

THOUGHTS FOR RETREAT

BY

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CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. I. 1, 20 ; III. I, 2 ; Matt. xiii.

2. Why am I making this retreat? I know already, but I want to remind myself again—to abandon everything temporal, for a little while, my work, my cares, my troubles, the hurry of the world, in order to devote a few hours to thinking of eternity. I am leading a purely natural life, not supernatural. My days are spent in working hard, perhaps for myself, selfishly, perhaps for others, with great self-sacrifice ; and in the daily rush I have neglected, overlooked, forgotten that these things are passing, and that the really important matter is the welfare of my soul. I want to confront myself now with the question of St. Francis Xavier:

"What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his own soul?"

I must one day die and be judged. How do I now stand?

What am I to do during retreat? What exactly is a retreat? These questions I can take on faith for the present. Let me wait and see. I have just to do simply and earnestly what I am told. The retreat is God's opportunity, and He will use it. I can safely leave the next few days in His hands.

3. There are probably souls now in hell who would have been saved by one earnest retreat.

4. Our Lord's words inviting the soul to retreat are: "Come with Me into a silent place apart, and I will speak to your soul." He demands, therefore, a recollectedness of mind, and earnest self-control, a careful quiet of soul, in the absence of which His grace will not be given. God cannot deal with a distracted soul. We see then the necessity of faithfully observing the silence imposed on us during retreat. No riches, spiritual or temporal, can be obtained without labour. The heavenly treasures hidden in this retreat can only be won by the man who will hold his tongue.

5. *"I walked down the valley of silence,
Down the deep, silent valley alone,
And I heard the sound of no footsteps
Around me, save God's and my own."*

—FATHER A. J. RYAN.

6. "It is of the very highest importance that he who is to make the retreat should enter it with a large heart, and with liberality towards his Creator and Lord, offering to Him his whole will and liberty, that His Divine Majesty may dispose both of himself and of all that he possesses according to His most holy Will."—ST. IGNATIUS.

7. Do not be afraid of this retreat. Do not be afraid that God will ask too much of you. God knows how weak you are, and how cowardly, and He loves you all the same. He values your little good-will, and will not crush it. His Father's love will not ask more of you than you must give Him if you wish to be truly happy.

8. In retreat I want to get at facts, to think straight, to find out betimes now the truth that will come in upon me at death, to ascertain as nearly as may be how I stand with my God, "to have my relations with my Creator dissected Out."

—FATHER RICKABY, *Waters that go Softly*.

9. The man who wishes to make a really good retreat needs three things, generosity towards God, a firm confidence in Him, and great frankness and obedience towards his spiritual director. Generosity and confidence go hand in hand, and spring from the firm conviction that an infinitely good God, Who thought it worth while to die for us on a cross of pain, will not abandon His creatures in spite of their unfaithfulness, but will help them with His grace and strength onward towards the great goal. The third point is of no less importance, because when the devil finds that a man is in earnest about serving God and overcoming his temptations, he ceases tempting him to open sin, but tries to lead him astray by deceiving him. He must remember that to every virtue are opposed two vices, one of excess and the other of defect. Thus, religion is a virtue, and is opposed both to irreligion and to fanaticism. We need the direction of another

to keep us on the path of virtue, and to prevent us from straying, either through cowardice or excess of fervour.

10. "Act like a man, take courage and do. Fear not, and be not dismayed; for the Lord my God will be with thee, and will not leave thee, nor forsake thee, till thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord."—
1 Par. xxviii. 20.

11. *"Life is real, life is earnest,
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul"*

-LONGFELLOW.

12. "But I can't believe in a thing like Christianity, and go on living as if it were not true, or did not matter. It does matter. It does matter supremely. It is the only thing that does matter." -HENRY HARLAND.

13. We should feel ourselves on the eve of our retreat as standing on the threshold of a great spiritual kingdom. Great things are in store for us if we are but faithful now. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field. Which a man having found, hid it; and for joy thereof goeth, and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field." It may cost us a great deal to buy this hidden treasure, but it is worth while. The man in the parable, as soon as he had seen the treasure, went, and for joy thereof, sold all that he had. The only people who can really give a fair opinion about this treasure are the saints, for they are the people who have found, and purchased, and embraced it; and no saint ever said he was sorry for his bargain. Our Lord's second parable, which immediately follows (Matt. xiii. 44-46) is still more striking.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like to a merchant seeking good pearls. Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went his way, and sold all that he had, and bought it." One pearl from God's treasury is worth all our possessions, yet we are promised the endless riches of God Himself. Let us, then, " Work while it is day; for the night cometh when no man can work." We may never have the opportunity of making another retreat.

14. *Let me be strong, dear Lord; let me not dread
The road that Thou hast willed my feet to tread;
Let me not fear the shade at close of day,
Nor the white pain that lingers by the way.*

*Grant me to see my duty face to face,
And to perform it faithfully give grace;
Let me not falter, teach me to be true,
Let me do all Thou hast for me to do.*

*Let me be strong, dear Lord; teach me to smile,
And hide the pain I know not to beguile;
And when the summons comes to kiss the rod
Let me not shrink—let me be strong, O God.*

15. Most people are near-sighted. They see the little, trivial temporal things around them, and overlook the eternal background stretching away to an infinite horizon. We might say of them what Newton said of himself and of his scientific labours, that they are like children wandering along the seashore, and rejoicing when they find a prettier stone, or more beautifully shaped shell than usual, and all the while the great ocean of truth lies unexplored before them.

16. *Build thee more noble mansions, O my soul,
While the swift ages roll
Leave thy low-vaulted past,*

*Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven by a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.*

- O. W. HOLMES.

17. What am I to seek in retreat? The wisdom of the saints. And what is this wisdom of the saints? "Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away, and is easily seen by them that love her, and is found by them that seek her. For she goeth about seeking such as are worthy of her; and she sheweth herself to them cheerfully in the ways, and meeteth them with all providence. For the beginning of her is the most true desire of discipline. And the care of discipline is love; and love is the keeping of her laws; and the keeping of her laws is the firm foundation of in-corruption; and incorruption bringeth near to God. Therefore the desire of wisdom bringeth to the everlasting kingdom."—Wis. vi. 13-21.

18. I have seen, when I was a boy, a juggler in the street throw up half a dozen balls or knives or plates, and continue catching and throwing them, and to me it seemed marvellous; but the religious juggler beats all others hollow. He has to keep up Christianity and Worldliness at the same time, and catch two sets of balls at once, which needs rather fine acting. And one of those days he will make a slip with one of the balls, and his game will be ignominiously over.

19. A retreat is a sort of spiritual telescope, an instrument for bringing distant things a little nearer, and enabling us to see the stars.

20. The value of meditating on terse spiritual sayings lies in their pointed power of stirring the mind to reflection. Cursory reading is like the restless travelling of the eye over a series of pictures; no one impression abides; each is quickly effaced by that which succeeds it.

21. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."—1 Kings iv. 10.

22. Use this retreat. "Four things there are which come not back to man or woman: The sped arrow, the spoken word, the past life, and the neglected opportunity."

23. "I have studied many queer philosophies, but I have found none that would work without God concealed somewhere."—CLERK MAXWELL.

CHAPTER II.

THE END OF MAN.

1. Spiritual Reading: Imitation of Christ, Bk. III. 9, 47; Matt. vi. and vii.

2. It is but useless labour to try to extinguish the conviction in man's heart that God exists, and that we are made for Him. Hold the burning torch downwards if you will, its flame still leaps towards heaven.

3. God will put up with a great many things in a human heart, but there is one thing that He will not put up with—a second place. He who offers God a second place offers Him no place.

4. "What art thou then, O human life? Thou art only a road, an unequal road; long for some, short for others; joyous for some, sad for others; but for all without return—we but march through it to reach the country beyond."—ST. COLUMBANUS.

5. Once the meaning of life is restricted to the blind, hard necessity of bearing our share in the struggle for earthly existence, life itself becomes for all of us a source of bitterness and grievous wrong. No success in material life, however brilliant, can bring the human heart that abiding satisfaction for which it cherishes so natural and invincible a longing. Given even the fullest measure of worldly success, what more can it bring a man than those fleeting, empty enjoyments, of which our greatest poets spoke such bitter words: "I seemed to myself," says Goethe, "like a poisoned rat, which in its terror runs from one hole to another, greedily sipping every fluid, devouring anything it comes across, yet unable to allay for a moment the gnawing agony within." No single human soul has ever yet reached happiness by an insatiate and reckless pursuit of earthly amusement.

6: "I do not look backwards nor forwards; I look upwards."

7. Be sure that you cannot trust too much in God, and cannot obtain less than you hope from Him.

8. There is an old saying, that "The love of God without the deeds of God is joy and comfort for the devil." Man may become pious in an unhealthy fashion; he may often and willingly go to the church, may have sweetness in his devotion, may go respectfully to the Sacraments, may have his room stocked with pious pictures, may burn with zeal when told of the misdeeds of his neighbour. This would, of course, be all right, if loving God were accompanied by the deeds of God. But with many of these devout people the way of living differs but little from that of worldly people; you find that they are eating and drinking well, sleeping long, not denying themselves, imagining a good deal, being sensitive to the slightest unpleasant occurrence, being severe with their fellows, judging rashly of others. Such piety is not much objected to by the devil. For whilst God is not pleased with a devotion that evaporates in sentiment, the mushrooms of spiritual pride and self-conceitedness grow luxuriantly, and at the same time, because of such people, religion is looked down upon with contempt by the people of the world, as if it were all sham and hypocrisy. No; let us not be deceived. The service of God is the touchstone of genuine piety. "The end of the spiritual exercise," says Father Rickaby, "is such amount and quality of self-denial as shall bring you to do the work given you by obedience, or by Providence, wholly, steadily, intelligently, courageously, cheerfully. We make retreats, either to find out our vocation, or to enable us better to do the work of our vocation. And a retreat that does not result in better individual work and better mutual co-operation, is a failure."

9. The late Father Bernard Vaughan once suggested the following New Year resolution for England, which a retreatant might do well to think over: "A resolution to realise that the very least religion you can do with to police your soul, is the recognition of a personal God, and an immortal soul. Once you realise that, you must say with the publican, throughout the year, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner,' there's hope for you. And that will see you right through."

10. If we can once print deeply on our souls this thought of our creation by God, then the whole Catholic theology lies as an open book before us. God alone is from eternity to eternity. Infinite years before I came into existence, God was, perfectly happy, infinitely glorious, wise and strong. He decided in His wisdom to create; and straightway the exterior world of creatures came into being. Before, there were no angels, no men, no sun or stars or heaven; there was only God. Now, outside of God, was a new and wonderful creation. But this new world was not independent of God. It was not sufficient that He once created it, He had also to support it, else it had straightway fallen back into its original nothing. God's creation, then, had (and has now) to be conserved by God; and this constant conservation is a perpetual act of creation. It is true to say that God is creating the world each and every moment of its existence.

In this great work of God's hands, in the universe of stars and living things and angels, I have my lowly place. God created, and is creating me now. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Why, then, should I be afraid of God? I cannot take one step without Him, I cannot even exist without Him, and He gives me all that I have, all that I need to support my life. All these things are gifts to me from God. Nay, more, just as God is every moment creating me, so He is every moment creating the gifts He gives me, and is creating them for me. "Be not solicitous, therefore," Our Lord tells us, "saying, What shall we eat? or, what shall we drink? or, wherewith shall we be clothed? . . . For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." The words take on a newer and a deeper meaning as we penetrate more and more into the relations between God and ourselves, and lend a fresh light to the text which follows: "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God, and His justice: and all these things will be added unto you."

11. If one looks at it carefully, on this earth, where God seems so much forgotten, it is yet for Him, after all, that the truest and most faithful love is found.

12. The air says to the eagle: "Trust me. Spread out your broad wings. I'll bear you up towards the sun. Only trust me, and take possession of your native element. The broad reaches of heaven and the vastness of the sky are all for you." We are the eagles of God. Shall we have less confidence? Mount, for God invites you. Mount!

13. It is the guilty who deserve the greatest compassion. The innocent, though oppressed by fate and man, have two sure refuges—God and their conscience. The sole refuge of the guilty is our pity.

14. "The older I grow—and I now stand on the brink of eternity—the more comes back to me the sentence in the catechism, which I learnt when a child at my mother's knee, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes: 'What is the great end of man? 'To glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever.' "-CARLYLE.

15. Some people's religion is just like a wooden leg. There is neither warmth nor life in it; and although it helps

them to hobble along, it never becomes a part of them, but has to be strapped on afresh every morning.

16. Religion ought to have the effect of making us fear the eye of God more than the tongues of men.

17. A dog will say no prayers, and yet it may be a very good dog. Its master, being a man and more than a brute, is expected to do better. When a dog awakes in the morning it shakes itself, and then runs hither and thither throughout the day, led on by its animal instincts. Yet, in so doing, it is really obeying the law assigned to its nature, though utterly unconscious of the Lawgiver. Having no reason, it obeys unwittingly and of necessity. But if a man exhibits no greater consciousness of his Maker and Master than a dog, his oblivion of God is a violation of the laws imposed upon his intellectual, rational nature. And if he lives like a dog, ought he not to be afraid that he might die like a dog?

18. Trust in God's providence and resignation must never be made to serve as an excuse for not doing our duty. One day a tired traveller on horseback asked the hospitality for the night of an Arab sheik, who granted it freely. As they were sitting in the tent enjoying their meal, the sheik said to the stranger: "What have you done with your horse?" "I have turned him loose and committed him to Allah," was the reply. "Go and tether him to a post, and then commit him to Allah," said the Sheik.

19. "God will be loved as God; that is to say, with holy fear, without reserve, in preference to all creatures, and with an undivided love. He will not accept a divided heart: for unless the creature be loved in and for Him, it is like offering Him what the creature has left."

—B. BERNARD OF CORLEONE.

20. "A poor beast that is going homeward goeth cheerfully."

21. "No proof of the existence of God appeals more to one than the conduct of Providence over one's past life, and this appeal grows stronger with the advance in years. . . . As one lives, one comes to see better that there is absolutely no reason why one should go on living, except in view of the praise, reverence and service of God: or, to put it philosophically, life is not worth living, except in so far as it contains an element of the divine."

—FATHER RICKABY, *Waters that go Softly*.

CHAPTER III.

USE OF CREATURES.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. III. 44, 31 ; Ecclus. viii. ; Luke xii.

2. See how men throw overboard the cargo of a ship when it becomes a question of saving their lives. Reason and self-love tell them that the less precious must go first. They do not begin with throwing their gold away; but even this they would part with if it threatened to drag them to the bottom of the sea. This is simply common sense, the wisdom of which no one has ever doubted. It is to this common sense and our self-interest that Our Lord appeals when He says: "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his own soul?"

3. Nothing touches the soul without leaving its impression; and thus, little by little, we are fashioned into the image of all that we have seen and heard, known and meditated. And if we learn to live in thought with all that is fairest and purest and best, the love of it all will in the end become our very life. It is the thought that we habitually think and love to dwell on that frames itself into our life.

4. One housewife once asked another why she allowed her husband and children to be so careless and untidy in their homes. The latter had understood the principle of the Use of Creatures, and silenced her inquisitive neighbour with the answer: "The marks of little muddy feet on the door can be more easily removed than the stains on the soul, if the little feet wander away and stray into sin. The prints of the little fingers on the window-pane cannot shut out the sunshine half so much as the shadow that darkens the mother's heart over one who is lost to herself as well as to God. And if my Joe finds home a refuge from care, and his greatest comfort within its four walls, he can pile his boots in the rocking-chair, and throw his coat on the door any day in the week, and if I can stand it, and he enjoys it, I can't see that it is anybody's affair."

5. There is a story of a certain prince who was notorious for his cruel disposition. He used to keep a tame bear in his gardens. One day he ordered his servants to set a dish of boiling honey before the brute. This joke was a barbarous one; for the poor beast's tongue and throat were burnt every time it tried to lick its favourite dainty. Yet, undeterred by its sufferings, it went on greedily swallowing down the sweet boiling liquid amid fierce howls of pain, until in the end

the inner organs were burnt so much that death came as a release from its pitiful, writhing agony.

Those who seek joy in the service of the world are endowed with the gift of reason, but they are not more rational than this poor brute itself. In fact, I have grave doubts as to the truth of the story, because even irrational beasts are not quite so stupid as that. It is only the rational man who can be so irrational as to take a sweet pleasure in that which he knows to be poison, heedless of the consequences.

6. "Man was created to praise, reverence and serve God, Our Lord, and thereby to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth were created for man's sake, to assist him in obtaining the end for which he was created. Whence it follows that man must use them only in so far as they help him to attain his end, and must withdraw himself from them, in as much as they hinder him. It is, therefore, necessary that we make ourselves indifferent towards all created things, in so far as it is permitted to the liberty of our free will to do so, and is not forbidden; so much so, that for our part, we do not wish for health rather than sickness, for riches rather than poverty, for honour rather than disgrace, for a long life rather than a short one, and so, in all other things, desiring and choosing solely those things which are more conducive to the end for which we were created."—ST. IGNATIUS.

7. "Thou gloriest in thy liberty, and thinkest that no man oppresses thee, O, free and independent franchiser ! But does not this stupid bottle of liquor oppress thee? No son of Adam can bid thee come or go, but this absurd whiskey bottle can and does. Thou art the thrall and slave, not of the Sultan of Timbuctoo, or any other royal master, but of thy own brutal appetites, and this accursed dish of liquor. And thou oratest of thy `liberty,' thou entire blockhead !"—CARLYLE, to a British drunkard.

8. "Clothe yourself with the love of God, and love creatures only for God's sake. Love them much, but have little to do with them, unless it be to labour for their souls."—ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA.

9. "Just as a little child trusts itself to its nurse, and if she puts it on her right arm is content, or on her left arm, does not trouble itself, as long as it is cared for and has its food, so let us say, ' God is my Father.' Whether He places me on His right side that is to say, gives me ease and comfort, or on His left side, which typifies the cross, it does not matter. He will sustain and fortify me; in Him is my trust."—ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

10. *To see the world in a grain of sand
And Heaven in a wild flower.
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

CHAPTER IV.

SIN.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. I. 24 ; Matt. xxiii. ; Ps. 1. and cxxix. ; Eccus. xxi.

2. If you live forgetful of your sins, God will remember them; but if you remember them, He, on His side, will forget them.

3. We sin, Christ pays. I close my eyes and look backwards two thousand years, to a bleeding figure bound to a stone pillar in a courtyard. Around Him stand a vast crowd of men and women and children, all, or nearly all, armed with scourges. All the different passions and vices and evil nature of man are there personified. Some are striking in malicious anger, as if to avenge a personal wrong, some with careless, laughing faces, hurling wanton blows, heedless of what they are doing so long as it gives them temporary pleasure. Others there are with faces full of shame, but no pity, their thongs but half lifted, as if in hesitation, knowing well the cruel pain they are about to inflict, but too entranced by the gratification of the moment to stay their hand. In the distance, the crowd are struggling and forcing their way to the front, eager to be among those who are satiating themselves with their brutal pleasure. Here and there are a few figures, who, in very shame, endeavour to turn away from the awful scene in which they, too, have participated; but only to be laughed and jeered at by the more hardy criminals, and in time they are forced back and repeat their cruel blows. Youths and children are led on by their elders to do that which they hardly realise to be either right or wrong, but are prompted by the example of those before them. I stand amongst that crowd, my blood-stained scourge uplifted. The weary eyes of the Sufferer open, and He looks down into the depths of my soul. "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends!"

"And the Lord looked at Peter; and he, going out, wept bitterly." O Lord, forgive me, for I do not understand! May my tears never cease to flow!

4. When you return to your daily work after this meditation on sin, bring one resolution with you—to beware always of occasions of sin to which you were at one time or another a habitual slave. It is as in the case of a dam that holds the water in a reservoir, or of a dyke that protects the low lands against the inundations of a huge river. If such a rampart has been in one place broken, whatever care has been taken to make the repaired part as strong as possible, the probability is, that, if it give way again, it will be in that place.

5. Years of repentance are necessary in order to blot out a sin in the eyes of men, but one act of true contrition suffices with God.

6. In the story of St. Ignatius' conversion little is told us of his former sins. In the case of St. Francis Xavier, we know nothing of his lapses in earlier life. The things that move a man most are never written, just because they move him too much to bear expression. So I cannot write what I feel when I make the Meditation on Personal Sins. All the words that come to me seem but an artificiality, a mockery of the truth. I seem steeped in sin, as Jesus Christ must have felt Himself in Gethsemane and on the cross. The places which my presence has infected, the persons whom my dirty talk and my bad example set on the way of damnation, stand before my mind. May God in His great mercy have pity on us! My God, I cannot undo the evil now! Thou must repair it for me! And as I stand and contemplate the filth that I have played in, the unclean thoughts which were my pleasure and my food and drink; as I feel the old temptations coming back again, dragging at me; as I look around me at God's pure, blue sky, and breathe His air; as I see in spirit the pure, young virgins who will one day follow the Lamb in His glory, singing the song that only virgin lips can sing, there rings in my ears the mocking question: "What hast thou done for Christ?" The blood-drops patter slowly downward from the silent cross. "He was loaded with my iniquities; He hath borne my sins."

7. The world is evil, so worldlings themselves are most ready to assure us at every turn, yet how many there are who fail to see that they bear that world with all its dangers about with them in their own hearts.

8. Men would never offend God if they knew how ready He is to forgive them. It is only by forgetting God's infinite goodness that sin becomes possible at all.

9. "Out of the depths I cried to Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice." There are three great depths which no human line can sound: the depth of our sinfulness, the depth of our unworthiness, the depth of our nothingness.

10. "I sat me on a settle in the street, and fell into a very deep pause about the most fearful state my sin had brought me to; and, after long musing, I lifted my head, but methought I saw as if the sun that shineth in the heavens did begrudge to give me light, and as if the very stones in the street and tiles upon the houses did bend themselves against me; methought that they did all combine to banish me out of the world. I was abhorred of them, and unfit to dwell amongst them, or be partaker of their benefits, because I had sinned against the Saviour." —BUNYAN, *Grace Abounding*.

11. *"But what indignity were counted meet
To match my vileness, I, who but presume
In cumb'ring thus Creation's bosom fair?
Stay, I will crouch repentant at the feet
Of traitor Judas. But I and no room
For to! my humble Saviour kneeleth there!"*

-ST. FRANCIS BORGIA.

12. *Thou who hast searched me through and through
And marked the crooked ways I went.
Look on me, Lord, and make me too
Thy penitent.*

13. We never sinned behind God's back, but all our offences were flagrant insults of the Divine Majesty in sight of His creatures, the angels and saints.

14. Sin is a horror which we cannot understand; we can only believe and pray.

15. Once upon a time God had a field, and He ploughed and harrowed and prepared it with the utmost care, and made of it a good seed-bed. And He sowed in it wheat of the best, which sprang up, and grew in splendid promise. The year passed, and the wheat flourished till the harvest came; and it stood in all its yellow fulness, waiting for the sickle. Then an enemy came and set it on fire. That enemy was Sin.

16. Late one evening a priest in a certain German city was called to the bedside of a dying man. When he came into the room he found a woman sitting by the bed, not the man's wife, for from his wife he had been separated some time before. The priest told the man that he must send the woman out of the house immediately, and sever all connection with her, otherwise he could not give him absolution, nor Viaticum, nor Extreme Unction, and after death he could not give him Christian burial, but must treat him as excommunicate and an outcast from God. When the woman heard this, she caught hold of the man's hand, and, turning to the priest, said: "Ay, and if we have to go together into hell, we will never separate." The priest had to go away without achieving anything. Some time afterwards, the woman slipped in coming down stairs, rolled to the bottom, and never stirred again. She had broken her neck. When did she repent?

CHAPTER V.

HELL.

r. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. I. 21 and 22 ; Matt. xxiv. ; Wisdom v.

2. " Many a man buys hell with so much pain, that he might have heaven with less than the half."—B. THOMAS MORE.

3. "He who abandons prayer casts himself into hell."—ST. TERESA.

4. We want to make this meditation on hell thoroughly grip and startle us, not into trembling fear, but into earnest resolution. We want to get close to hell in thought, to see and hear and touch and taste and smell the agonies of the damned. Do not be afraid of exaggerating the picture. The number of lost angels alone must be simply uncountable, and to them are added how many human souls. All that is worst in man and devil, all the filthy evil that ever entered our minds, or ever will enter them (e.g., in temptation, etc.) is found in hell, but magnified a thousandfold. We know what rottenness is, but no effort of our imagination can picture for us the horror of the bodies that will be restored to the damned. A kingdom of disorder! There are no friends in hell, no friendly encouragement; nothing but cursing and blaspheming and howls of pain. Everything that is good and pure and holy, God, Jesus Christ, Our Blessed Lady, the saints, a mother's love, a nun's devotion, a priest's zeal, patriotism, chastity, justice, charity, in short, everything that appeals to us as noble, is cursed and blasphemed in hell, because the damned are utterly turned away from God, Who is the only Source of all Good. The lost souls are a torment to themselves and to those around them.

5. "Oh! If the others can stand it, I suppose I can also," said a mocker at a mission once to a missionary. Oh, yes! You will stand it, but how? "Their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished."

6. "There are venial sins and mortal sins; and of mortal sins there are sins of frailty of the flesh and sins of malice of the spirit. There is almost as much difference between the second two as between the first two. For a mortal sin of frailty a man loses the grace of God, and goes to hell for ever, if he dies under that privation: but as a rule they who are sentenced to hell fire incur the sentence because they have passed from frailty to malice. Christ on earth was accounted the friend of sinners, yet observe His behaviour to the Pharisees and to Herod."—FATHER RICKABY. *Waters that go Softly.*

7. Read Luke xvi. 19-31.

8. Hell is an unpleasant fact. Is it on that account to be discredited and ignored. All our earthly experience is replete with unpleasant facts. The man in a responsible position, who will never look an unpleasant fact in the face, is commonly accounted a fool."—FATHER RICKABY, *Waters that go Softly.*

9. " *Time's value he who loses understands.*

Fierce is the wish of men tonight in Hell

That they once more might grasp with nervous hands

The mighty instrument and use it well."

10. "And a certain ruler asked Him, saying: "Good master, what shall I do to possess eternal life? "It is the question that many of us put to Our Lord, but we do not like His answer."Keep the commandments; and if thou wilt be perfect,

go, sell what thou hast, and come, follow Me." Many of us, like the rich young man, go away sorrowing. "And Jesus, seeing him become sorrowful, said: How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a rich man to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." As Father Rickaby remarks, when Our Lord used these words, He meant camel (not rope), He meant needle (not postern-gate); "And they that heard this said," in consternation, "who then shall be saved?" Our Lord gave them no answer, only a warning to humility and fervent prayer. His words deserve to be well weighed and pondered. "With men this (salvation with riches) is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. I. 23 ; Job xiv. r Cor. xv.
2. Defer not charities till death; for certainly, if a man weighs it rightly, he that doth so is rather liberal of another man's than of his own."—FRANCIS BACON.
3. One day the old, thoughtlessly repeated commonplace: "We must all die," will transform itself into the acute consciousness: " I must die—now."
4. An old man sitting in the parlour of a wayside inn was once asked jokingly, "What is life?" "Life," he answered, "is like this taproom; men come in, glance round, and go out." "God grant that they go out, not into exterior darkness, but into everlasting light."
5. Neither Providence nor life deceive us; but we often deceive ourselves to the designs of the one, and as to the goal of the other.
6. It is the man who tries to make the best of both worlds who makes nothing of either.
7. "Will you sell me that horse?" one farmer once asked another, and received the truly Catholic answer: "My dear man I will sell you anything I have got, except my soul."
8. Towards one or the other of the two eternities all of us are hastening with inconceivable speed; but how many of us are too busy to inquire which of the two it is.
9. When we die we shall have to leave all our goods and belongings behind; there will be no pockets in our shroud.
10. "To accept death with resignation," says St. Alphonsus Liguori, a Doctor of the Church, "outweighs all other penance."
11. Be not like the foolish drunkard, who, staggering home one night, saw his candle lit for him. "Two candles," said he, for his drunkenness made him see double. "I will blow out one," and as he blew it out, in a moment he was in the dark. Many a man sees double through the reckless drunkenness of sin. He has one life which he wastes, and seems to expect another in which to turn to God. So, like a fool, he blows out the only candle he has, and in the outer darkness he will have to lie down for ever.
12. A happy death is not the same as a painless death. The happiest death ever died was that whereby, under the torment of the cross, Our Saviour overcame sin and death and hell. St. Lawrence died a happy death on the gridiron, and Blessed Thomas More by the headsman's axe. To die as softly as one drops off asleep, and awakening to find an angry Judge and an everlasting fire, is not a happy death.
13. A man's life may be compared to the course of a rifle bullet flying; the all-important thing for that bullet is that it shall hit the mark. The mark of human life is a happy death, which means a happy eternity. At baptism the bullet of life was aimed well and true to the mark. But, after a certain time of flight, a power developed, which in a leaden bullet never appears; that power is free will, and by use of free will human life can deviate from the right course on which it was started. But after deviation it may also, with God's help, reset itself again for the mark, or it may depart from God and deviate further still. Anyhow, the bullet is always flying, and is sure to strike somewhere: the instant of its striking is the instant of death. The bullet cannot be fired a second time; it hits or misses once and for ever.
14. "Life is not unlike a game of whist. Some are playing for love, and their trumps are hearts. Some are playing for riches, and for these diamonds are trumps. Some are playing for power and dominion, and they use clubs as trumps. But there is a fourth hand, and this is the most important in the game. This hand is taken by the angel of death, and for him spades are trumps. Shall you be able to say when spades are turned up on the table, " O death, where is thy

victory?" —The late FATHER BERNARD VAUGHAN.

15. The object of this meditation of death is not to make us afraid. Why should we be afraid of death? The day of our death will be the happiest day of our lives, happier than the day of our First Communion, of our marriage, of the coming of the first baby. Death will be for us the beginning of our true life. We have sufficient knowledge of God's love to be humbly confident. Fathers do not damn their children. "For in this we differ from unbelievers: they do right to fear death, having no hope of resurrection: but thou that art on thy way to a better life, and hast learnt the higher lesson of the hope that is fixed there, what excuse shalt thou have for believing in the resurrection, and still dreading death equally with them that have no faith in the resurrection?" (St. John Chrysostom). No! Not fear, but earnestness, use of time, and an ardent zeal for souls.

CHAPTER VII.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. I. 19 ; Bk. III. 11 ; Bk. IV. 17, 7 ; I John iv. ; Ps. ix.

2. An old writer, speaking of men as stewards of God, urges upon them as wise traders and servants to take good care of four houses which are under their charge:

(1) Their warehouse, or heart and memory, wherein they should store up precious things, holy affections, grateful remembrances, heavenly aspirations, kind and unselfish desires, etc. Without a good stock in the warehouse there can be no good trade.

(2) Their workhouse, or their actions, wherein they retail to others for God's glory the grace entrusted to them ; teaching the ignorant, comforting the poor, visiting the sick, speaking kind words and doing kind deeds. We must be active, or we cannot be acceptable servants.

(3) Their clock-house, meaning their speech, which must always be like a well-timed bell, speaking the truth accurately; and, meaning also their observance of time, redeeming it by doing promptly the duties of every hour. We must use time well, or our spiritual gains will be small.

(4) Their counting-house, or their conscience, which is to be scrupulously watched, and no false reckonings allowed, lest we deceive our own souls. The Master has ordered His recording angels to keep an exact account of our doings; we must take care that our books agree. We must often examine our conscience and prepare a balance sheet, to know how much we have in hand, and what deficit is to be made up by works of penance.

3. "*Adore, give thanks, beg light, the day review,
Contrite forgiveness crave, propose anew.*"

4 "*Each man walks with his head in a cloud of poisonous flies.
We cannot be kind to each other here for an hour ;
We whisper, and hint, and chuckle, and grin at a brother's shame.
We men are a little breed.*"

—TENNYSON.

5. We must carefully distinguish the examination of conscience that we make during retreat from the examination of conscience that we will make every day in after life (for this must be one of the principal resolutions of our retreat—never to let a day pass in future life without an earnest examination of conscience and preparation for death). The examination of conscience made in retreat is a careful study of our past lives, in order to discover, review and sum up all the sins we have ever committed, that we may clear our souls completely by a general confession, (A general confession of one's whole past life is not always advisable. On this point the director should be consulted.) and return to our daily duties with the deep peace of heart that comes from a good conscience. Do not be afraid of your sins. If you are sinful, God is a thousand times more merciful. Remember the Prodigal Son. And let no temptations of Satan ever make you wish to go back behind this general confession (even in a future retreat), and disturb your peace of soul. Say to yourself with King David: "Now I begin!"

6. What am I to do afterwards, if, in my daily examination of conscience, I find no serious sins to accuse myself of ? I answer, first, that this is just as it should be. Every man of good will can live out his whole life without falling into

grievous sin, and, thanks be to God, many do so. Kneel down and thank God from the depths of your heart for having preserved you this day from sin: and look back over the past. There have been other days in your life not quite so flawless; perhaps the only reason why you did not sin today is, that God preserved you from the temptation. Learn, then, gratitude and humility, and joy in God's light service. Secondly, have another look at the day. Are you quite so sure that it is altogether free from sin. You were not walking all day with God; and Our Lord tells us: "He that is not with Me is against Me." You mean, in saying that the day has been good, that there have been no seriously sinful actions. Have there been no sinful words or thoughts? Lying? Uncharitable conversation, bitter criticism of your neighbour (which, even if true, may be a venial sin), boastfulness, depreciation of others, etc.? And thoughts—impurity, impatience, anger, petty vanity, selfishness, laziness, revenge, waste of time? No, my friend, your day has been a good one, thanks be to God, but it is not sinless. You only think so because you do not know yourself. You have fulfilled the commandments in graver matters; but have you been perfectly loyal to your crucified Master? Can you understand now a little better the meaning of the text in the Psalms: "I looked for one that would grieve together with Me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort Me, and I found him not? "Have you done nothing today of which you will be ashamed when you stand face to face with Christ your Judge ?

7. Not too much mere examination, now or afterwards; the most important thing is the act of contrition. And it bears constant repetition.

CHAPTER VIII.

PRAYER.

1. "He, who, when he has once knocked, is angry because he is not forthwith heard, is not a humble petitioner, but an imperious exacter. However long He may cause thee to wait, do thou patiently abide the Lord's pleasure."—ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS.

2. Don't rush your prayers. Don't shorten or omit them on the pretext that duty calls you to some other task. The highest of all duties commands you to make ample provision for this daily communion with God. There will always be distractions. There is no economy of time when there is a question of useless conversation, amusements or recreation. Hour after hour is spent with our families, friends and neighbours, but the time spent with God is exceedingly brief. In the morning we are hurried. In the evening we are fatigued. The only thing that can keep us close to God, that can keep alive the fear of sin, the one thing that can procure for us the supernatural light, whereby we discern the false from the true in spiritual matters, is hurried, slurred over, and gone through mechanically. Some morning ("When we least expect it," are Our Lord's words), the sun rises on our last day of life. The time is short, and we make a hurried preparation. We pray then as we never prayed before. We pour out our souls in regret for the lost days and hours. We would give a million worlds for another week, another year, in which to make up for lost time. Lost time! The time that has no importance in our eyes while we are well and strong, the time that is spent in wordliness, in sin, in vain amusements, in the things that do not count, in everything but the one thing useful and profitable—prayer. The world blinds us, the flesh draws us away from God; the devil always furnishes us with a pretext, and we go along through life, giving no thought to the wasted hours, and never thinking of economising time until there is a question of spending it in the things for which time was made—the love and service of God, which have their root in frequent and fervent daily prayer.

3. What am I to do after each lecture of the retreat? The answer is very simple—think it over and pray about it. The object of our retreat is to get our minds full of these great spiritual truths, to weigh our lives in the scales of the sanctuary. For this two persons' work is necessary—our work and God's work. God must touch our souls with His grace, if these lofty truths are to enter our little hearts; and we must beg and implore this grace. On the other hand, our work is no less important, our honest efforts to apply these thoughts to ourselves, and to see how far our lives correspond with them. There is a story told of a sailor who came to make a retreat. At the end of the meditation time the priest came to him, and found him pacing up and down his room, saying over and over again to himself, " D --n it, it's true ! D--n it, it's true! "He made a good meditation ! He had at least thought it over. There is another story told of a famous General of the Society of Jesus. A visiting priest came one morning into the little oratory where he was making his morning meditation, and found that for a whole hour he did nothing but look at his crucifix, and repeat

again and again, " My Jesus, mercy." His mind was so full of the great spiritual truths that he needed no longer to think them over; he only needed to pray about them. For us probably a mixture of the two methods is the best. Think it over as long as you get fruit from the reflection, and as soon as you begin to be distracted and inattentive, or when you feel impelled to do so, turn to God, and beg from Him light to understand, and grace and strength to fulfil His Will. Tell Him you are sorry for the past, thank Him for His goodness, offer Him for the future a humbler heart and a more generous service.

4. *"Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of ; wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me, night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those that call them friend ?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."*
—TENNYSON, Mort d'Arthur.

5. "Father, I cannot pray." A priest hears this complaint so often that he is sometimes inclined to think that the whole world is suffering from this complaint. And yet it is so completely false. What, after all, is the object of prayer? Not visions, nor ecstasies, nor devout feelings, nor a certain feeling of rest and peace, nor freedom from distractions, all these things are good, but they are by no means essential to true prayer. They are a free gift from God, and, moreover, very seldom given, except for short periods, even to God's most faithful friends. The object of prayer is to gain supernatural strength to live better. But you can gain this strength without feeling any devotion in prayer at all; it is a free gift of God. As long as your distinctions distress you, all is well; the only failure possible in prayer is ceasing to try. Get up from a distracted prayer humbled and with a resolution to make up for your failure by doing your next duty with your whole heart and soul, and God will give you His grace. "He exalteth the humble," sang Our Blessed Lady in the Magnificat. Gain humility from your bad prayer, and you have learned the saints' secret of profiting by their faults. Irritation only springs from your own pride in wanting to do well. If God is satisfied with your prayer (and He is, if you keep on trying), that suffices. "And besides, though far from depreciating those beautiful thoughts which bring us nearer to God, I have long been of opinion that we must be careful not to overestimate their worth. The highest inspirations are of no value without good works."—The Little Flower.

6. "I would guarantee the salvation of any soul that would make a quarter of an hour's meditation every day."—
VEN. CARDINAL BELLARMINE, S. J.

CHAPTER IX.

HEAVEN.

1. Spiritual Reading : Imitation of Christ, Bk. II. 7, 8 ; Bk. III. 21, 22, 5, 47, 48 ; I Cor. xv. ; Apoc. xiv. and xxi. Ps. 44.

2. *"What is Heaven?" I asked a little child.
"All joy," and in her innocence she smiled.
I asked the aged, with sad care oppressed,
"All suffering o'er, oh ! Heaven at last is rest."*

*I asked the artist, who adored his art,
"Heaven is all beauty," spoke his raptured heart.
I asked the poet with his soul afire,
"Tis glory, glory," and he struck his lyre.*

*I asked the Christian, waiting his release,
A halo round him, low he answered,*

*"Peace." So may all look with hopeful eyes above.
'Tis beauty, glory, joy, rest, peace and love.*

3. " We shall say much, and yet shall want words; but the sum of our words is, He is All."—Ecclus. xliii. 29.

4. How can one describe to a man who has been born blind what sight is? It is impossible. And why? Because, in order to explain to him what vision is, he must already know something to which vision is similar. Otherwise, all my comparisons and analogies are meaningless to him. If he asks me what "red " is, and I tell him that it is a "colour," his knowledge is not increased, because he can form absolutely no idea what "colour" is, and all that I can tell him about "colour" is, that it is " something that you see." And, because he does not know what sight is, and of what a priceless gift he is deprived, he has no great longing for the use of his eyes. He does not know, in fact, that they are to be used! Is there no analogy between a man that has never seen the light of day and ourselves, in this question of heaven? Theologians tell us that our greatest joy in heaven will be the vision of God face to face. Most of us can form no idea of what this means; it is only after years of theological study that we become faintly conscious of the unmeasured and unmeasurable happiness contained in the sight and the knowledge and possession of the divine beauty. And that is the agony of the priest; on the one side he sees the first dim rays of the endless happiness in store for men, and on the other he sees men, ignorant of their unimagined glorious destiny, careless of the words of truth and of the promptings of their conscience, selling their priceless birthright for the salt and bitter cup of sin that feeds them not, but leaves them with a greater hunger and craving for happiness and peace. O mankind, have pity on your immortal souls! Let me tell you of a happiness surpassing your wildest dreams, " good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and flowing over, which will be poured into your bosom! Let me tell you of a kingdom of light, peace, love, glory, power, where every wish is gratified, where " the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." Let me promise you, in the Name of the everlasting God, your place among the many mansions of your Father's home, where the light things of your earthly trial will merit an eternal crown, and where God Himself will serve you; and then answer me, was not David right when he cried: `My soul hath thirsted after the strong, living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God'?

5. There is a story told of a boy who was born blind, whose sight was given to him by a skilful surgical operation. When the bandages were removed after the operation, and the eyes that had never seen the light were opened, the boy shrieked aloud, clasped his hands over his eyes, and was afraid to move. He thought that everything that he saw was touching his eyes; the only sense he knew by which he could come into connection with external objects was the sense of touch! How like ourselves when we begin to use our spiritual eyes! We imagine we see a narrow, contracted world, all centred round, and touching ourselves, and we fail to realise the extent, the magnitude, the vastness of God's goodness and His promised reward.

6. " *O Soul, what then desirest thou? "*
Lord, I would see Thee who didst choose me."
"What fears can yet assail thee now?"
All that I fear is but to lose Thee.
Love's whole possession I entreat.
Lord, make my soul Thine own abode;
And I will build a nest so sweet,
It will not be too poor for God."

—ST. TERESA.

7. If I go to the theatre I go to see the play. It might add greatly to my comfort and pleasure to be allowed in without paying, to have the best seat in the house, to be given a free programme as I arrived; but all these would be merely accidentals. The real object of my desire is the play; and if no play were performed, neither the most beautiful cushioned armchair, nor the most beautifully printed programme could make up to me for the disappointment. This is an illustration for us of the happiness of heaven. All that we hear in sermons of the wonderful beauty of the risen body, of the perfect gratification of all the senses, of the freedom from pain, power of penetrating through matter; of

the celestial happiness of the companionship of the angels and saints; these are all immeasurable and perhaps inexhaustible sources of happiness, but they are not Heaven. Heaven is the seeing face to face, the enjoying, the possession of Him Whom our hearts love. We will hold Him, and will not let Him go. It is indeed true that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what things God hath prepared for those that love Him."
