

Selections

FROM
MADAME GUYON'S
DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS

LOWERY

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Selections from the Devotional Writings of Madame de la Mothe- Guyon

COMPILED BY
D. D. LOWERY



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Dedicatory

TO MY DAUGHTER GRACE, WHOSE CHRISTIAN LIFE
AND FAITH ARE A COMFORT TO ME, EARNESTLY
DESIRING FOR HER THE HIGHEST AND BEST
IN THE REALM OF GRACE, AND THE
POSSESSION OF SOME SUCH EXCELLEN-
CIES OF LIFE AND THOUGHT AS
SO EMINENTLY DISTINGUISHED
THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF THE AUTHOR OF
THESE SELECTIONS
MADAME DE LA MOTHE-GUYON

Preface

THESE selections from the writings of Madame Guyon are necessarily limited to such of her works as were accessible to me. Among them, happily, are those most important to fully meet the purpose of this small volume; namely, to present, in concise form, her teaching on some of the practical and doctrinal phases of Christianity. At the same time the aim throughout this entire work has been to furnish the reader with wholesome food for meditation during the "Quiet Hour," and with fuel to rekindle the dying embers on the altar of devotion. How well I have succeeded in the selection and compilation and arrangement of the matter, with the above thought in view, I must let the reader determine.

The writings of Madame Guyon consist of forty volumes, only a few of which are now in print. From these few, together with several others of her

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books out of print which, after long search, I succeeded in securing through the agency of second-hand book-stores, I have made the selections contained in this volume. The foot-notes in the following pages give simply the titles of the works from which the selections are taken, omitting the author's name, since all the volumes referred to are the writings of Madame Guyon. The stanzas placed at the beginning of the parts and divisions are also taken from her poems.

The outline of this volume, the division into parts and sections, and the grouping, under different heads, of the matter selected, are entirely my own, excepting in Part II., where the author's general plan is followed, while I am wholly responsible for the topical division and statement in the form there given.

The title of this book may not convey to some minds the real idea and purpose of its contents. The term, "devotional," as used here, is not to be under-

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stood as restricted in its application to forms and expressions of public and private worship, but, as employed here, to literature of a highly inspirational and deeply spiritual character. This is preëminently true of all Madame Guyon's writings.

The task, which was an exceedingly pleasant one, was nevertheless attended with considerable difficulty, owing to the abundance of matter to select from and the limited space in this small volume for its use. However, if the reader shall receive from its perusal as much comfort and blessing as the compiler enjoyed in its preparation, he will consider himself amply repaid for the time and labor bestowed upon it. The volume is thus sent forth on its mission, and I can only pray that our dear Lord may own it as a means of rich blessing to the lives of those into whose hands it may fall.

D. D. L.

Harrisburg, Pa., March 11, 1904.

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Introductory

MADAME DE LA MOTHE-GUYON'S maiden name was Jeanne Marie Bonviver de la Mothe. She was born, April 13, 1648, at Montargis, France, about fifty miles south of Paris. She was born and died within the pale of the Roman Catholic Church. Though carefully educated in the forms and doctrines of that church, and adhering to its communion, she saw plainly the corruptions and abuses of the church, especially of the hierarchy, and early set to work, both by her prolific pen and by speech, to correct, as far as possible, its abuses; or at least to rebuke, instruct, admonish; to inculcate better principles and impart the deeper truths of spirituality, which already were beginning to bear rich fruitage, until her enemies, unable to answer her argument, while at the same time unwilling to admit the fact of existing conditions as they really were, turned against her

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with the weapons of persecution. Relentlessly they followed her, insisting that she must retract the doctrinal and other statements in her writings and cease going about teaching them as she had been doing, in the meantime threatening her with severe punishment if she refused to obey the mandates of her superiors in the church. But she meekly, though bravely stood out against their combined assault; she neither retracted nor ceased her labor of faith, love, and devotion. She was finally seized and cast into prison at Vincennes, September 27, 1695; again at Vangirard, and then in the Bastille, where she remained until 1705, notwithstanding the fact that the proceedings against her had been concluded in the year 1700, and her justification had been pronounced in the same year at Issy. Although she was continually persecuted, ostracized, imprisoned,—confined within prison walls for ten long, dreary years,—her life was always full of activity, and her really

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superior mental powers were called into requisition for the accomplishment of her great and enduring life-work. She wrote forty volumes, her poems, justifications, autobiography, and miscellaneous works under various titles, numbering in all twenty books, and twenty duodecimo volumes of her "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures." This latter she undoubtedly considered her greatest and most important work. Her comments on the Holy Word she regarded as "the mystical sense of the Sacred Scriptures."

Living in a time and place and under conditions so adverse to the exercise of independent religious thought and the growth of genuine piety, she yet attained the highest eminence as a woman of keen intellect and deep spirituality.

She belonged to the class of believers known as "Mystics"; not an opprobrious designation this, by any means, but simply indicating the peculiar trend of thought and manner of life of

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those belonging to this school of religious belief and opinion. She emphasized the spiritual sense or meaning of the sacred Scriptures, and had no taste for merely ceremonial matters. As she is placed before the reader here—in these selections from her writings—to speak for herself in the following pages, it is not necessary to go into further detail of the character of her teachings. She died, at the age of sixty-nine years, as she had lived, in the joy and triumph of an absolutely surrendered life. Before closing this brief account of the life of this remarkable woman, however, I am constrained to quote an extract from the concluding page of the second volume of the “Life and Religious Opinions and Experiences of Madame de la Mothe-Guyon,”¹ by Prof. Thomas C. Upham, D. D.,

¹ The original two-volume edition of this biography by Professor Upham has been out of print for some years, but recently a new one-volume edition has been issued, edited and revised by an English clergyman, and published in London by Sampson, Low, Marston & Company.

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LL. D., together with her "last will and testament":

"In the beginning of the month of March, 1717, she had a very severe attack of sickness, from which she never recovered. During her sickness she conversed with her friends and wrote a few letters; but she had no doubt that her labors were drawing to a close. God's hour, that hour to which she had long looked with interest, had arrived. 'Already those with whom, either as friends or as enemies, she had been associated in the earlier part of her life, Harlai, La Combe, Fénelon, Beauvilliers, Bossuet, the powerful monarch of France, all had been called hence. 'At last the summons came to her also. She received it without surprise and without repugnance. She went down to the grave, as her life would lead us to anticipate, in perfect resignation and peace. She had given her soul to God, and God received her. No clouds rested upon her vision; no doubts perplexed the fullness of her hope and joy.

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At half-past eleven o'clock on the night of June 9, 1717, she died, aged sixty-nine years.

“A short time before her death she wrote a will, from which the following passage is an extract. It is an affecting evidence of the depth of her piety and that she relied on Jesus Christ alone:

“‘In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

“‘This is my last will and testament, which I request my executors, who are named within, to see executed.

“‘It is to thee, O Lord God, that I owe all things; and it is to thee that I now surrender up all that I am. Do with me, O my God, whatsoever thou pleasest. To thee, in an act of irrevocable donation, I give up both my body and my soul, to be disposed of according to thy will. Thou seest my nakedness and misery without thee. Thou knowest that there is nothing in heaven, or on earth that I desire but thee alone. Within thy hands, O God,

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I leave my soul, not relying for my salvation on any good that is in me, but solely on thy mercies, *and the merits and sufferings of my Lord Jesus Christ.* ”

PART I
Miscellany

THE love of thee flows just as much
As that of ebbing self subsides ;
Our hearts (their scantiness is such)
Bear not the conflict of two rival tides.

Both cannot govern in one soul ;
Then let self-love be dispossess'd ;
The love of God deserves the whole,
And will not dwell with so despised a guest.

SELECTIONS FROM THE DEVOTIONAL WRITINGS OF MADAME DE LA MOTHE-GUYON

I

Struggle and Death of Self

Bondage

ALL souls that are to be conducted by this way are placed at the beginning of the spiritual life in the midst of infinite and equally ineffable joys,—for there are not upon earth such heavenly blessings as these persons participate in,—but when, through so many favors, God has assured himself of the faithfulness of this people, it is then he makes them undergo the severe captivity. And none can be exempt from it, since Jesus Christ, the first of the predestined and chief of the abandoned

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ones, has himself been pleased to come forth from the delights of his Father's bosom to render himself of all men the most captive.¹

A little sand checks my fury, says the sea, and the whale cannot go out of the waters, although it finds nothing to confine it. I cannot, likewise, go forth from my bitterness and from my hell, although I see in it a strange immensity. Nothing binds me, and still I do not cease to be imprisoned. My prison has neither walls nor ramparts, and yet I am a captive in the midst of the greatest freedom.²

When any for relief run to confess, the only true remedy for them is prayer; to present themselves before God as criminals; and to beg strength of him to rise out of this state. Then would they soon be changed and brought out of the mire and clay. But the devil has falsely persuaded the doctors and the wise men of the age that,

¹The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis to Deuteronomy. ²The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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in order to pray, it is necessary first to be perfectly converted. Hence people are dissuaded from it, and hence there is rarely any conversion that is durable. The devil is outrageous only against prayer, and those that exercise it, because he knows it is the true means of taking his prey from him. He lets us undergo all the austerities we will, and neither persecutes those that enjoy them nor those that practice them. But no sooner does one enter into a spiritual life, a life of prayer, but he must prepare for strange crosses, as all manner of persecutions and contempts in this world are reserved for that life.¹

Oh, wisdom, oh, profundity of the Word of God! The sight of our sins and of our infidelities without number ought indeed to persuade us that it is not through our own merits that God has chosen for us interior states, and for the purity of his love, the more as, since he has penetrated us with the liveliest lights, and gratified us with the

¹ Autobiography.

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mystic ray, we have not ceased to be ungrateful and rebellious against him. God acts thus, then, before making the soul enter into himself; he shows it in detail all its infidelities and offenses, which overthrow it and cast it even into the abyss.¹

The Lord now removes all conscious experience of his grace and love. The soul is at first greatly afflicted, and sees the bad use it has made of his gifts, and the self-complacency it has indulged in on account of them. Its sighs and its tears are the expression of its grief; then the Well-Beloved overwhelms it with new tokens of his love, which throws it into greater shame than ever. The soul hardly dares lift up its eyes, until it again forgets the past and sinks itself in these new favors of the Lord.²

Crooping for Light

O my Lord, thou wast in my heart and demanded only a simple turning of

¹ The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis to Deuteronomy. ² Spiritual Torrents.

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my mind inward to make me perceive thy presence. O Infinite Goodness! while I was running hither and thither to seek thee, my life was a burden to me, although my happiness was within myself. I was poor in the midst of riches, and ready to perish with hunger, near a table plentifully spread and a continual feast. O Beauty, ancient and new, why have I known thee so late? Alas! I sought thee where thou wast not, and did not seek thee where thou wast. It was for want of understanding these words of thy gospel, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here; or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." This I now experienced, for thou becamest my King, and my heart thy kingdom, wherein thou didst reign supreme and performed all thy sacred will.¹

The soul has a certain self-esteem, which is deeply hidden, and a secret

¹Autobiography.

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contempt (that is, pity) for others not in its own experience. It is prone to be scandalized at their faults, and is hard toward them. It has a secret pride, so that it is troubled most at *faults committed openly*, for it would fain be faultless. It maintains a reserved bearing to others, and claims to itself the gifts of God, forgetting its own weakness, loses self-distrust, speaks rashly, and has a subtle desire to attract notice. Although all these facts and many others are to be found deeply hidden, the soul is unconscious of them. If it falls into some visible fault it is beset with a swarm of self-reflections, and when there comes any spiritual dryness it is dejected, discouraged, and distressed, immediately believing that it has lost all; it then endeavors to do all it can to regain the presence of God. It observes austere silence at times, and at others is apt to talk without end about the things of God. It may, under the pretense of obligation, impose upon itself unneces-

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sary actions, and thus fulfill its own will instead of the will of God.¹

The more thou didst augment my love and my patience, O my Lord, the less respite had I from the most oppressive crosses; but love rendered them easy to bear. O ye poor souls, who exhaust yourselves with needless vexation, if you would but seek God in your hearts, there would be a speedy end to all your troubles, for the increase of crosses would proportionately increase your delight.²

Self-Effort, or Trusting in Human Merit

If the soul is to know God, it must know its own misery apart from him, and God searches out in its very depths what was most deeply hidden within it. The grace of faith to suffer stripping has always to do with the most deep-seated and hidden faults of the selfhood.³

¹ Spiritual Torrents. ² Autobiography. ³ Spiritual Torrents.

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I had a fault common to most of our sex—I could not hear a beautiful woman praised without finding fault in her, artfully causing it to be remarked to lessen the good which was said of her. This fault of mine continued long, and was the fruit of gross and malignant pride. Extravagantly extolling any one proceeds from a like source.¹

I did not indeed serve Thee yet with that fervor which thou wast pleased to give me soon after, for I would still have been glad to reconcile thy love with the love of myself and of the creature; and unhappily I always found some who loved me, and whom I could not forbear wishing to please; not that I loved them, but for the love that I bore to myself.²

Canst thou deceive him (leviathan) and catch him in thy nets as a bird—he who is stronger than thou art? Or wilt thou bind him, and canst thou chain him down in some corner, to make use of him according to thy need, as one

¹, ²Autobiography.

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makes use of a slave? For it was in that way that he was brought under subjection to man before his sin.

Whatever help you may obtain from your spiritual friends, can you cut him off, as those think they can do who say that it is not necessary to abandon ourselves to God, unless we have suppressed (or take away) self-love? God asks those, in the person of Job, whether they will ever be able to accomplish that. It is a hydra which is ever strengthening itself; when its head is cut off, new ones come again. But who will be able to fill the reservoir of its frightful head, which, like a hideous belly, contains in itself all the thefts that it commits? In that way favoring its self-righteousness, it retains all the virtues, rendering them proprietary, and communicating its malignity to them, preventing them from permitting themselves to be lost in God—as the leviathan prevents the fish from swimming in the sea. In that way it keeps back all its reserves, the graces, the

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gifts, the powers, the victories, etc. What if you say to yourself, "I shall yet be able to chain him and subdue him by my strength," remember the battle which you have had with him, and what happened to you for believing that you had the power to throw him down; and let the remembrance of that enable you to keep silence.¹

Souls who have heard or read that they must be "stripped," set about doing it themselves, and do not progress, for, as it is done by self-effort, God does not clothe them with himself, which is his divine purpose in unclothing them.

In this stage the soul must not seek to sustain a life which has to be laid down. If we truly desire to live only in God, we must not cling to, or nourish our "own" life, in ever so little a degree. We must rest in the hand of the faithful God, and let him do as he wills.

Some souls are like drowning persons; they do not cease to resist until

¹ The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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they are exhausted. In pity God appears to be hard, and gives the soul no succor, so as to cause it to drop into the helplessness of death. It ceases from its own works, and thereby enters into rest.¹

These states are not continuous in their violence; there are remissions, which, while they afford space for taking breath, serve, at the same time, to render the subsequent trial more painful. For nature will make use of anything to sustain its life, as a drowning man will support himself in the water by clinging to the blade of a razor, without adverting to the pain it causes him, if there be nothing else within his reach.²

Oh, that you could comprehend the depth of this mystery, and learn the secrets of the conduct of God, revealed to babes, but hid from the wise and great of this world, who think themselves the Lord's counselors, and capable of investigating his procedures, and sup-

¹Spiritual Torrents. ²Concise View of the Way to God.

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pose they have attained that divine wisdom hidden from the eyes of all who live in self, and are enveloped in their own works, and who by a lively genius and elevated faculties mount up to heaven, and think to comprehend the height and depth and length and breadth of God.¹

But just in proportion as this activity decays, and is lost in an amorous passivity, so does our strength of resistance sink and diminish, and, as this degree advances, and the soul becomes more and more passive, it becomes more and more powerless in combat. As God becomes strong within, so do we become weak. Some regard this impossibility of resistance as a great temptation, but they do not see that all our labor, aided and assisted by grace, can only accomplish the conquest of our outward senses, after which God takes gradual possession of our interior, and becomes himself our purifier. And as he required all our watchful-

¹Autobiography.

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ness while he continued us in amorous activity, so he now requires all our fidelity to let him work, while he begins to render himself Lord by the subjection of the flesh to the spirit.¹

The Death of Self

I shall try to leave out as few faults as possible, and I depend on you to destroy it when your soul hath drawn those spiritual advantages therefrom, which God intended, and for which purpose I am willing to sacrifice all things, being fully persuaded of his designs toward you, as well for the sanctification of others as for your own sanctification.

But let me assure you, this is not attained, save through pain, weariness, and labor; and it will be reached by a path that will wonderfully disappoint your expectations. Nevertheless, if you are fully convinced that it is on the *nothing* in man that God establishes his greatest works, you will be

¹ Concise View of the Way to God.

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in part guarded against disappointment or surprise. He destroys that he might build; for when he is about to rear his sacred temple in us, he first totally razes that vain and pompous edifice which human art and power had erected, and from its horrible ruins a new structure is formed, by his power only.¹

We rob God of a glory that he expects of us, and that he has a right to exact, and which I dare say is the purpose of our creation. We deprive ourselves by stubbornness of the greatest of all good things, being contented with a kind of death or mortification, which is only the shadow of death, and not the reality. I am convinced that if one were to read the "Reflections upon the Scriptures" with a spirit unbiased, and resolved to lose all things for God, he would find in them a hidden manna. It is fruit enclosed in a husk; but we must break the husk, that is, take away self, in order to taste sweetness, and

¹Autobiography.

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pleasantness. I pray God that he may choose for himself hearts determined to be his at their own cost. It is all I wish for, and for which I would give my life a thousand times.¹

Oh, glorious consolation for a man who finds himself in the last desolation, to want to persuade him that the afflictions that he suffers are the penalty of his sins! What! is that a reason that because a person is unhappy he must be guilty? The same things which are punishments for sins, are also trials with which God afflicts and purifies his own—and a person does very wrong to condemn what he does not understand. Nevertheless, although this reproach and this condemnation from the learned, and of himself, may be the heaviest cross that can be experienced, it is not permitted to be the most necessary: for a person only dies by being convicted of his error. It is this condemnation, joined to reproaches and convictions which

¹ Spiritual Letters.

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the person has in his mind, that truly causes his death.¹

Oh, strange blindness! people take the plentitude of divine justice for the wrath of God, and the breath of love for the breath of anger. Sinners, it is true, are chastised by the breath of the wrath of God, and are consumed by the spirit of his anger; but as to upright souls, they are annihilated by the breath of pure love, which goes forth from God himself, and are consumed by the spirit of his divine justice, which, in order that God alone may remain, takes away everything from man. Nevertheless, as these things appear similar to those who are not divinely enlightened, they are taken for the same thing, although they may be infinitely different.²

You fly into a passion as soon as any one speaks to you. You cannot bear a scornful or cold look. I pray God to help you. Do not think that I like to have people cold towards you; by no

^{1,2} The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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means. Perhaps they are not really so. Things happen without intention, and God permits it, in order that you may die to self. Be no longer of a quick temper. Fretfulness keeps one continually in a disposition to commit new faults. However, be of good courage; God is stronger than your weakness. He will take care of you. You will experience the battle between nature and grace a long time. Suffer all that you cannot avoid, but keep calm within. When through your vivacity you commit faults, be humiliated, but do not fret.¹

When a tree is cut down it has still some hope; but when a person digs it up, nothing of it remains. It is the same with man; it is useless to cut him and diminish him; that only serves to make his propriety more apparent and to strengthen it. If his root should grow old in the earth, as this tree cut down perhaps as dead, when the long practice of virtue has reduced him to

¹ Spiritual Letters.

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the dust of his humiliation, and when, by the knowledge which is given him of his nothingness, he sees himself there useless, as it were, and like a rotten trunk, he will come forth, nevertheless, by the scent of the water; the fragrance of sensible grace causes him to spring up and to rise from the dead entirely new; and it will cause him to send forth his branches with much more power than at the beginning. O Propriety, it is necessary to root thee up, in order to destroy thee.¹

I am not surprised at anything so long as truths pertaining to the interior remain untasted. Many people understand exterior mortification, but little do they wish to be brought to an entire giving up of their own spirit, their ideas, reasonings, prejudice, and their own will, that they may enter the narrow way of faith; and being naked and despoiled of all these things, follow Jesus, who was stripped and robbed of everything for love of us.

¹The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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And yet, we can never attain to the death of the old man, in order to be re-clothed and animated with the new man, except by this way.¹

If we do not die to our own will and spirit, just as I have said, we shall never be invested or filled with eternal reason and pure love. Instead of a narrow reason, we must have a liberal one; instead of a love mixed with self, a pure and divine love. If we leave our own reason, we shall possess *the Wisdom*—Christ—as an inheritance. It is for God to illuminate us. I pray him to do it.²

It is believed that the interior life can be extinguished by dint of persecution and crying it down; but it is just then that it multiplies. The more those persons who teach it are decried, persecuted, or calumniated, the more persons are found joining them in order to pursue the same path; and by its very persecution it is established and increased, just as the church was

^{1,2} Spiritual Letters.

Devotional Writings

founded and spread by the blood of the martyrs. The demons also, by their cruel temptations, take a part in it, and this is most painful at the commencement by the reason of the feebleness of nature, which finds itself overwhelmed under the burden. But the more this soul is laden on all sides with weaknesses and miseries, the more it rises again like the palm tree, and the more it multiplies itself.¹

The soul that sees God coming near, fears death very much, well knowing that it is necessary to die to see him. From the time when the state of death begins, which lasts for a long period, it enters into strange fears, and would willingly say, "I would prefer to go no further than to pass through such rude trials." It keeps itself aloof, and endeavors to defend itself from death, thinking that it even approaches God when it loves to remain in its estrangement; and deceived as it is by self-love, it prefers to preserve its own life rather

¹The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

Struggle and Death of Self

than suffer itself to be carried away by a holy death, which would happily resuscitate it in God. This leads it to say to the director (much more by its real resistances than by its words alone): "Speak to me thyself; for so long as it is only thou who speakest to me, and I keep to the words of man and human means, or, at least comprehend by reason, I shall not die; but to go upon the word of God alone, and under his particular conduct, in the obscurity of a naked faith, I cannot resolve to do it, for fear of death and loss."¹

The means of reducing a soul to total ruin, is to take away from it all support, and to destroy it on all sides; for if it found the least prop and the least support, it could not be destroyed; like a person who is drowning, as long as he finds props and supports he will never drown. If a person were suspended above the sea, although it might be only by a small thread, he would never fall within, unless the thread were

¹ The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

broken ; in like manner, as long as there is a small place in which we are not destroyed, we are not ruined. That is why Job says that since he is destroyed on all sides, he is certainly ruined, and that the hope which he had in himself or in anything out of God, has been not only cut off, like a tree which a person cuts away, (that would be a small matter, for it can always spring up again,) but that it has been snatched away like a tree which is plucked up and which cannot spring up any more, for nothing of it remains. This comparison of the tree is a very good one ; because if there remains only a little root, it will shoot forth ; likewise, if there remains anything of the self-life in us which is not taken away, it will gradually spring up and increase. That is why, when God wishes to be very merciful to a soul, he does not allow the least subsistence to remain.¹

We see those who content themselves in practicing great outward austerities,

¹ The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

Struggle and Death of Self

and yet by indulging their senses in what is called innocent and necessary, they remain forever unsubdued; so that austerities, however severe, will not conquer the senses. To destroy their power, the most effectual means is, in general, to deny them firmly what will please, and to persevere in this, until they are reduced to be without desire or repugnance. But if we attempt, during the warfare, to grant them any relaxation, we act like those who, under pretext of strengthening a man who was condemned to be starved to death, should give him from time to time a little nourishment, which indeed would prolong his torments, and postpone his death.

It is just the same with the death of the senses, the powers, the understanding, and self-will; for if we do not eradicate every remains of self subsisting in these, we support them in a dying life to the end. This state and its termination are clearly set forth by St. Paul. He speaks of bearing about in

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the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. (II. Cor. 4:10.) But, lest we should rest here, he fully distinguishes this from the state of being dead, and having our life hid with Christ in God. It is only by a total death to self we can be lost in God.¹

¹Autobiography.

How happy are the new-born race,
Partakers of adopting grace!

How pure the bliss they share!
Hid from the world and all its eyes,
Within their heart the blessing lies,
And conscience feels it there.

The moment we believe, 't is ours;
And if we love with all our powers
The God from whom it came,
And if we serve with hearts sincere,
'T is still discernible and clear,
An undisputed claim.

II

Faith

For Guidance

I AM very glad that God has led you by the path of naked faith. It is the safest, and, I dare say, the only sure way; inasmuch as it is always accompanied by pure love, which robs the creature of all in order to restore all to God. We are always wanting to be something, whether under nature or grace; we know not how to be content that God alone should be in us, and for us; that we should be glorified solely by our destruction. By that means only is the old man put off, and we made new creatures in Christ Jesus. As to what you said about the enemy's temptations through sensible workings, that does not happen to souls led by naked faith, because the trials are suited to the state of the soul.¹

¹Spiritual Letters.

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Widely different is the revelation of Jesus Christ, made to the soul when the eternal word is communicated. (Gal. 1:16.) It makes us new creatures, created anew in him. This revelation is what the devil cannot counterfeit. From hence proceeds the only safe transport or ecstasy, which is operated by naked faith alone, and dying even to the gifts of God, how sublime and excellent soever they may appear, because as long as the soul continues resting in them, it does not fully renounce itself, and so never passing into God, loses the real enjoyment of the Giver, by attachments to the gifts. This is truly an unutterable loss.¹

On your part continue to walk without knowing where, and without wishing to know, trusting God only, who will know how to lead you into himself, by ways unknown to your thoughts or feelings.²

This is not subject to delusions or enthusiasm, for faith embraces the

¹Autobiography. ²Spiritual Letters.

Faith

whole, and does not expect or desire anything for itself. This faith has but one subject, which is God, his glory, and his good pleasure, which it prefers to all self-interest; and this it is that produces the pure love which loves the *whole of God*, both what he is, and for the sake of himself, without one regard to what we ourselves are.¹

Faith so strongly seizes on the understanding as to make it decline all reasonings, all particular illuminations and illustrations, how sublime soever, which sufficiently demonstrates how far visions, revelations, ecstasies, etc., differ from this, and hinder the soul from being lost in God. For although by them it appears lost in him for some transient moments, yet it is not a true loss, since the soul which is entirely lost in God finds itself again no more. Faith then makes the soul lose every distinct light, in order to place it in its own pure light.²

¹Spiritual Letters. ²Autobiography.

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For Duty

Faith disposes of everything itself; it causes itself to be accompanied by servants, but they cannot aid it in this. It prepares the necessary wood for the sacrifice, so that there may remain no pretext for eluding obedience, although in a matter which reason might regard as suspicious in many points. Oh, fidelity and generosity of faith! It is truly on good grounds that it is the source and origin of a great people and of an innumerable multitude of saints so much the more admirable before God as they are the more hidden from men.¹

It is well to understand here that we do not speak of the ordinary means of salvation, but of a soul wholly interior, and called to the deepest annihilation; of a soul brought into the whole truth, of the all of God and of the nothingness of the creature; and not of a Christian in the ordinary way, who relies almost wholly upon his works for salvation.

¹ The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

I know very well that faith without works is dead; but that is not the case here, since the soul of which we speak is only annihilated after having been employed in all good works; and having exhausted all the good of its own operations, the work of God becomes so powerful in it as to overcome the operations of the creature, and absorb them in such a manner that the soul finds itself deprived by excess (and not by deficiency) of the blessings which assured its salvation; this convinces it that it is the salvation wrought out and merited by Jesus Christ, which is for souls that have renounced all, who are dead to self-interest—which is only obtained by spoliation and the annihilation of the entire self-life.

I know that all men are saved only in and through Jesus Christ; but all men are not fully abandoned to Jesus Christ, in order to trust only in him and not in their works; but the latter, when they shall have done all the good that all the saints together have done

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upon the earth, nevertheless they could not have any hope of salvation except in Jesus Christ, and not in their works.¹

The Testing of Faith

God tempts Abraham to make the last trial of his faith, and to test him to the utmost in total nakedness, and in the stripping of all supports; not only of human props, of which he had already stripped him previously, making him come forth from his country, but also of supports taken in God, even in all his benefits and promises. He spares nothing; and to render the thing more severe and this faith more magnanimous, to prove and purify his love, and to rid him of all self-interest, and of all foreign attachment, although most legitimate, he says to him, *Take thy son*. This word is very sweet; not only thy son, but thine only son; how very dear to him must he then have been! He continues, *Thy son whom thou lov-*

¹ The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

est so tenderly; to make even his love serve for its liveliest grief. He names him by his name, Isaac, placing before his eyes all the sweetness of this amiable victim, so as to make him conceive so much the more of the greatness of his loss and to render it more sensible to him. Then he adds, *Come and sacrifice him to me upon a distant mountain*. Is it not that the length of the road may try his faith the more? Isaac, who has always represented the passive life, or contemplation, is to perish; faith must sacrifice this life, and give it the deathblow, so that there may remain nothing more that can hinder the total loss into God.

But far from so severe a temptation diminishing the faith of this patriarch, it takes again even a new vigor; and although so surprising a commandment as is given him is contrary to that which God had given to every one not to shed human blood, and must horrify him, according to reason, in the fear of committing a parricide. Yet

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faith bears all that; and trusting itself to God above reason and faith, it sets about executing what has been commanded it.¹

¹The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

VAIN pageantry and pomp of earth, adieu !
I have no wish, no memory for you !
Rich in God's love, I feel my noblest pride
Spring from the sense of having nought beside.

III

Surrender, or Abandonment

Immediate and Unquestioning

HOW MANY make terms with God, and put limits as to how far they will submit to his doings? This is abandonment in figure, not in reality. Entire abandonment excepts nothing, reserves nothing.¹

Fidelity requires us to suffer spoliation to the whole extent of the designs of God, without being anxious about ourselves, sacrificing to God all our interests both for time and for eternity. Nothing must be made a pretext for reserving or retaining the slightest atom, for the least reservation is the cause of an irreparable loss, as it prevents our death from being total. We must let God work his absolute pleasure, and suffer the winds and tempests to beat

¹Spiritual Torrents.

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upon us from every quarter, submerged, as we may often be, beneath the tumultuous billows.¹

Do not fear that you will displease God with a too violent constraint; but live abandoned to him, and you will be at peace. He will not permit that you should offend him, fearing him as you do. The prudence of the flesh corrupts everything; but true prudence which is confidence in God adapts everything, returns it buoyant and peaceable for God's service. On the other hand, fear burdens, embarrasses, weakens, and causes stumblings. You must be abandoned for others, as well as for yourself.²

Absolute and Unreserved

I have learned with much joy of the design you have of being God's without reserve. It is the one thing needful to make our life happy. Give yourself, therefore, to God with all your heart, so that you may not take yourself back

¹ Concise View of the Way to God. ² Spiritual Letters.

Surrender, or Abandonment

again. Regard yourself as one who belongs to him. Love him above everything else; try to have his will govern all your actions; acquire the habit of meditating within yourself, where God is ever present; try to retain this divine Presence; re-enter your own heart often, that you may speak with God, and listen to him. Hold yourself sometimes, like Mary, at the feet of your Lord.¹

To love only for one's self, the virtues, gifts, and favors of God is not to be worthy of him. Oh, is God not enough worthy to be loved to give him all our heart, and great enough to occupy it entirely, without our wishing to retain something with him?²

If the lamp, if the distinct lights, which are like little stars, and which are ordinary graces, are extinguished, it is only by the light of the Sun, which absorbs them in its light; whereas, the little grace that the wicked might have is taken away from

¹Spiritual Letters. ²The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

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him by sin. If the step which the simple took to become virtuous should appear to be obstructed, it is only because God, as a kind Father, seeing that the weakness of this soul prevents it from advancing, takes this child in his arms to carry it, and the child permits him to do it; while sinners leave the path, the traces or the steps of virtue, to enter the path of sin.¹

But dearly beloved, whoever you are who sincerely wish to give yourselves up to God, I conjure you, that after having once made the donation, you take not yourselves back again; remember, a gift once presented is no longer at the disposal of the giver.²

Oh, blessed nothingness, how glorious thy termination! what gain, O my soul, hast thou not made for all thy losses? Thou art lifted above all by the loss of all.³

¹The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.
²A Short and Easy Method of Prayer. ³Spiritual Torrents.

LONG plunged in sorrow, I resign
My soul to that dear hand of Thine,
 Without reserve or fear.
That hand shall wipe my streaming eyes ;
Or into smiles of glad surprise
 Transform the falling tear.

My sole possession is Thy love ;
In earth beneath, or heaven above,
 I have no other store ;
And though with fervent suit I pray,
And importune thee, night and day,
 I ask thee nothing more.

IV

Submission

Willing and Cheerful Submission

We must serve God with an unmistakable joy, that shows that we serve him with pleasure. Furthermore, you should do what you do with an openness of heart which lets people know that the yoke of obedience is neither burdensome nor cumbrous to you.¹

The soul is in harmony with the divine will. It has no separate will, for its will is the will of God; it has no desire but to fulfill his desires, for it has lost all repugnance, and contrariety towards the will of God.

Its condition of life has become so simple that it has nothing to say about itself. (See Matthew 10:16, margin; II. Corinthians 11:3.) It is silent, not because of reserve, but because its ex-

¹ Spiritual Letters.

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perience passes all expression by its extreme simplicity. There are no visions, revelations, ecstasies, changes in this degree of divine life. It is above all these, for this way is simple, seeing nothing except as in God, the *one* center and principle of all things, and environed by him.

All distinction in service is taken away. The meanest service and the (so-called) highest, are alike beautiful to it if but in the divine will.¹

“Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.” It is done in heaven without resistance and without reluctance. All the outward works that we can do, be they what they will, will not, cannot, advance us, as this total and continual submission of our will to the divine—most infallible will. It is this renunciation of ourselves that Jesus Christ taught us; namely, to submit continually our reason to faith, and our will to God. And this is what I require of you, that you simply enter into this

¹ Spiritual Torrents.

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course; what you see is a work of time. Faith brings us back to our own nothingness, and by our not being anything leaves God to be all that he is, in himself and for himself. Love is the consequence of faith; the more simple and naked faith is, the more pure is the love; and, on the other hand, faith is the consequence of love; the more perfect love is, the more perfect is faith. In the way of which I here speak, we are screened from the angel of darkness, who can transform himself into an angel of light, but not into an angel of love. Let us descend by love, faith, and humility, keeping ourselves in our own nothingness, and we need not fear falling. I require of you in the name of God, that you preserve an inviolable attachment to his way, without wavering. I assure you that they who pursue this method are founded upon the Living Rock, Christ Jesus.¹

¹Spiritual Letters.

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The Fruit of Submission, or of Obedience

Is it not a pitiful thing to accuse a person of pride who abandons himself to his God, who, despairing wholly of his own strength, waits for his deliverance through the goodness and divine power of God; and, nevertheless, saying to him that if he take away his iniquity himself, he will be able to go with his face lifted up? Is there not much more pride when a person believes that he has the power to do it by his own strength rather than to permit God to do it; and to imagine that one can in that way lift the head without confusion, and with a secret assurance of having taken away his sin? I confess that I do not understand that virtue, nor the nature of that humility, which, in making us more powerful than God, leads us to exalt ourselves without fear, and to remain steadfast in that elevation. If the most righteous man fall seven times, what state is

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there without fear? The true way not to fear is not to exalt ourselves, and to trust in his righteousness; to abandon ourselves so fully to God that he himself may be our righteousness—then we should have no fear of losing it. The way to have no fear of falling, is to be so low and so annihilated that we could fall no more; for if I am still righteous with my own righteousness, I shall fall seven times a day, and I can fall infinitely more; but if I am no longer righteous with my own righteousness, and I am righteous with the righteousness of God, I shall no longer be unrighteous, except in withdrawing myself from that state. If I exist no longer in anything, and I am in the lowest state that I can be, I shall no longer be able to fall.¹

Jesus Christ expired under pangs. God uses the like conduct towards his dearest servants to render them conformable to his Son, in whom he is always well pleased. But few place that

¹ The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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conformity where it ought to be. It is not in voluntary pains or austerities, but in those which are suffered in a submission ever equal to the will of God, in a renunciation of our whole selves, to the end that God may be our all in all, conducting us according to his views, and not our own, which are generally opposite to his. In fine, all perfection consists in this entire conformity with Jesus Christ, not in shining things which men esteem. It will only be seen in eternity who are the true friends of God. Nothing pleases him but Jesus Christ, and that which bears his mark or character.¹

Do not depend upon a feeling anticipated by the will, but upon being at the actual moment abandoned to God. The same God who has until now caused you to act against your dislikes, will enable you to do so again, when it is necessary.²

The root of the tulip put in the ground, seems to be a very insignificant

¹Autobiography. ²Spiritual Letters.

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thing; yet when the season is come, it produces a flower of various colors and very beautiful to the eye. If the man that had heard of a tulip, but had never seen one, should be told that the bulb would produce so beautiful a flower, he would scarce believe it; and if, through his impatience, he should be often taking up his tulip root out of the earth to see the process, whether it began to shoot or no, he would certainly incapacitate it for putting forth and producing this excellent flower. And thus it is with us, when we will be seeing, discerning, and knowing what God operates in us, we only hinder his work. There is nothing wanting on our part but fidelity, patience, submission, and absolute resignation to our Divine Gardener, who in his own time, will let us see the wonderful things he hath wrought in us, while we thought ourselves poor, miserable, and destitute of all good.¹

This loss is called the annihilation of

¹Spiritual Letters.

the powers, for although in themselves they still subsist, yet they seem annihilated to us, in proportion as charity fills and inflames, it becomes so strong, as by degrees to surmount all the activities of the will of man, subjecting it to that of God, in such sort that when the soul is docile, and leaves itself to be purified, and emptied of all that which it has of its own opposite to the will of God, it finds itself by little and little detached from every emotion of its own, and placed in a holy indifference, wishing nothing but what God does and wills. But this never can be effected by the activity of our own will, even though it were employed in continual acts of resignation, because these, though very virtuous, are so far one's own actions, and cause the will to subsist in a multiplicity, in a kind of separate distinction or dissimilitude from God.

When the will of the creature entirely submits to that of the Creator, suffering freely and voluntarily,—and

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yielding only a concurrence to the divine will (which is its absolute submission),—suffering itself to be totally surmounted and destroyed by the operations of love, this absorbs the will into itself, consummates it in that of God, and purifies it from all narrowness, dissimilitude, and selfishness.¹

¹Autobiography.

COME shame, come sorrow, spite of tears,
Weakness, and heart-oppressing fears,—
One soul, at least, shall not repine
To give you room; come, reign in mine!

V

Fellowship

Divine Union

OH, thou Word made flesh, whose silence is inexpressible eloquence, thou canst never be misapprehended or mistaken. Thou becomest the life of our life, and the soul of our soul. How infinitely is thy language elevated above all the utterances of human and finite articulation! Thy adorable power, all efficacious in the soul that has received it, communicates itself through them to others, and as a divine seed becomes fruitful to eternal life.¹

As God transforms the soul into himself, his life is communicated to it more plentifully. The love of God for the creature is incomprehensible, and his assiduity inexplicable; some souls he

¹ Autobiography.

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pursues without intermission, prevents them, seats himself at their door, and delights himself in being with them and in loading them with the marks of his love. He impresses this chaste, pure, and tender love upon the heart.¹

A philosopher, seeing that he could not comprehend the flowing and ebbing of the sea without stopping to consider it further, threw himself into the sea, in order to be taken in by it; and I, having labored for some time in looking at and contemplating the flow and reflow of God in his divine persons, and seeing that I could not comprehend it without stopping longer to contemplate it, I am lost and swallowed up in him; and this is the way I have learned more about it in one moment than I could have learned by my care and solicitude during a lifetime.²

The soul is thus received into God, and is there gradually changed and transformed into him, as food is trans-

¹ Concise View of the Way to God. ² The Book of Job, in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

formed into the one who has partaken of it. All this takes place without any loss of its own individual existence, as has been elsewhere explained.

When transformation begins, it is called *annihilation*, since in changing our form we become annihilated as to our own in order to take on his. This operation goes on constantly during life, changing the soul more and more into God, and conferring upon it a continually increasing participation in the divine qualities, making it unchangeable, immovable, etc.; but he also renders it fruitful in, and not out of himself.¹

As soon as the soul has died in the embraces of the Lord, it is united to him in truth and without any intermediate; for in losing everything, even its best possessions, it has lost the means and intermediates which dwelt in them; and even these greatest treasures themselves were but intermediates. It is, then, from that mo-

¹ Concise View of the Way to God.

ment united to God immediately, but it does not recognize it, nor does it enjoy the fruits of its union until he animates it and becomes its vivifying principle. A bride fainting in the arms of her husband is closely united to him, but she does not enjoy the blessedness of the union, and may even be unconscious of it; but when he has contemplated her for some time, fainting from excess of love, and recalls her to life by his tender caresses, then she perceives that she is in possession of him whom her soul loves, and that she is possessed by him.¹

The Abiding Divine Presence—The Soul's Keeper and Provider

As soon as a soul has turned to God and has been cleansed from its sins, it instinctively desires to be entirely united to him. Out of God it can never find repose.²

There were times, indeed, when I

¹Concise View of the Way to God. ²Spiritual Torrents.

found nature overcharged ; but the love of God and his grace rendered sweet to me the very worst of bitters. His invisible hand supported me, else I had sunk under so many probations. Sometimes I said to myself, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me" (Psalm 42:7). "He hath bent his bow and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins" (Lamentations 3:12, 13). It seemed to me as if every one thought he was in the right to treat me ill, and rendered service to God in doing it. I then comprehend that it was the very manner in which Jesus Christ suffered. He was numbered with the transgressors. (Mark 15:28.) He was condemned by the sovereign pontiff, chief priests, doctors of the law, and judges deputed by the Romans, who valued themselves on doing justice. Happy they who by suffering for the will of God under all the like circumstances, have so near

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a relation to the sufferings of Jesus Christ!¹

Nothing is more easy than to avoid sin when we are kept carefully without and within. That knowledge caused the Prophet-King to desire a guard over his lips. God surrounds the soul within, and keeps it by the unction of grace; and without by a wisdom which, adjusting all its deeds, prevents the weaknesses of nature, and it is then a fountain sealed.

All that it undertakes for God prospers; and it seems that God has no other desire than to please this heart that loves him.²

There are souls whom God loves, and others who are his delight. You are of the latter class. Allow yourself then to be led by him, who loves you tenderly. The more self is crucified within you, the more God will possess you. It is not you yourself who will destroy self; but by remaining faithful in the deprivation of all life of which

¹Autobiography. ²The Book of Job in The Mystical Sense of Scripture.

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he is not the principle, he will perform in you this work.¹

There are not only springs in God, but there are bottomless depths and mighty rivers, of which something is shown to this soul. There are depths in which it is lost never to come out; there, being contained in the abyss itself, it is made one in it, and in this essential union there issues out from it (as from God, it existing no longer, but God being in it and for it) rivers, waters, and fountains, to be distributed outwardly according to the need of every one. But it is necessary for this that it should have arrived not only at the land, God,—in which it lives and drinks as from the spring,—but, moreover, it must be sunk, lost, transformed in God, in order that there may flow from God by it rivers, waters, and fountains; because these all issue out of the immense plains of the divinity, and from the mountains of his power and grandeur.²

¹ Spiritual Letters. ² The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis-Deuteronomy.

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You must begin by giving God some proof of the love you bear him, not by rejoicing in his loving caresses, but by applying yourself to your duties. You should preserve the near presence of God in all that you do, and not be troubled when you lose the feeling of this Divine Presence, provided you keep the truth of it.¹

¹ Spiritual Letters.

I LOVE my God, but with no love of mine,
For I have none to give;
I love thee, Lord, but all the love is thine,
For by thy life I live.
I am as nothing, and rejoice to be
Emptied and lost and swallowed up in thee.

VI

Communion

Inward Communion

IT is not necessary to write except in real need and it would not be well to interrupt inward communion with God in order to write, or speak of God. Communion itself may be made to give place to our employment; for anything which God orders concerning us ought to be preferred to everything else. It is very needful to know that God's possession of us is not lost, or even enfeebled by any of the acts connected with our calling. It is only affected by acts coming from our own choice, they are the fruits of our own will, which is entirely opposed to the pure will of God.¹

In this state comes that ineffable silence by which we not only subsist in

¹ Spiritual Letters.

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God, but commune with him, and which, in a soul thus dead to its own working, and general and fundamental self-appropriation, becomes a flux and reflux of divine communion, with nothing to sully its purity, for there is nothing to hinder it.

The soul then becomes a partaker of the ineffable communion of the Trinity, where the Father of spirits imparts his spiritual fecundity, and makes it one spirit with himself. Here it is that it communes with other souls, if they are sufficiently pure to receive its communications in silence, according to their degree and state; here, that the ineffable secrets are revealed, not by a momentary illumination, but in God himself, where they are all hid, the soul not possessing them for itself, nor being ignorant of them.¹

Silent and Unceasing Prayer

The prayer of the state of faith is an absolute silence of all the powers of the

¹ Concise View of the Way to God.

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soul, and a cessation of every working, however delicate, especially toward its termination. The soul in that state, perceiving no more prayer, and not being able to set apart fixed seasons for it, since all such exercises are taken away, is led to think that it has absolutely lost all kind of devotion. But when life returns, prayer returns with it, and accompanied with a marvelous facility; and as God takes possession of the senses and faculties, its devotion becomes sweet, gentle, and very spiritual, but always in God. Its former devotion caused it to sink within itself, that it might enjoy God, but that which it now has, draws it out of self, that it may be more and more lost and changed in God.¹

Nothing now was more easy to me than prayer. Hours passed away like moments, while I could hardly do anything else but pray. The fervency of my love allowed me no intermission. It was a prayer of rejoicing and

¹ Concise View of the Way to God.

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possessing, devoid of all busy imaginations and forced reflections; it was a prayer of the will, and not of the head, wherein the taste of God was so great, so pure, unblended and uninterrupted, that it drew and absorbed the power of my soul into a profound recollection without act or discourse. For I had now no sight but of Jesus Christ alone. All else was excluded, in order to love with the greater extent, without any selfish motives or reasons for loving.¹

¹Autobiography.

Oh! it is good to soar,
These bolts and bars above,
To Him whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love;
And in thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom of the mind.

VII

Tranquillity

Tranquillity Through Trans- formation

THERE are a thousand things that might be said about the inward and celestial life of the soul thus full of life in God, which he dearly cherishes for himself, and which he covers externally with abasement, because he is a jealous God. But it would require a volume, and I have only to fulfill your request. God is the life and soul of this soul, which thus uninterruptedly lives in God, as a fish in the sea, in inexpressible happiness, though loaded with the sufferings which God lays upon it for others.

It has become so simple, especially when its transformation is far advanced, that it goes its way perpetually

without a thought for any creature or for itself. It has but one object, to do the will of God.¹

I experienced these words in the Canticles: "Thy name is as precious ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee." For I felt in my soul an unction which, as a salutary balsam, healed in a moment all my wounds. I slept not that whole night, because thy love, O my God, flowed in me like a delicious oil, and burned as a fire which was going to devour in an instant all that was left of self.²

The Tranquil Soul Remains Undisturbed by External Conditions

The senses suffer pain and remain subject to suffering, but the central depth of the soul retains its equanimity because He who possesses it is immutable. There appears to be a separation of the two parts, the higher and the lower; they live together like

¹ Concise View of the Way to God. ² Autobiography.

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strangers who do not know each other. No pain prevents the perfect peace, tranquillity, joy, and immoveableness of the higher part, as the divine condition of the higher does not hinder extreme suffering in the lower.¹

When the new name has been given, and the soul is well advanced, it sees all things in God and God in all things. Sin, which before gave it so much fright, terrifies it no longer; all hell itself could not dismay it, because it can no longer see anything distinct from God himself, where there is no sin, but perfect holiness. This manner of expressing itself, so simple and natural, is so appropriate to the soul of this degree, that although it would, it could not do otherwise. Let those who do not comprehend this believe it not impossible. It must be thus because the soul that has been received into God can no longer see these things but as God sees them, without fear, without trouble, without emotion, without mal-

¹ Spiritual Torrents.

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ice, without fault, taking part in his divine attributes in proportion as it is received into his unity.¹

¹ The Mystical Sense of Scripture, Genesis to Deuteronomy.

On Prayer, or Method of
Prayer

Prefatory Note

THE following selections are taken wholly from Madame Guyon's book entitled, "A Short and Easy Method of Prayer." The selections are necessarily brief, and comparatively few of them can be given here, but nevertheless quite full enough to give somewhat of a complete outline of her teaching on this subject. The general trend of her work in consecutive order is here strictly adhered to. However, it is only just, both to the author as well as to the present compiler of these selections to say that, partly in phraseology and wholly in the arrangement of the headings of the different parts, there is a very noticeable departure from the original plan of division and topical statement, thus undoubtedly enabling the reader to more easily comprehend the author's meaning, (which is often difficult to understand, because of

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involved statements, and words and phrases peculiar to her,) and also to more readily follow the whole plan of her book. She closed her preface to this work, thus appropriately introducing a subject of this character to the reader, as follows:

“It is thou alone, O holy Jesus, who lovest simplicity and innocence, ‘and whose delight is to dwell with the children of men’ (Proverbs 8:31), with those who are, indeed, willing to become ‘little children’ (Matthew 18:3); it is thou alone who canst render this little work of any value, by imprinting it on the heart, and leading those who read it to seek thee within themselves, where thou reposest as in the manger, waiting to receive proofs of their love, and to give them testimony of thine. They lose these advantages by their own fault. But it belongeth unto thee, O child Almighty! uncreated Love! silent and all-containing Word! to make thyself loved, enjoyed, and understood. Thou canst do it; and I

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know thou wilt do it by this little work,
which belongeth entirely to thee, proceedeth wholly from thee, and tendeth only to thee.”

D. D. L.

THOU hast an ear to hear ;
A heart to love and bless ;
And, though my notes were e'er so rude,
Thou wouldst not hear the less ;
Because thou knowest as they fall,
That love, sweet love, inspires them all.

Introductory

1. ALL are capable of prayer, and it is a dreadful misfortune that almost all the world have conceived the idea that they are not called to prayer.

Prayer is nothing but the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love. St. Paul has enjoined us to "pray without ceasing" (I. Thessalonians 5:17), and our Lord bids us watch and pray (Mark 13:33, 37); all therefore may, and all ought to practice prayer.

2. Let all pray; you should live by prayer, as you should live by love.

Let all without exception come, for Jesus Christ hath called *all*.

Yet let not those come who are without a heart; they are excused; for there must be a heart before there can be love.

3. All who are desirous of prayer, may easily pray, enabled by those

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ordinary graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which are common to all men.

Prayer is the key to perfection, and the sovereign good; it is the means of delivering us from every vice, and of obtaining us every virtue; for the one great means of becoming perfect is to walk in the presence of God.

4. You must, then, learn a species of prayer which may be exercised at all times; which does not obstruct outward employments; which may be equally practiced by princes, kings, prelates, priests and magistrates, soldiers and children, tradesmen, laborers, women and sick persons; it is not the prayer of the head, but *of the heart*.

It is not a prayer of the understanding alone, for the mind of a man is so limited in its operations that it can have but one object at a time; but it is the prayer of the heart which is not interrupted by the exercises of reason.

5. Nothing is so easily obtained as the possession and enjoyment of God. He is more present to us than we are

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to ourselves. Will it not then be highly sinful to neglect prayer? But doubtless you will not, when you have learned the method, which is the easiest in the world.

First Degree

THERE are two ways of introducing a soul into prayer, which should be pursued for some time; the one is *meditation*, the other is *reading, accompanied by meditation*.

1. Meditative reading is the choosing some important practical or speculative truth, always preferring the practical, and proceeding thus: Whatever truth you have chosen, read only a small portion of it, endeavoring to taste and digest it, to extract the essence and substance of it, and proceed no farther while any savor or relish remains in the passage; then take up your book again and proceed as before, seldom reading more than half a page at a time. Those who read fast, reap no more advantage than a bee would by only skimming over the surface of the flower, instead of waiting to penetrate into it, and extract its sweets.

First Degree

Much reading is rather for scholastic subjects than divine truths. To receive profit from spiritual books, we must read as I have described; and I am certain that if that method were pursued, we should become gradually habituated to prayer by our reading, and more fully disposed for its exercise.

2. Meditation, which is the other method, is to be practiced at an appropriate season, and not in the time of reading. Then let a lively faith in God, immediately present in our inmost souls, produce an eager sinking into ourselves, restraining all our senses from wandering abroad.

3. When we are thus fully entered into ourselves, and warmly penetrated throughout with a lively sense of the divine Presence; when the senses are all recollected, and withdrawn from the circumference to the center, and the soul is sweetly and silently employed on the truths we have read, not in reasoning, but in feeding thereon,

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and animating the will by affection, rather than by fatiguing the understanding by study, meditation then becomes silent prayer, or soul-communion with God, holding sweet, though inaudible converse with the Divine Presence.

4. But as I have said that our direct and principal exercise should consist in the contemplation of the Divine Presence, we should be exceedingly diligent in recalling our dissipated senses, as the most easy method of overcoming distractions; for a direct contest only serves to irritate and augment them; whereas, by sinking within, under a view by faith of a present God, and simply recollecting ourselves, we wage insensibly a very successful, though indirect war with them.

Meditative Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

1. THOSE who cannot read books, are not, on that account, excluded from prayer. The great book which teaches all things, and which is written all over, within and without, is Jesus Christ himself.

The method they should practice is this: They should first learn this fundamental truth, that "the kingdom of God is within them" (Luke 17:21), and that it must be sought there only.

2. They should then repeat the Lord's Prayer in their native tongue, pondering a little upon the meaning of the words, and the infinite willingness of that God who dwells within them to become, indeed, "their Father." Then, continuing the Lord's Prayer, let him beseech this King of Glory to reign in him, abandoning himself to God, that

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he may do it, and acknowledge his right to rule over him.

If they feel an inclination to peace and silence, let them not continue the words of the prayer so long as this sensation holds; and when it subsides, let them go on with the second petition, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," upon which let these humble supplicants beseech God to accomplish in them, and by them, all his will, and let them surrender their hearts and freedom into his hands, to be disposed of as he pleases. But they should not burden themselves with frequent repetitions of set forms, or studied prayers; or the Lord's Prayer, once repeated as I have just described, will produce abundant fruit.

3. At other times, they may place themselves as sheep before their Shepherd, looking up to him for their true food: O divine Shepherd, thou feedest thy flock with thyself, and art indeed their daily bread.

On other occasions, we may look to

Meditative Prayer

him as a physician, and present for his healing virtue all our maladies; but always without perturbation, and with pauses from time to time, that the silence, being mingled with action, may be gradually extended, and our own exertion lessened; till at length, by continually yielding to God's operations, he gains the complete ascendancy, as shall be hereafter explained.

Second Degree

1. SOME call the second degree of prayer *contemplation*, the prayer of *faith and stillness*, and others call it *the prayer of simplicity*. I shall here use this latter appellation, as being more just than that of contemplation, which implies a more advanced state than I am now treating of.

2. First, as soon as the soul by faith places itself in the presence of God, and becomes recollected before him, let it remain thus for a little time in respectful silence.

3. I would warmly recommend to all, never to finish prayer without remaining some little time afterward in a respectful silence. It is also of the greatest importance for the soul to go to prayer with courage, and to bring with it such a pure and disinterested love as seeks nothing from God but to please him, and to do his will; for a

Second Degree

servant who only proportions his diligence to his hope of reward, is unworthy of any recompense.

Aridities

1. THOUGH God has no other desire than to impart himself to the loving soul that seeks him, yet he frequently conceals himself from it, that it may be roused from sloth, and impelled to seek him with fidelity and love.

2. Thus only can you demonstrate that it is *himself* alone, and his good pleasure that you seek; and not the selfish delights of your own sensations in loving him. Be patient in prayer, though during your whole lifetime you should do nothing else than wait the return of the Beloved in a spirit of humiliation, abandonment, contentment, and resignation.

Abandonment

1. HERE we must begin to abandon and give up our whole existence to God, from the strong and positive conviction that the occurrences of every moment result from his immediate will and permission, and are just such as our state requires.

2. Abandonment is a matter of the greatest importance in our progress; it is the key to the inner court, so that he who knows truly how to abandon himself will soon become perfect.

3. Abandonment is the casting off all selfish care, that we may be altogether at the divine disposal. All Christians are exhorted to abandonment. (Matthew 6:32-34; Proverbs 3:6; 16:3; Psalm 37:5.) Our abandonment, then, should be, both in respect to external and internal things, an absolute giving up of all our concerns into the hands of God.

4. It is practiced by continually losing our own will in the will of God; renouncing every private inclination as soon as it arises, however good it may appear, that we may stand in indifference with respect to ourselves, and only will what God has willed from all eternity; resigning ourselves in all things, whether for soul or body, for time or eternity; forgetting the past, leaving the future to providence, and devoting the present to God; satisfied with the present moment, which brings with it God's eternal order in reference to us, and is as infallible a declaration of his will as it is inevitable and common to all.

Sufferings

Accepted as from God

1. BE patient under all the sufferings God sends; if your love to him be pure, you will not seek him less on Calvary than on Tabor. Be not like those who give themselves to him at one season, only to withdraw from him at another.

2. No, beloved souls, you will not find consolation in aught but in the love of the cross, and in total abandonment; who savoreth not the cross, savoreth not the things that be of God. (See Matthew 16:23.) Abandonment and the cross go hand-in-hand together.

3. As soon as anything is presented in the form of suffering, and you feel a repugnance, resign yourself immediately to God with respect to it, and give yourself up to him in sacrifice.

Mysteries

1. It will be objected, that, by this method, we shall have no mysteries imprinted on our minds; but so far is this from being the case, that it is the peculiar means of imparting them to the soul.

2. In this state of abandonment Jesus Christ frequently communicates some peculiar views, or revelations of his states; these we should thankfully accept, and dispose ourselves for what appears to be his will; receiving equally whatever frame he may bestow, and having no other choice but that of ardently reaching after him, of dwelling ever with him, and of sinking into nothingness before him, and accepting indiscriminately all his gifts, whether darkness or illumination, fecundity or barrenness, weakness or strength, sweetness or bitterness, temp-

tations, distractions, pain, weariness, or uncertainty.

3. God engages some, for whole years, in the contemplation and enjoyment of a single mystery, the simple view or contemplation of which recollects the soul; let them be faithful to it; but as soon as God is pleased to withdraw this view from the soul, let it freely yield to the deprivation.

Virtue

1. IT is thus that we acquire virtue with facility and certainty; for as God is the principle of all virtue, we inherit all in the possession of himself; and in proportion as we approach toward his possession, in like proportion do we receive the most eminent virtues.

2. What a hungering for sufferings have those souls, who thus glow with divine love! How would they precipitate themselves into excessive austerities, were they permitted to pursue their own inclinations!

3. Oh, were this simple method once acquired, a way so suited to all, to the dull and ignorant as well as to the most learned, how easily would the whole church of God be reformed! *Love* only is required. "Love," says St. Augustine, "and then do what you

please." For when we truly love, we cannot have so much as a will to do anything that might offend the object of our affections.

Mortification

1. I SAY further, that, in any other way, it is next to impossible to acquire a perfect mortification of the senses and passions. The reason is obvious: the soul gives vigor and energy to the senses, and the senses raise and stimulate the passions; a dead body has neither sensations nor passions, because its connection with the soul is dissolved. This life of the senses stirs up and provokes the passions, instead of suppressing or subduing them; austerities may indeed enfeeble the body, but for the reasons just mentioned, can never take off the keenness of the senses, nor lessen their activity.

2. The only method of affecting this is inward recollection, by which the soul is turned wholly and altogether inward, to possess a present God.

3. I do not mean by this to discour-

Mortification

age mortification, for it should ever accompany prayer, according to the strength and state of the person, or as obedience demands. We have only, then, to continue steadfast in the utmost attention to God, and all things will be perfectly done.

4. The soul has a double advantage by proceeding thus, for in withdrawing from outward objects it constantly draws nearer to God, and besides the secret sustaining and preserving power and virtue which it receives, it is farther removed from sin, and thus nearer it comes to him; so that its conversion becomes firmly established as a matter of habit.

Perfect Conversion

1. CONVERSION is nothing more than turning from the creature in order to return to God. It is not perfect (however good and essential to salvation) when it consists simply in turning from sin to grace. To be complete, it should take place from without inwardly.

When the soul is once turned toward God, it finds a wonderful facility in continuing steadfast in conversion, and the longer it remains thus converted the nearer it approaches and the more firmly it adheres to God; and the nearer it draws to him it is, of necessity, the farther removed from the creature, which is so contrary to him.

2. God has an attractive virtue which draws the soul more and more powerfully to himself, and in attracting he purifies; just as it is with a gross vapor exhaled by the sun, which, as it

Perfect Conversion

gradually ascends, is rarefied and rendered pure; the vapor, indeed, contributes to its ascent only by its passivity; but the soul coöperates freely and voluntarily. This kind of introversion is very easy, and advances the soul naturally and without effort, because God is our center.

3. But besides the attracting virtue of the center, there is, in every creature, a strong tendency to reunion with its center, which is vigorous and active in proportion to the spirituality and perfection of the subject. As soon as anything is turned toward its center, it is precipitated towards it with extreme rapidity, unless it be withheld by some invincible obstacle. A stone held in the hand is no sooner disengaged than by its own weight it falls to the earth as to its center; so, also, water and fire, when unobstructed, flow incessantly toward their center.

4. All our care should therefore be directed towards acquiring the greatest degree of inward recollection; nor

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should we be discouraged by the difficulties we encounter in this exercise, which will soon be recompensed on the part of God by such abundant supplies of grace as will render it perfectly easy, provided we are faithful in meekly withdrawing our hearts from outward distractions and occupations, and returning to our center with affections full of tenderness and serenity.

Active Contemplation

1. THE soul that is faithful in the exercise of love and adherence to God is astonished to feel him gradually taking possession of its whole being; it now enjoys a continual sense of that presence which is become, as it were, natural to it; and this, as well as prayer, becomes a matter of habit.

2. We must, however, urge it as a matter of the highest import, to cease from self-action and self-exertion, that God himself may act alone. (Psalm 46:10.) But the creature is so infatuated with love and attachment to its own working, that it does not believe that it works at all unless it can feel, know, and distinguish all its operations.

3. Those greatly err who accuse this prayer of inactivity, a charge that can only arise from inexperience. This

appearance of inaction is, indeed, not the consequence of sterility, but of abundance.

4. There are two kinds of people that keep silence; the one because they have nothing to say, the other because they have too much; the latter is the case in this state; silence is occasioned by excess, and not by defect. To be drowned, and to die of thirst, are deaths widely different; yet water may be said to be the cause of both; abundance destroys in one case, and want in the other. The infant hanging at its mother's breast is a lively illustration of our subject; it begins to draw the milk by moving its little lips; but when its nourishment flows abundantly it is content to swallow without effort.

5. But what becomes of the babe that thus gently and without exertion drinks the milk? Who would believe that it could thus receive nourishment? Yet the more peacefully it feeds the better it thrives.

Active Contemplation

The interior is not a stronghold, to be taken by storm and violence, but a kingdom of peace, which is to be gained only by love.

6. The most sublime attainments in religion are those which are easiest reached; the most necessary ordinances are the least difficult.

What is it you fear? Why do you not instantly cast yourself into the arms of Love, who only extended them on the cross that he might embrace you? What risk do you run in depending solely on God, and abandoning yourself wholly to him? Ah! he will not deceive you, unless by bestowing an abundance beyond your highest hopes; but those who expect all from themselves may hear this rebuke of God by his prophet Isaiah, "Ye have wearied yourselves in the multiplicity of your ways, and have not said, Let us rest in peace" (Isaiah 57:10, Vulgate).

Rest Before God

1. THE soul advanced thus far, has no need of any other preparation than its quietude; for now the presence of God, during the day, which is the great effect, or rather continuation of prayer, begins to be infused, and almost without intermission. The only way to find him is by introversion. No sooner do the bodily eyes close than the soul is wrapped in prayer.

2. The same may be said of this species of prayer that is said of wisdom, "All good things come together with her" (Wisdom 7:11). For virtues flow from this soul into exercise with so much sweetness and facility that they appear natural to it, and the living spring within breaks forth abundantly into a facility for all goodness, and an insensibility to all evil.

3. Let it then remain faithful in

Rest Before God

this state; and beware of choosing or seeking any other disposition whatever than this simple rest, as a preparative either to confession or communion, to action or prayer.

Interior Silence

1. The reason why inward silence is so indispensable is because the Word is essential and eternal, and necessarily requires dispositions in the soul in some degree correspondent to His nature, as a capacity for the reception of himself.

2. Hence it is so frequently enjoined upon us in sacred writ to listen and be attentive to the voice of God. (Isaiah 51: 4; 46: 3; Psalm 45: 10, 11.) We must forget ourselves and all self-interest, and listen and be attentive to God.

3. Outward silence is very requisite for the cultivation and improvement of inward; and, indeed, it is impossible we should become truly interior, without loving silence and retirement. When, through weakness, we become,

Interior Silence

as it were, uncentered, we must immediately turn again inward; and this process we must repeat as often as our distractions recur.

Self-Examination

1. Self-examination should always precede confession, but the manner of it should be conformable to the state of the soul. When we examine with effort we are easily deceived and betrayed by self-love into error. We must, then, forsake self and abandon our souls to God, as well in examination as confession.

2. When souls have attained to this species of prayer, no faults escape the reprehension of God; no sooner are they committed than they are rebuked by an inward burning and tender confusion.

3. Those who tread these paths should be informed of a matter respecting their confession, in which they are apt to err. When they begin to give an account of their sins, instead of the regret and contrition they had been

Self-Examination

accustomed to feel, they find that love and tranquillity sweetly pervade and take possession of their souls.

4. The soul will also be amazed at finding a difficulty in calling its faults to remembrance. This, however, should cause no uneasiness, first, because this forgetfulness of our faults is some proof of our purification from them, and, in this degree of advancement, it is best to forget whatever concerns ourselves that we may remember only God. Secondly, because when confession is our duty, God will not fail to make known to us our greatest faults; for then he himself examines; and the soul will feel the end of examination more perfectly accomplished than it could possibly have been by all our own endeavors.

Turning from Faults to God

1. Should we either wander among externals, or commit a fault, we must instantly turn inwards; for, having departed thereby from God, we should, as soon as possible, turn toward him, and suffer the penalty which he inflicts. It is of great importance to guard against vexation on account of our faults.

2. The truly humble soul is not surprised at its defects or failings; and the more miserable it beholds itself, the more it abandons itself to God, and presses for a more intimate alliance with him, seeing the need it has of his aid.

Distractions and Temptations

1. A direct struggle with distractions and temptations rather serves to augment them, and withdraws the soul from that adherence to God which should ever be its sole occupation. We should simply turn away from the evil, and draw yet nearer to God. A little child, on perceiving a monster, does not wait to fight with it, and will scarcely turn its eyes toward it, but quickly shrinks into the bosom of its mother, in assurance of its safety.

2. If we do otherwise, and in our weakness attempt to attack our enemies, we shall frequently find ourselves wounded, if not totally defeated; but, by remaining in the simple presence of God, we shall find instant supplies of strength for our support.

Prayer, a Devotional Sacrifice

1. Both devotion and sacrifice are comprehended in prayer, which, according to St. John, is an incense, the smoke whereof ascendeth unto God. Prayer is the effusion of the heart in the presence of God.

2. Prayer is a certain warmth of love, melting, dissolving, and sublimating the soul, and causing it to ascend unto God; and, as the soul is melted, odors rise from it, and these sweet exhalations proceed from the consuming fire of love within.

3. Thus doth the soul ascend to God, by giving up self to the destroying and annihilating power of divine love. This is a state of sacrifice essential to the Christian religion, in which the soul suffers itself to be destroyed and annihilated, that it may pay homage to the sovereignty of God. We must

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surrender our whole being to Christ Jesus, and cease to live any longer in ourselves, that he may become our life.

4. This is the prayer of truth; it is worshipping God "in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23.) In spirit, because we enter into the purity of that Spirit which prayeth within us, and are drawn forth from our own carnal and human method; in truth, because we are thereby placed in the truth of the all of God, and the nothing of the creature.

There are but these two truths, the *all*, and the *nothing*; everything else is falsehood. We can pay due honor to the *all* of God only in our own annihilation.

5. Jesus Christ assures us that the "kingdom of God is within us" (Luke 17:21), and this is true in two senses: first, when God becomes so fully master and lord in us that nothing resists his dominion, then our interior is his kingdom; and again, when we possess God,

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who is the Supreme Good, we possess his kingdom also, wherein there is fulness of joy, and wherein we attain the end of our creation.

Active Silence

1. Some persons, when they hear of the prayer of silence, falsely imagine that the soul remains stupid, dead, and inactive; but it unquestionably acts more nobly and more extensively than it had ever done before. It is not meant that we should cease from action; but that we should act through the internal agency of His grace.

2. This activity of the soul is attended with the utmost tranquillity. When it acts for itself, the act is forced and constrained, and, therefore, it is more easily distinguished; but when the action is under the influence of the Spirit of grace, it is so free, so easy, and so natural, that it almost seems as if we did not act at all. When a wheel rolls slowly we can easily perceive its parts; but when its motion is rapid, we can distinguish nothing. So the soul

which rests in God has an activity exceedingly noble and elevated, yet altogether peaceful; and the more peaceful it is, the swifter is its course; because it is given up to that Spirit by whom it is moved and directed.

3. This attracting Spirit is no other than God himself, who, in drawing us, causes us to run to him. How well did the spouse understand this, when she said, "Draw me, we will run after thee" (Canticles 1:4).

4. Instead, then, of encouraging sloth, we promote the highest activity by inculcating a total dependence on the Spirit of God as our moving principle; for it is in him, and by him alone, that "we live and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We must, therefore, forsake our multifarious activity to enter into the simplicity and unity of God, in whose image we were originally formed. In this way, when we are wholly moved by the divine Spirit, which is infinitely active, our activity

must, indeed, be more energetic than that which is merely our own.

5. God originally formed us in his own image and likeness; he breathed into us the Spirit of his Word, that breath of life (Genesis 2:7) which he gave us at our creation, in the participation whereof the image of God consisted.

6. As all action is estimable only in proportion to the grandeur and dignity of the efficient principle, this action is incontestably more noble than any other. Actions produced by a divine principle are divine; but creaturely actions, however good they appear, are only human, or, at least, virtuous, even when accompanied by grace.

7. Jesus Christ has exemplified this in the gospel. Martha did what was right; but because she did it in her own spirit, Christ rebuked her. The spirit of man is restless and turbulent; for which reason he does little, though he seems to do a great deal. "Martha," says Christ, "thou art careful and

troubled about many things; but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41, 42.) And what was it Mary had chosen? Repose, tranquillity, and peace. She had apparently ceased to act, that the Spirit of Christ might act in her; she had ceased to live, that Christ might be her life. This shows how necessary it is to renounce ourselves, and all our activity, to follow Christ; for we cannot follow him if we are not animated by his Spirit.

8. The spirit of divine action is so necessary in all things that St. Paul, in the same passage, founds that necessity on our ignorance with respect to what we pray for. "The Spirit," says he, "also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered." Why, then, should we be burthened with superfluous cares, and weary ourselves

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in the multiplicity of our ways, without ever saying, Let us rest in peace? God himself invites us to cast all our care upon him.

Internal Acts

1. Acts are distinguished into external and internal. External acts are those which appear outwardly, and bear relation to some sensible object, and have no moral character, except such as they derive from the principle from which they proceed. I intend here to speak only of internal acts, those energies of the soul by which it turns internally *towards* some objects, and *away from* others.

2. If during my application to God, I should form a will to change the nature of my act, I should thereby withdraw myself from God and turn to created objects, and that in a greater or less degree, according to the strength of the act; and if, when I am turned toward the creature, I would return to God, I must necessarily form an act for that purpose; and the more perfect this

Internal Acts

act is, the more complete is the conversion.

Till conversion is perfected, many reiterated acts are necessary; for it is with some progressive, though with others it is instantaneous.

To give the heart to God, is to have the whole energy of the soul centering in him, that we may be rendered conformable to his will. We must, therefore, continue invariably turned to God, from our first application to him.

3. As many reiterated acts form a habit, the soul contracts the habit of conversion; and that act which was before interrupted and distinct becomes habitual. We may remark that at times we form with facility many distinct yet simple acts which show that we have wandered, and that we reënter our heart after having strayed from it; yet, when we have reëntered, we should remain there in peace.

4. The great difficulty with most spiritual people arises from their not clearly comprehending this matter.

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Now, some acts are transient and distinct, others are continued, and again, some are direct, and others reflective. All cannot form the first, neither are all in a state suited to form the others.

5. By the continued act, I mean that whereby the soul is altogether turned toward God by a direct act, always subsisting, and which it does not renew unless it has been interrupted.

6. Now the soul that is thus profoundly and vigorously active, being wholly given up to God, does not perceive this act, because it is direct and not reflective.

7. It is, then, improper to say that we do not make acts; all form acts, but the manner of their formation is not alike in all. The mistake arises from this, that all who know they should act are desirous of acting distinguishably and perceptibly; but this cannot be; sensible acts are for beginners; there are others for those in a more advanced state.

Internal Acts

When the vessel is in port, the mariners are obliged to exert all their strength, that they may clear her thence, and put to sea; but they subsequently turn her with facility as they please. In like manner, while the soul remains in sin and the creature, many endeavors are requisite to effect its freedom; the cables which hold it must be loosed, and then, by strong and vigorous efforts, it gathers itself inward, pushes off gradually from the old port of Self, and, leaving that behind, proceeds to the interior, the haven so much desired.

8. When the vessel is thus started, as she advances on the sea she leaves the shore behind; and the farther she departs from the land, the less labor is requisite in moving her forward.

To spread the sails, is to lay ourselves before God in the prayer of simple exposition, to be moved by his Spirit; to hold the rudder, is to restrain our heart from wandering from the true course, recalling it gently, and

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guiding it steadily by the dictates of the Spirit of God, which gradually gains possession of the heart, just as the breeze by degrees fills the sails and impels the vessel.

9. If the wind be contrary and blow a storm, we must cast anchor in the sea, to hold the vessel. This anchor is simply trust in God and hope in his goodness, waiting patiently the calming of the tempest and the return of a favorable gale.

Barren Preaching

1. If all who labored for the conversion of others sought to reach them by the heart, introducing them immediately into prayer and the interior life, numberless and permanent conversions would ensue. If ministers were solicitous thus to instruct their parishioners, shepherds, while they watched their flocks, would have the spirit of the primitive Christians, and the husbandman at the plow maintain a blessed intercourse with his God.

2. Oh, when once the heart is gained, how easily is all the rest corrected! This is why God, above all things, requires the heart.

The decay of internal piety is unquestionably the source of the various errors that have appeared in the world; all would be speedily overthrown were inward devotion reestablished.

Oh, how inexpressibly great is the loss sustained by mankind from the neglect of the interior life! and what an account will those have to render who are entrusted with the care of souls, and have not discovered and communicated to their flocks this hidden treasure!

3. Some excuse themselves by saying that there is danger in this way, or that simple persons are incapable of comprehending the things of the Spirit. But the oracles of truth affirm the contrary.

4. The simple ones, so far from being incapable of this perfection, are, by their docility, innocence, and humility, peculiarly qualified for its attainment. We are told in Scripture that "unto the simple, God giveth the understanding of his law" (Psalm 118:130, Vulgate).

5. Man frequently applies a remedy to the outward body, whilst the disease lies at the heart. The cause of our being so unsuccessful in reforming

mankind, especially those of the lower classes, is our beginning with external matters.

6. I therefore beseech you all, O ye that have the care of souls, to put them at once into this way. O ye dispensers of his grace, preachers of his Word, ministers of his sacraments, establish his kingdom!—and that it may indeed be established, make him *ruler over the heart*.

7. Alas! by directing them to pray in elaborate forms, and to be curiously critical therein, you create their chief obstacles. The children have been led astray from the best of fathers, by your endeavoring to teach them too refined a language. Go, then, ye poor children, to your Heavenly Father, speak to him in your natural language; rude and barbarous as it may be, it is not so to him.

8. Men have desired to love Love by formal rules, and have thus lost much of that love. Oh, how unnecessary is it to teach an art of loving! The most

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ignorant often become the most perfect, because they proceed with more cordiality and simplicity. The Spirit of God needs none of our arrangements; when it pleases him, he turns shepherds into prophets, and, so far from excluding any from the temple of prayer, he throws wide the gates that all may enter. And doth not Jesus Christ himself thank his Father for having "hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes?" (Matthew 11:25.)

Divine Union

The Passive Way to Its Attainment

1. It is impossible to attain divine union solely by the way of meditation, or of the affections, or by any devotion, no matter how illuminated. All the efforts, nay, the very existence, of self, must be destroyed; because nothing is opposite to God but self, and all the malignity of man is in self-appropriation, as the source of its evil nature; insomuch that the purity of a soul increases in proportion as it loses this self-hood; and that which was a fault while the soul lived in self-appropriation is no longer such after it has acquired purity and innocence by departing from that self-hood which caused the dissimilitude between it and God.

2. To unite two things so opposite

as the purity of God and the impurity of the creature, the simplicity of God and the multiplicity of man, much more is requisite than the efforts of the creature. Nothing less than an efficacious operation of the Almighty can ever accomplish this; for two things must have some relation or similarity before they can become one; as the impurity of dross cannot be united with the purity of gold.

3. The impurity which is so fatal to union consists in self-appropriation and activity. Self-appropriation, because it is the source and fountain of all that defilement which can never be allied to essential purity, as the rays of the sun may shine, indeed, upon mire, but can never be united with it. Activity, for God being an infinite stillness, the soul, in order to be united to him, must participate of his stillness, else the contrariety between stillness and activity would prevent dissimilation. Therefore the soul can never arrive at a divine union but in the rest of its

Divine Union

will; nor can it ever become one with God but by being reëstablished in central rest and in the purity of its first creation.

4. God purifies the soul by his wisdom, as refiners do metals in the furnace.

5. Further, the pure and the impure gold are not mingled; before they can be united, they must be equally refined; the goldsmith cannot mix dross and gold. What will he do, then? He will purge out the dross with fire, so that the inferior may become as pure as the other, and then they may be united.

6. Thus we may see that the divine justice and wisdom, like a pitiless and devouring fire, must destroy all that is earthly, sensual, and carnal, and all self-activity, before the soul can be united to its God.

7. It may, perhaps, be objected here, that as God never robs man of his free will, he can always resist the divine operations. By man's giving a passive consent, God, without usurpa-

tion, may assume full power and an entire guidance; for, having in the beginning of his conversion made an unreserved surrender of himself to all that God wills of him, or by him, he thereby gave an active consent to whatever God might afterwards require. But when God begins to burn, destroy, and purify, the soul does not perceive that these operations are intended for its good, but rather supposes the contrary; and, as the gold at first seems rather to blacken than brighten in the fire, so it conceives that its purity is lost; insomuch, that if an active and explicit consent were then required, the soul could scarcely give it, nay, would often withhold it. All it does is to remain firm in its passive consent, enduring as patiently as possible all these divine operations, which it is neither able nor desirous to obstruct.

8. In this manner, therefore, the soul is purified from all its self-originated, distinct, perceptible, and multiplied operations, which constitute

Divine Union

a great dissimilitude between it and God; it is rendered by degrees *conform*, and then *uniform*.

9. We do not, then, say, as some have supposed, that there is no need of activity; since, on the contrary, it is the gate, at which, however, we should not always tarry, since we ought to tend toward ultimate perfection, which is impracticable except the first helps are laid aside; for, however necessary they may have been at the entrance of the road, they afterwards become greatly detrimental to those who adhere to them obstinately, preventing them from ever attaining the end.

10. But while we confess that the enjoyment of God is the end for which alone we were created, and that every soul that does not attain divine union and the purity of its creation in this life can only be saved as by fire, how strange it is that we should dread and avoid the process; as if that could be the cause of evil and imperfection in the present life, which is to produce

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the perfection of glory in the life to come.

11. None can be ignorant that God is the supreme good; that essential blessedness consists in union with him; that the saints differ in glory, according as the union is more or less perfect; and that the soul cannot attain this union by the mere activity of its own powers, since God communicates himself to the soul in proportion as its passive capacity is great, noble, and extensive.

Now, the whole desire of the Divine Being is to give himself to every creature according to the capacity with which it is endowed; and yet, alas! how reluctantly man suffers himself to be drawn to God! how fearful is he to prepare for divine union!

12. Some say that we must not place ourselves in this state. I grant it; but I say, also, that no creature could ever do it, since it would not be possible for any, by all their own

Dibine Union

efforts, to unite themselves to God ; it is he alone must do it.

They say, again, that some may feign to have attained this state. None can any more feign this than the wretch who is on the point of perishing with hunger can, for any length of time, at least, feign to be full and satisfied.

Since, then, none can attain this end by their own labor, we do not pretend to introduce any into it, but only point out the way that leads to it, beseeching all not to become attached to the accommodations on the road, external practices, which must all be left behind when the signal is given.

Let us all agree in the way, as we all agreed in the end, which is evident and incontrovertible. The way has its beginning, progress, and termination ; and the nearer we approach the consummation, the farther is the beginning behind us ; it is only by leaving the one that we can arrive at the other. You cannot get from the entrance to a distant place without passing over the

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intermediate space, and, if the end be good, holy, and necessary, and the entrance also good, why should the necessary passage, the direct road leading from the one to the other, be evil?

Oh, the blindness of the greater part of mankind who pride themselves on science and wisdom! How true is it, O my God, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes!

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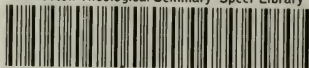
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