A mirror for monks, ed. by sir J.D. Coleridge

by

Franciscus Ludovicus Blosius

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To the Bodleian Library,
from S. J. Dodgson, June 27, 1913.
A MIRROR FOR MONKS.

WRITTEN BY
LEWIS BLOSIUS,
ABBOT OF ST. BENET'S ORDER.

EDITED, WITH A PREFACE, BY
SIR JOHN DUKE COLERIDGE,
HER MAJESTY’S ATTORNEY GENERAL,
M.P. FOR EXETER, AND LATE FELLOW OF EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD.

SECOND EDITION

LONDON:
C. J. STEWART, II, KING WILLIAM STREET, W.C.
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PREFACE.

The author of the following treatise, Louis François de Blois, or (to adopt the style by which, from the fact of his having written in Latin, he is more commonly known) Ludovicus Franciscus Blosius, was born in the month of October, 1506, at the Chateau of Doustienne, in the diocese of Liege, in Hainault. He was of a house noble in itself, and connected with more than one royal family, his father being Adrian de Blois, Seigneur of Juvigni, and his mother, Catharine de Barbançon. His parents had ten children, six sons, most of them men of distinction in their various ways of life, and four daughters. The youngest daughter, under the influence of her brother Louis, to whom she was tenderly attached, devoted herself to a Religious life, pursuing it with a gentle perseverance, of which the biographer of her brother has left us a striking record. Blosius
Preface.

was educated at the Court of Prince Charles, afterwards the Emperor Charles V., by whom he was greatly beloved, and who is said to have been a constant student of his writings. At the early age of fourteen he entered the Benedictine Order at the Monastery of Liessies, in Hainault, and in the course of a very few years the singular beauty of his character and the holiness of his life recommended him to the Abbot, Giles Gipius, as Coadjutor in the government of the Society. In 1530, while only twenty-four years old, he succeeded Giles as Abbot. From that time till his death in 1563 or 1566 (the date of his death appears to be uncertain), he devoted himself entirely to the government of his monastery, to the improvement of its discipline, and the ripening and strengthening of its Religious character, both by his own personal influence and example, and by a new body of statutes which he drew up, and for which he procured the approval of Pope Paul III. in 1545. The Abbacy of Tournay and the Archbishopric of Cambray were pressed
upon him in vain by Charles V. He would not leave his monastery, and lived and died an example of that holy life which it is the main object of all his works to build up and confirm in others.

His works fill a folio volume, are written in Latin, and are entirely devotional. The most famous of them is the little treatise, an old translation of which is now reprinted. It was published by Blosius under the assumed name of the Abbot Dacryanus, and during his lifetime he never openly acknowledged himself its author. Indeed, in the Life of Blosius prefixed to the complete edition of his works, published at Ingoldstadt in 1726, under the care of Anthony de Winghe, there is an elaborate discussion whether it was in truth the work of Dacryanus or of Blosius himself. There can be no kind of doubt, however, that Blosius wrote it. There never was an Abbot Dacryanus, and the name itself, the "Weeper," is manifestly symbolical of the contents of the book.
The Mirror for Monks has been very popular. It has been translated into French, first by De la Nauze, in 1726, and secondly by the celebrated De Lamennais, in 1820. De Lamennais prefixed to his edition a striking Preface, eulogizing ascetic writers in general, and Blosius in particular. "It would be a great mistake," says he, "to suppose, on account of this title, that it is of use only to those for whom it seems to have been principally composed. There is no Christian, in whatever station he may be, who may not read it and meditate upon it with profit. All the precepts of the spiritual life, all the counsels which can lead to perfection, are here brought together, and we are not afraid to say, presented with a charm of manner which renders them attractive, without any touch of the scholastic dryness which too often mars the best works of this kind. We know none, not even excepting the Imitation of Christ, so superior in other respects, which unites in the same degree sweetness, tenderness, lively
feeling, and naïve expression. One sees and feels throughout that the author is himself penetrated by the truths he proclaims, for 'the heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.'”*

The English translation here reprinted was published in Paris in 1676, and has become now a book of extreme rarity. The copy used for this reprint, the use of which I owe to the kindness of Mr. Richmond, is, in spite of many endeavours to procure another, the only one I ever saw. The book is not mentioned in the last edition of Brunet, and only one example of it is noticed in Mr. Bohn’s edition of Lowndes.

I have made the spelling conform to our present usage. The spelling of 1676, at any rate the spelling of this book, has no philological value. It is simply bad and incorrect spelling; and to have retained it would have been valueless to the scholar, and a mere hindrance to the free use of the work itself as a book of devotion or meditation.

* Proverbs xvi. 23.
I am unable to give any account of the translation, or to say who was the translator. There are a considerable number of like translations, of more or less merit, made about the same time, and published abroad for the use of English Roman Catholics living in foreign countries. The writers of these books never returned to England; the readers of them were gradually merged into the population of the foreign countries where they lived; and thus the history of the books, and the very names of their writers, are now unknown, at least in England, and possibly have perished altogether.

I, at any rate, can furnish no information; but I hope the beauty and value of the book itself will be a sufficient reason for its being reprinted with any one who reads it. I have no other reason to give for reprinting it, but that I hope it may do good. Blosius, it is true, was a Roman Catholic Abbot of the sixteenth century. But it may soften prejudice and enlarge sympathy to find, as in the much higher example of the *Imitation of Christ,*
Preface.

how pure, how simple, how Scriptural, how devout, how intensely and essentially Christian was the religion taught and practised by such a man at such a time. I might indeed, as both the French translators did, have softened the title, which as it stands may awaken prejudice; and have altered a sentence here and there, with which, perhaps, all readers belonging to the Church of England may not agree. But I have thought it best to leave Blosius as I found him, and as his English translator left him. The Mirror for Monks is really a looking-glass for Christians, and to Christian readers I commend it.

John Duke Coleridge.

Buckland Court, Ashburton,
1st October, 1870.

I had intended to confine the reprint of this translation to the very limited number of copies which during the present year have
been placed in the hands of those few persons
I thought might feel interested in the matter.
But the little book has excited more interest
and been received with more favour than
I expected; and I have been advised by
some, to whose opinion and wishes I owe
every deference, to allow of its publication.
Among these I may mention Dr. Newman,
Mr. Gladstone, and my father, Sir John Taylor
Coleridge. Accordingly the book is now
published, contrary to my original intention,
but no doubt on my responsibility.

It is hardly necessary to say that I do
not agree with every theological doctrine which
Blosius assumes or inculcates in his book.
But I think the book in itself a good and
beautiful book; I believe the writer of it to
have been a holy man; and I do not think
it right, in spite of high authority to the
contrary, to mutilate or adapt such works as
these. To do so appears to me unmanly and
unfair. It is as if we were afraid of the
soundness of our convictions, and dared not
look in the face the fact that good men in other times did not share them. Whereas it is part of Christian history that very good and saintly men have held opinions in religion which we now think mistaken; and it is a narrow and shallow judgement which holds such opinions to be inconsistent with true and vital Christianity. This book, to my mind, proves that they are nowise inconsistent; and I most earnestly hope that those who read it carefully will think so too; and may find it kindle or increase in their hearts the love of God and of His Son.

JOHN DUKE COLERIDGE.

*Buckland Court, Ashburton,*
31st August, 1871.
A TABLE OF THE THINGS CONTAINED IN THIS TREATISE.

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A MIRROR FOR MONKS.

CHAPTER I.

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

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

Busy yourself in repressing the unstable wander-
ings of your heart; strive to overcome weariness,
idleness, and the irksomeness of your infirm mind.
Spend your daily labour in these things; let this
be your glorious contention and healthful affliction.
Be not remiss; but arise, watch, look about you,
and expose yourself wholly, lest you be evilly
partial to yourself. God requireth thus much of
you; so doth your state.

You are called a Monk: see that you be truly
what you are called. Do the work of a Monk.
Labour earnestly in beating down and casting forth
vice.

Be always armed against the frowardness of
nature, against the haughtiness of mind, against
the pleasures of your flesh, and the enticements of
sensuality. Understand well what I say. If you permit pride, boasting, vainglory, self-complacency, to domineer over your reason, you are no Monk.

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

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

If a contentious and earnest strife being risen between you and another, you do not presently treat of a reconciliation, and what wrong soever hath been done, you do not presently pardon sincerely, but seek for revenge, and retain a voluntary private grudge, and not a true and sincere affection in your heart, or show outwardly signs of disaffection—nay, if when occasion and necessity requireth, you defer to help him that hath injured you, you are no Monk, you are no Christian, you are abominable before God.

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

If you neglect readily and faithfully to obey your ghostly Father, if you refuse to reverence and sincerely to love him as God's vicar, you are no Monk.

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

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

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

If you desire delicate and superfluous meats, and intemperately long after the drinking of wine beyond the measure of a cup, especially if you be in health, and have beer or other convenient drink sufficiently, you are no Monk.
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If foolishly you require precious apparel, soft beds, and other solaces of the flesh which agree not with your state and profession; if, loving corporal rest, you refuse to undergo labour and affliction for God's sake, you are no Monk.

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

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

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

If you esteem not the ordinations of holy religion, though never so little, and willingly do transgress them, you are no Monk. To conclude: If you seek any other thing in the monastery but God, and with might and main aspire not to perfection, you are no Monk.

As I have said, therefore, that you may truly be what you are called, and may not wear the habit of a Monk in vain, do the work of a Monk.
Arm yourself against yourself, and as much as in you lieth overcome and subdue yourself. If presently you find not the peace you desire; if, I say, as yet you cannot be at rest, but are troubled and assailed by brutish motions and turbulent passions: yea, if so be by God's permission, for your own profit, throughout your whole life you shall have to do with such enemies, despair not, be not effeminately dejected, but, humbling yourself before God, stand and be steadfast in your place, and skirmish stoutly; for even the vessel of election, St. Paul, endured temptations all his lifetime, in which he was buffeted by the angel of Satan. When he often beseeched our Lord to be freed from this trouble he obtained it not, for that it was not expedient for him; but our Lord answered his prayer, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for strength is perfected in weakness." And so afterwards St. Paul did gratefully endure the scourge of temptation. Being comforted by the example of this most strong and invincible champion, faint not in temptation, but endure manfully, remaining fixed and immovable in this holy purpose; for without doubt, this labour of yours is grateful to God,
although the same seem hard and insufferable to you. Go through this spiritual martyrdom with an invincible mind. Doubt not, although you be a thousand times wounded, and as often trod under foot, if you stand to it, if you give not ground to your enemy and like a coward cast not away your weapons, you shall receive a crown. Do according to your ability, and commend the rest to God's disposing, saying: As Thy will is in Heaven, so be it done. Let the divine will and ordination be your chief consolation. Which way soever you turn yourself, wheresoever you are, you shall find tribulations and temptations as long as this life lasteth; which, that you may patiently endure, you ought always to be prepared.

But you are happy, if by grace you have proceeded so far that all grief and affliction whatsoever become truly pleasing to you for God's sake. What think you, Brother, is my glass big enough; or is not this yet sufficient for you, but you yet desire to hear in more express terms, more abundantly and fully, how to compose yourself within and without, or how, according to reason, you ought to order every day before God.
CHAPTER II.

HOW WE OUGHT TO BESTOW OUR TIME FROM OUR FIRST RISING TO MATINS IN THE MORNING.

As soon as you are awake and ready to rise to Matins, devoutly arm yourself with the sign of the Cross, and briefly pray to God that He will vouchsafe to blot out the stains of sin in you, and be pleased to help you. Then, casting all vain imaginations out of your mind, think upon some other thing that is spiritual, and conceive as much purity of heart as you can, rejoicing in yourself that you are called up to the praise and worship of your Creator. But if frailty of body, if heaviness of sleep, if conturbation of spirit, depress you, be not out of heart, but be comforted and force yourself, overcoming all impediments with reason and willingness; for the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Certainly, according to the labour which
you undergo for the love of God, such shall be your recompense and reward. Being come off from your bed, commend and offer yourself, both body and soul, to the Most High; make haste to the choir, as to a place of refuge and the garden of spiritual delights. Until Divine Office begins, study to keep your mind in peace and simplicity, free from troubles and the multiplicity of uncertain thoughts; collecting a goodly and sweet affection towards your God by sincere meditation or prayer. In the performance of the Divine Office have a care to pronounce and hear the holy words reverently, perfectly, thankfully, and attentively, that you may taste that your Lord is sweet, and may feel that the Word of God hath incomprehensible sweetness and power. For whatsoever the Holy Ghost hath dictated is indeed the life-procuring food, and the delightful solace of a chaste, sober, and humble soul. Remember, therefore, to be there faithfully attentive, but avoid too vehement cogitations and motions of mind; especially if your head be weak, lest being hurt or wearied, confounded and straitened internally, you shut the sanctuary of God against yourself. Reject, likewise, too troublesome care,
which commonly bringeth with it pusillanimity and restlessness, and persevere with a gentle, quiet, and watchful spirit in the praises of God, without singularity. But if you cannot keep your heart from wanderings, be not dejected in mind; but patiently endeavour, patiently do what lieth in your power, committing the rest to the divine will. Persevere in your goodly affection towards God, and even your very defects, which you are no way able to exclude, will in a manner beget you consolation. For as the earth, which is of a convenient nature, doth by the casting of dung, oftentimes more faithfully send forth her seeds; so a mind of goodwill, out of the defects which by constraint it sustaineth, shall in due time receive the most sweet fruit of divine visitation, if it endure them with patience.

And what profit do you reap by being impatient? Do you not heap calamity upon calamity? Do you not show your want of true humility, and bewray in yourself a pernicious propriety?*

* This word is here used in a sense perhaps new to many readers. It does not of course mean what we now commonly understand by it; but is used by Blosius and by many other ascetic writers to signify
As long as you do reverently assist, and are ready with a prompt desire of will to attend, you have satisfied God; neither will He impute the inordinateness of this instability to you, if so be by your negligence you give not consent unto it, and before the time of prayer you set a guard over your senses. If you cannot offer a perfect dutifulness, offer at least a good will: offer a right intent in the spirit of humility; and so the devil shall not find any occasion to cavil against you. Although you have nothing else to offer but a readiness, in body and spirit, to serve our Lord in holy fear, be sure of it that you shall not lose your reward. But, woe to your soul, if you be negligent and remiss, and care not to give attendance; for it is written—"Cursed is the man that doth the work of God negligently." Be diligent, that you may perform what you are able, if you a habit of mind the opposite of that which is expressed by the word "detachment." "Self-seeking" has been suggested to me as an equivalent, but it hardly is so. Perhaps "the thinking of things solely with reference to oneself," or "a desire to possess things whether temporal or spiritual for oneself alone," would express the idea intended to be conveyed by the word. But the periphrasis would be long and awkward, and I leave the word as it is, here and elsewhere in the treatise, with this explanation.
be not able to perform what you desire. Upon this security, be not troubled when impediments happen, and you be not able to perform as much as you would. When, I say, distraction of your senses, dejection of mind, dryness of heart, grief of head, or any other misery or temptation afflicteth you, beware you say not: I am left, our Lord hath cast me away, my duty pleaseth Him not. These are words befitting the children of distrust. Endure, therefore, with a patient and joyful mind all things for His sake that hath called and chosen you, firmly believing that He is near to those that are of a contrite heart. For if you humbly, without murmuring, carry this burden laid on you, not by mortal tongue to be uttered, what a deal of glory you heap up for yourself in the life to come. You may truly say unto God: As a beast am I become with Thee. Believe me, Brother, if being replete with internal sweetness, and lifted up above yourself, you fly up to the third heaven, and there converse with Angels, you shall not do so great a deed as if for God's sake you shall effectually endure grief and banishment of heart and be conformable to our Saviour; when, in
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extreme sorrow, anguish, fear, and adversity, crying unto His Father—“Let Thy will be done;” Who also, being thrust through His hands and feet, hanging on the Cross, had not whereon to lean His Head; Who also most lovingly endured for thee all the griefs and disgraces of His most bitter Passion. Therefore, in holy longanimity, contain yourself, and expect in silence until it shall please the Most High to dispose otherwise. And certainly in that day it shall not be demanded of you how much internal sweetness you have here felt; but how faithful you have been in the love and service of God.
CHAPTER III.

GOD HATH TWO SORTS OF SERVANTS, AND THE DESCRIPTION OF BOTH.

Among those that are called the servants of God, many serve Him unfaithfully, few faithfully. Indeed, unfaithful servants, as long as they have sensible devotion and present grace of tears, do serve God with alacrity, they pray willingly, joyfully go about good works, and seem to live in deep peace of heart; but as soon as God hath thought it good to withdraw that devotion, you shall see them troubled, chafe, become malicious and impatient, and at last neither willing to be at their prayers nor any other divine exercises. And because they feel not internal consolations as they desire, they perniciously betake themselves to those that are external and contrary to the spirit, whereby it is manifest that they are not purely God's gift, and abuse them to their own pleasure; for if they did love God purely, and did not viciously rest in
His gifts, they would remain peaceable in God, those gifts being taken away; and would not even then turn out of the way to unlawful consolations. Therefore they are unfaithful, because in adversity they keep not touch with God. They believe for awhile, and shrink back in time of trial. They would have all things go on their side, and endure nothing that goeth against them. If God grant those things that they would have, they serve Him; if He deny them, they leave Him—nay, in prosperity they serve not God, but themselves; and in all things would rather have their own will done than God's. They place sanctity in internal sweetness and consolation, rather than in the perfect mortification of vices; being ignorant that by the withdrawing of devotion it more certainly appeareth, if one truly love God, than by the infusion of it. For that sensible devotion is commonly more truly a natural than spiritual devotion.

But whatsoever it be, unless a man make use of it wisely, it is wont oftentimes to bring him that is so affected to a hidden kind of pride, a wicked complacence and a vain security, as we daily see in these unfaithful servants. For as soon
as they are tickled with this inward sweetness, they will forsooth begin to judge and despise others: they think themselves great saints, and the secre-
taries of God; they expect and wonderfully long after divine revelations, and wish that some miracles were done by them, or of them, by which others might take notice of the holiness which they think they have, but have not. Thus do they use to vanish away in their own imaginations, who gape more after sensible grace than the Giver of grace. But faithful servants behave themselves far other-
wise, for they seek not themselves, but God; neither their own consolation, but chiefly the will and honour of God; they always fly propriety; whether God be pleased to infuse or not to infuse the influence of internal sweetness, they are all one, and persisting in equality of mind cease not to love and praise God. It is not internal darkness, nor difficulty of senses, nor coldness of affections, nor dryness of heart, nor dejection of mind, nor drowsiness of spirit, nor adversity of temptation; to conclude, it is neither misery of adversity, nor success of prosperity, that is able to heave them out of their place; for although, peradventure, they
feel in the inferior powers of the soul the oppression of inordinate sorrow proceeding from adversity, or the violence of sensual delight arising out of prosperity, they are not for all that dejected, because they continue quiet in the reason or higher part of the soul, and do conform their will to the divine will or permission, and grieve that they feel the least contradiction of unseemly motions. Being founded, therefore, as a firm rock, they persist steadfast in the love of God, as they whose chief comfort is in His will. They are always devout, because with all their power they avoid and abhor whatsoever is displeasing to God, and may never so little contaminate the purity of their heart; and, committing themselves in all chances to God, do still possess a pure, free, and quiet mind. This is the truest devotion and most acceptable to God. The other sensible devotion, which is more familiar to novices, or those that are lately converted, is not durable and sure, yet notwithstanding it is very profitable to us if we wisely make use of it. The faithful servants (for so I still call them, whom Christ calleth not servants, but friends), faithful servants, I say, do seek after that effectual
and most pleasant sweetness of grace also; they seek after the joy of our Lord's salvations; they seek after His most lovely countenance and most sweet embraces, but they do this with a spiritual and bashful, not with a sensual, greediness, or childish lightness, or a troubled impatience. They desire the gifts of God, not that they may be sensually delighted in them, but that, being made more fervent by them, and more pure from all inordinate-ness, they may please their heavenly Bridegroom. They love the gifts of God, and willingly thank Him for them; but yet they keep themselves, as it were, quiet and free from them as long as they rest not in them. By grace they go forward to the Giver of Grace and Supreme Good, in Whom only it is lawful for them to rest. They are truly happy, because by how much the less they stick to those gifts they receive so many the more.

And although they be never so much endowed with blessings from God, they lift not up their mind, they despise not others, but themselves; I say, they despise and acknowledge themselves unworthy of all spiritual grace, they always keep in mind that whatsoever they have it is of God's
mere mercy, and that of them more is exacted to whom more is given or committed. And so continuing in holy fear, and by these gifts proceeding in humility, they confess themselves to be below the lowest. They rejoice and glory within themselves if, being oppressed with unjust infamy, reproaches, injuries, and uttermost scorn, they have imitated Christ; not if they could be elevated above themselves by excess of mind, or could see strange visions, or do most apparent miracles. They, presently making the sign of the Cross, repel the deceitful suggestions by which the devil endeavours to allure them to vainglory and self-complacency, no way consenting to the subtleties of the wicked serpent. They do not confidently place the loss of their salvation either in the number or in the merit of good works which they do, but put their trust in the freedom of the sons of God, which they have obtained by the blood of Christ. We then, brother, knowing the difference of the faithful servants, endeavour to be of those which, may be, you are not of, and strive to leave them of whom, peradventure, you are one. If you are of those you would not be of, and are
not of those of whom you would be, grieve and humble yourself, for God giveth grace to the humble. And certainly, if you humble yourself in the sight of our Lord, grieving that you are yet of the number of the unfaithful, you have already in a manner passed into the lot of the faithful; labour, persevere, fear not. You shall not be reproved with the unfaithful, but shall be received with the faithful.

There are others also that are bound to the divine service, and yet cannot be called either faithful or unfaithful servants of God; these a man may lawfully call the idle slaves of the devil. I mean those unhappy wretches that, esteeming either not at all, or very little, of devotion or the grace of God, and altogether neglecting the interior parts, make a show, as though they honoured God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him. These being plunged over head and ears in a sea of evil, do little think of their own salvation. These are all one to-day as they were yesterday. They came from the choir as they went thither, viz., unclean, tepid, apt to no goodness, wandering, dissolute, without fear, without reverence. By the divine praises, which with a polluted mouth they
utter, they more exasperate than please. I would to God these had kept them in the world; for what do they in monasteries? why tread they on holy ground? why devour they the alms of the just? why pollute they the angelical schools of spiritual exercises with carnal delights? If they intended to live uncleanly, they should have remained in a place for their purpose, and not have entered into places of purity. Living negligently in monasteries, they double the punishments of hell which their ill living in the world had deserved. But it is out of our way to speak more of these things; wherefore I return whence I strayed.
CHAPTER IV.

THAT FOR EVERY HOUR OF THE DAY WE OUGHT TO CLEAVE TO SOME SETTLED EXERCISE, LEST OUR MIND GROW SLUGGISH.

So that you may be settled in your private exercise, prescribe yourself something what to do every hour, and to be busied in. But so that, if at any time, either upon obedience or any other private reasonable cause or chance happening, you abbreviate your exercise or wholly overslip it, you be not inordinately vexed, for you ought chiefly to endeavour to attain to this, that in the liberty and purity of heart (rejecting all propriety) you may always persevere, peaceable and without trouble before God. For this is acceptable to our Lord above all other exercises, be they never so laborious and hard. Whatsoever, therefore, shall hinder this liberty in you, although it be spiritual and seem very profitable, occasion so requiring, leave it as much as obedience doth
permit. Endeavour, I say, to repel all restlessness of heart, which choketh true peace and perfect trust in God with all spiritual proceedings. Let not vicious idleness at any time take place, for it destroyeth souls. Avoid also idle businesses; I mean those that are unprofitable, neither marvelous at this kind of speech. Let not vicious idleness at any time take place, for there is also a commendable idleness, which is when the soul, fixed on God, and exempted from the noise and imagination of all sensible things, doth rest as it were idle in internal silence, and in the most blessed embraces of her Beloved, to which, if the hand of our Lord bring you, you shall profitably and happily be idle. Otherwise, always either read, or meditate, or pray, or take in hand something else that shall be serious and necessary; and truly, if you will settle yourself with all diligence to the study of Scripture you will be wonderfully comforted, and every spiritual thing will begin to grow sweet unto you, and so it will come to pass that, being accustomed to holy delights, you will easily condemn those that are carnal, and your mind will be wonderfully strengthened in your good purpose. To the end,
therefore, that you may merit so great a fruit, willingly and wisely give yourself to reading; that is to say, in reading seek spiritual consolation and profit and the love of God, not curiosity, not superfluous understanding and knowledge, not neatness and elegance of words; for the Kingdom of God is not in elegance of speech but in holiness of life, which elegance of speech, nevertheless, as it is not over-carefully to be sought after if it be wanting, so it is not scornfully to be rejected by him that hath it, for it is also the gift of God. Receive all things with thanksgiving, and all things shall help forward for your salvation. Howbeit, be not troubled if many of those good things which you hear or read slip out of your memory. For as a vessel which often receiveth water remaineth clean, although the water poured in be presently poured out again, so likewise, if spiritual doctrine often run through a well-willing mind, although it abide not there, nevertheless it maketh and keepeth the mind clean and pleasing to God. Your chief profit consisteth, not in committing the word of doctrine to memory, but rather that the effects of the doctrine and words remain in you,
that is by this doctrine to get an internal purity, and a ready mind to fulfil the commandments of God. Learn to apply those things to yourself that are spoken against vice, for it is not safe to assert them against others with a fixed judgement of mind, lest while you obstinately judge another you defile or trouble your own conscience. And so, in all things which seem any way obscene, avoid as much as in you lieth even the very least allurement of any slippery motion; if by way of temptation they do impugn, molest, and trouble you importantly, contradict them with reason, deny to give consent, and, making the sign of the Cross, direct your whole intention to God. For so without hurt you may escape this danger. Furthermore, do not imitate those that observe no order in reading, but do read what cometh first to hand and where they first open the book; they like nothing which is not new and strange, for they loathe all things that are usual and stale, though never so profitable. Far be such instability from you, for it doth not recollect but distract the spirit, and he is dangerously sick that is tainted with this disease. Wisely bind your mind to a certainty of reading, and
accustom yourself to go through with it, although sometimes it administer no matter of pleasure.

Read, I say, not confusedly or disorderly, but methodically. Repeat those things again and again that are good. Nevertheless, in time of tribulation and spiritual poverty you may intermit what you have begun, and, according to your necessity, turn and apply yourself to other godly exercises which may be more consolatory.

For it is the opinion of the Fathers that it is good to go to prayer or meditation from reading, and again to have recourse to reading from prayer; that prayer with a commendable vicissitude succeeding reading and reading succeeding prayer, loathsomeness may be taken away; and the mind being, as it were, fresh and lusty, may always be the more able for the proposed work, and that the greater fruit may be reaped of both. And what hindrance is there why a man should not make short prayers even in reading, and aspire to God by holy desires? There are many things that may serve either for reading or prayer or meditation: such are all the Scriptures in which there is conference with God. Always prefer common prayers before
private, and judge them to be more profitable for you, although sometimes they may seem more barren and unsavoury. In like manner, esteem of all common and regular actions, for above all things obedience ought to be in the first place. If, peradventure, you demand in what prayers and meditations you should in private chiefly exercise yourself: if you will credit me, after you have accused yourself and craved pardon for your sins, you shall chiefly beseech God to mortify your evil passions and vicious affections, and quite and clean to strip you of all inordinateness; and that He will be pleased to grant you grace joyfully and patiently to endure all tribulation and temptation. Ask of Him profound humility and most fervent charity. Beseech Him to vouchsafe always to direct, teach, illuminate, and protect you in all things. These things, in my judgement, are most necessary for you. And, indeed, they are most great and high, neither can they otherwise be obtained than by prayer. Persevere, therefore, continually knocking; and without doubt our Lord will at length open unto you, and will give you as much bread as your necessity shall require. But so you neglect not
willingly to give thanks for what you have received. For nothing displeaseth God more than forgetfulness and ingratitude for received benefits. And that you may the more willingly and sooner incline God's benignity unto you, pray attentively for the state of the whole Church, commending unto God all the Faithful, both alive and dead, and every reasonable creature. Will you further hear in what with profit you may exercise yourself. I will tell you: singing of psalms is profitable, the godly meditating on other parts of Scripture is profitable, the consideration of creatures compared to their Creator is profitable.
CHAPTER V.

HOW POWERFUL AND EFFICACIOUS THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST'S LIFE AND PASSION IS.

All prayers, singing of hymns, thanksgiving, and holy meditations are profitable. But by consent of all, the remembrance of Christ's Humanity, and especially of His most sacred Passion, is said to be most profitable and only necessary, and with justice. For it is the present extermination of passions and inordinate affections, a fit refuge in temptation and surest safeguard in dangers, a sweet refreshing in distress, a friendly rest from labour, a gentle repressing of distractions, the true door of sanctity, the only entry to contemplation, the sweet consolation of the soul, the unfailing flame of divine love, the salver of all adversities, the fountain of all virtues, from whence they flow to us: to conclude, the absolute example of all perfection, the haven, hope, trust, merit, and salvation.
of all Christians. I knew a Monk, whose custom was to propose to himself every day some part of our Lord's Passion, as, for example, one day he would set before his eyes Christ's being in the Garden. And whithersoever he went that day, wheresoever he chanced to be, if not troubled with any other serious and necessary cogitation, whatsoever he did outwardly, he took a special care to direct his internal eye to our Lord suffering distresses in the Garden, and thus would he talk with his soul: And my soul, behold thy God. Behold, daughter, attend, see, and consider, most dear! Behold thy God, behold thy Creator, behold thy Father, behold thy Redeemer and Saviour! behold thy refuge, behold thy defender and protector, behold thy hope, trust, strength, and health! Behold thy sanctification, purity, and perfection! behold thy help, merit, and reward! behold thy tranquillity, consolation, and sweetness! Behold thy joy, thy delights, and thy life! behold thy light, thy crown, and thy glory! behold thy love and thy desire! behold thy treasure and all thy good! behold thy beginning and thy end! Whither art thou scattered, thou wandering daughter? How long wilt
thou leave the light and love darkness? How long wilt thou forsake peace and involve thyself in troubles! Return, return, thou Sunamite, return! Daughter, return and recollect thyself, most dear! leave many things and embrace one—for one thing is necessary for thee. Abide with thy Lord; place thyself by thy God; go not from thy Master; sit in His shadow Whom thou lovest, that His fruit may be sweet to thy throat. It is good for thee to be here, daughter. For hither the enemy cannot make his approach; here are no snares, no dangers, no darkness. All things are here safe, all things calm. Reside here willingly, most dear. For here thou shalt be safe and free, thou shalt be merry and joyful. Here are roses, lilies, and violets; here flowers of all virtues do smell most pleasantly. Here thou shalt see a brightness sweetly enlightening all things with his rays. Here thou shalt find true consolation; here thou shalt find peace and rest. To conclude, here thou shalt find all good.

With such short sentences he would both sharply and sweetly spur forward his soul, and call her home when she was wandering abroad, and force her to apply herself to the chiefest good. Of