shall overcome all trouble or difficulty. Nay, in a little while you will find this labour more easy and pleasant; and being regenerate to the newness of an unknown light, you will begin to taste of the delights laid up for the saints. You will not be the same as you were before: but, being happily changed into another man, and clothed with angelical grace, you will highly esteem what before you despised, and despise what before you highly esteemed. That which before did evilly please you will now displease you; what before evilly displeased you will now please you: you will promptly

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and willingly endure what before seemed insufferable. O pleasant metamorphosis! O change proceeding from the right hand of the Most High! At last, this laudable custom growing into a second nature, and the divine love more perfectly possessing you within, you will not feel any labour; and as before without labour you did think on filthy, impure, absurd, foolish, vain, and dream-like things, so now you will without labour adhere to God and divine things. For, of necessity, the mind must daily reflect on that which the heart dearly loveth.

Woe, woe unto perverse, tepid, and negligent monks—monks in name, but not in life—who, contemning the reverence of their state, and violating their vows, are neither ashamed, nor fear to wallow in the dirt and dung of sloth, vanity, and passions. But blessed, yea, ten times triple blessed, are those monks and religious men who, albeit they are of little estimation and imperfect, do, notwithstanding, with might and main aspire and tend to perfection; for they are certainly the adopted sons of God, whom our pious Saviour doth comfort, saying, *Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give you a kingdom.** They may with security await death, although they are yet

* Luke xii 32.

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but in the beginning of their holy purpose. Because it shall be *precious in the sight of our Lord*,* surely may they look forward to death; and yet not death, but the sleep of peace, an end of death and a passage from death to life.

4. What say you, Brother? Are you yet in doubt? Do you yet stagger? Take courage, I pray you, and being emboldened through so great a confidence in our Lord's goodness, lay hold on the way of salvation without a fear, preparing your soul against temptations. Let no manner of difficulty affright you. In all adversity which you happen to endure, either at home or abroad, say gratefully: *The will of our Lord be done.*† Although you must sweat much and long, and wrestle strongly before you can overcome and supplant the old man, let not that trouble you; consider not the labour, but the fruit of the labour. Believe me, the supernal piety will be present at your labours, and will still most lovingly succour you, will comfort you when you fear, will confirm you when you stagger, will defend you being assailed, will uphold you when you slip, will comfort you in your sorrow and will, now and then, infuse the most precious ointment of internal sweetness into you.

If you persevere, the force of temptations

* Ps. cxv 15.

† Acts xxi 14.

PERSEVERANCE

must of necessity yield to the force of divine love; temptations and tribulations will no more be grievous and bitter to you, but light and sweet. Then shall you see all good, and shall find a paradise even in this life. This, I say, will come to pass if you persevere and be not of the number of them that begin well, but, being deluded by the allurements of Satan, or wearied with the troubles of temptations and labours, do afterwards lightly leave their good purposes. They, who will not be pressed with the weight of tribulation, and, therefore, in time of affliction are scandalised in our Lord and go back from him, do seem, as it were, to say: *This saying is hard, and who can bear it ?**

They build not on the firm rock, but on the unstable sand; and, therefore, their buildings do easily fall down at every puff of wind and push of the floods. And would to God they would consider their ruins, and not so give over, but make haste to renew the decayed building, no more laying their foundations upon the sands, but committing them to the firmness of the rock.

Dear Brother, if—which God forbid—your building be fallen, renew your overthrown work, and build again more happily than you did before. If it fall twice, or ten,

* John vi 61.

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or a hundred, yea, a thousand times, or more, repair it as often as it falleth. Never despair of God's mercy; for the innumerable multitude of horrible and hideous sins doth not make God so implacably angry with us as doth desperation alone; for he that despaireth of forgiveness denieth the mercy and omnipotence of God and blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost. We cannot be so ready to sin as our Lord is to pardon, if we abuse not his patience; that is, if we will truly and in time do penance. Thus ought every Christian to think.

5. But, lest prolixity make my treatise displeasing, I think it best for me to withdraw my pen, and to stop the course of my navigation begun. In the meantime, while we take down our sails, it will not be amiss briefly to touch upon what you ought to do at every day's end.

Every day, therefore, before you go to bed, seriously, but without inordinate discipline of mind, consider in what you have that day offended, and ask pardon of our most merciful God, purposing thenceforth to live better, and more carefully to avoid all vice. Then pray that he will vouchsafe to keep you that night from all pollution, both of body and mind, commending to him and to his sacred Mother and your holy angel your soul and

SELF-EXAMINATION

body to be guarded and kept. Being gone to bed, arm yourself with the sign of our Lord's Cross, and having honestly and chastely composed your body, sigh to your Beloved, thinking upon some good thing until sleep gently seize on you; which, if it be over deep and rather a burthen than a refreshing to your body, or if, likewise, by frail illusions it procure or produce anything savouring of dishonesty, be not overmuch grieved thereat, but humbly sigh before our Lord, and with humble prayer beseech him to grant you sobriety of diet and of the senses, to which sobriety of sleep and purity of body are commonly companions.

That is all, dear Brother, that I have to send you. You desired a mirror or looking-glass; see whether you have received one. If I have anyway satisfied your desire, God be praised; if not, howsoever, God be praised. I have given you what things our Lord hath given me; but, be they better or worse, I desire you sometimes to read them over. Fare you well, and pray for me.

THE END



