

The Story of Annette;

A Soul in HELL

Introduction

What is related in these pages is of the greatest importance. Though the events in question took place in Germany, what we give here is, as far as we are able, a faithful translation from the original language. The "Nihil obstat" was granted by the Vicar of Rome, and the "Imprimatur" of the Pope's Vicar for Rome guarantees the text free from doctrinal error. These frightening pages must sound a warning for us, describing as they do a way of life which is very common in present-day society. The Divine Mercy, in allowing these revelations, lifts for us a corner of the veil hiding that most awesome of mysteries which awaits us all at the term of our days on earth.

We hope that many souls will hear and take heed

The Story

Claire and Annette were two girls working for a firm in southern Germany. They were not particularly close friends, but simply observed normal everyday courtesies towards each other. However, working as they did side by side each day, they naturally got around to exchanging views on life, etc. Claire confessed openly that she was a Christian and she considered it her duty to instruct her colleague and to call her charitably back into line when she treated matters of religion lightly or superficially. Thus they spent some time together until Annette married and gave up her job to go and live elsewhere. It was in 1937. In the autumn of the some year Claire was spending her holidays with beside Lake Garda when, towards the middle of September, her mother wrote from home the sad news that Annette had been killed in an automobile accident and had been buried the day before. Claire was horrified by the news, knowing as she did how little her friend had cared about her religion. Had she

been ready to appear before God? What had been the state of her soul at the moment of her unexpected death? The next morning Claire heard Mass, offered her Holy Communion for her unfortunate friend and prayed fervently for her soul. But that very night, ten minutes after midnight, the following vision came to her.

"Claire," said Annette, "don't pray for me. I am damned. I have come to tell you that and to speak to you at length about it, but do not think I am doing it out of friendship. We who are here in this place, we do not love anyone anymore. I am doing what I am doing because I am forced to. I am acting now as 'a part of that power which always wills evil, yet does good.' To be honest, I would like you too to be cast into this place where I am to spend eternity. Do not be surprised that I should say that. Here we all think that way, our will is irrevocably directed towards evil, at least what you call evil. Even if we do happen to do something good as I am doing now by letting you

know what goes on in hell, we never do it with a good intention."

Annette continues: "Do you remember when we met four years ago in southern Germany? You were twenty three, and you had already been there six months when I arrived. As I was a newcomer you sometimes got me out of scrapes, and you put me in touch with good people, whatever 'good' may mean. I used to praise you for your love of your neighbor. How ridiculous! Your good turns were just a matter of pure form, in fact I was already beginning to suspect as much. Here we know of no goodness in anybody.

You already know something about my early life so now I will tell you the rest. If my parents had had their way, I should never have been born. They felt birth was somehow shameful. My two sisters were already fourteen and fifteen when I appeared on the scene. Oh if only I never had been born! Why can't I just stop existing now and get away from these torments? No pleasure could compare with that of being

able to reduce my being to dust, like a layer of ash that the wind blows away! But I have to go on existing, I have to exist like this, the I made myself, an existence I wrecked!

My father and mother were still young when they left the country to go and live in the town, but both of them had already stopped going to church, and a good thing too! They got friendly with other non-church goers. They first met in a dance hall, and at the end of six months they had to get married. They brought only just enough religion from the marriage ceremony to take my Mother to Sunday Mass maybe once a year. She never really taught me to pray. The only things that interested her were the day to day material tasks that had to be done, even though we did not have to worry about money. Those words; 'pray' 'Mass' 'religious instruction' 'Church'; I find it unspeakably revolting to utter them. I loathe it all. I hate people who go to Church. In fact, for that matter I hate everybody and everything.

The fact is that everything is a source of pain for us. Everything we learned before our death, every memory of things we saw or knew is like a cruel flame. And in every one of these memories we see the graces that were offered to us, the graces we spurned. Oh what agony! We don't eat, we don't sleep, we cannot walk upright. We are spiritually in chains, we look with horror, with 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' on the ruins of our lives. All that is left for us is hate and torment; Do you understand? Here we drink in hate like water, even among ourselves. Above all we hate God, and I will tell you why. The elect in heaven, cannot help loving Him because they see Him unveiled in all His dazzling beauty. That gives them indescribable happiness. We know it and that knowledge drives us into a fury. Here on earth, those who know God through creation and Revelation can love Him, but they do not have to. The believer, and it makes me grind my teeth to have to say, the believer who in his meditation contemplates Christ with His arms outstretched on the

Cross will end up loving Him. But the man to whom God comes like a hurricane, a Chastiser, a Righteous Avenger, the man whom God has rejected as He did us, that man can only hate Him eternally with all the audacity of his ill-will. Yes hate Him with all the strength of a freely made decision to be cut off from Him. We make that decision with one dying breath. Even now we would not wish to change it, nor shall we ever wish to do so.

Do you understand now why hell is eternal? It is because our obstinacy will go on forever. Because I am forced to I must add that God is merciful, even to us. I say I am forced because, although I am in control of what I tell you, I am still not allowed to lie as I should like to. I am telling you many things against my will, and I have to hold back the flood of abuse I should like to spew forth. God was merciful in not giving us time to do all the evil that our ill-will would have had us do. Had we done it, it would have added to our faults and so to our punishment. In fact, God either caused us to die young, as I did,

or He brought in some other kind of extenuating circumstances. Even now He shows Himself merciful towards us by not making us go any closer to Him than we are here in this far-off Place of hell. That lessens our torment. Every step closer to God would cause me greater pain than you would feel walking up close to a red hot brazier.

You were shocked once when we were out walking and I told you that a few days before first Communion my father had said to me; "My dear Annette, do get a Pretty dress. All the rest is just a farce." Because you were shocked I was almost ashamed. Now the whole thing seems laughable.

The only sensible thing about the whole business was that children were not admitted to Communion before they were twelve. Well, by that age I was already crazy about worldly pleasures so I did not worry at all about not taking religion seriously and I did not attach much importance to my First Communion. It makes us furious when we see that nowadays many

children of seven go to Communion, and we do all we can to persuade people that at that age their powers of reason are not yet sufficiently developed. They must have time to commit a few mortal sins. Then that white disc won't do as much damage as it would if their soul were still living by the faith, hope, and charity ... BAH! what a thought ... that they received at baptism. If you remember, I was already thinking along those lines when I was on earth.

I have already mentioned my father. He often used to fight with my mother. I did not say much to you about it because I was ashamed. How ridiculous, to be ashamed of something evil!! It is all the same to us in this place.

My parents no longer even slept in the same room. I was in with my mother, and my father had the room next door, so that he could come in as late as he liked. He used to drink heavily, and he was squandering all of our money on alcohol. My sisters both went out to work because they said they needed the money, and my

mother took a job to bring something in as well.

During the last year of his life, my father often used to beat my mother when she would not let him have any money. On the other hand, he was always kind to me. One day, I told you about this, and you were shocked at my capriciousness (come to that, was there anything about me that did not shock you?); anyhow, one day my father bought me a pair of shoes, and I made him take them back at least twice because the style and the heels were not up-to-date enough for me.

The night my father had the stroke that killed him something happened to me that I did not dare tell you about for fear you would take it the wrong way. But now you have to know about it. It is important because it was then that I was first attacked by the spirit that torments me now.

I was asleep in the bedroom with my mother. I could tell from her deep breathing that she was sound asleep. Suddenly I heard someone calling my name. A voice I did

not know was saying; 'what will happen if your father dies?'

Since he had been treating my mother so badly, I had stopped loving my father; in fact from that time on I did not love anyone anymore. I was just fond of a few people who cared about me. Outright love, a love that does not expect any reward, that only exists in soul that are in the state of grace, and mine certainly was not.

I did not know who was asking me this strange question, so I just said, 'But he isn't going to die!'

There was silence for a while then I heard the same question again. Again I snapped back; 'He is not going to die! There was silence. Then a third time the voice asked me; 'What will happen if your father dies?' I began to think of how my father often came home drunk, shouting at my mother and beating her. I remembered how he had humiliated us in front of our friends and neighbors. I got angry and I blurted out; 'That will be just his hard luck!' After that there was silence.

In the morning when my mother wanted to go in and tidy up my father's room, she found the door locked. Around midday they forced the door open and found my father's body lying half-dressed on the bed. He must have had some sort of accident while he was going to fetch beer from the cellar, and he had been in bad health for a long time.

You and Martha persuaded me to join the young people's association. I never hid the fact that I considered the talks given by the organisers as pretty parochial sort of stuff, but I liked the games. As you know I became one of the leaders straight away, which was typical of me. I liked the outings as well. I even went as far as going to Confession and Communion occasionally, although I did not have anything to confess. I did not consider thoughts and words were of any importance, and at the time I was not sufficiently corrupted to go in for any really immoral actions.

You warned me once, 'Annette, if you do not pray more, you are headed for hell.' Well you were

all too right when you said I did not pray much, and when I did it was in a casual sort of way. You were all too right. All of these now burning in Hell were people who did not pray or did not pray enough. Prayer is the first step toward God, and it is always the decisive step, especially prayer to her who was Christ's Mother, and whose name we never speak.

Countless souls are torn from the Devil's clutches by the spirit of prayer, souls that would otherwise be bound to fall into his hands as a result of sin. To tell you all this is burning me up with anger; I am only going on because I forced to.

There is nothing easier in this world for a man than to pray, and it is precisely upon prayer that everyone's salvation depends. That is the way God has arranged things. Little by little He gives to everyone who perseveres in prayer so much light and strength that even the most hardened sinner can pick himself up once and for all, even if he is sunk in sin up to his neck!

During the last years of my life, I no longer prayed as I should

have done, and so I deprived myself of the grace without which no one can be saved. Where we are now we no longer receive any grace, and even if it were offered we should scorn it. All the ups and downs of earthly life stop when you get here. You on earth can pass from a state of sin to a state of grace, and then fall back into sin again, often through weakness, sometimes through malice. But once you die all that comes to an end because it is only the instability of earthly life that makes it possible. From the moment of our death our state is final and unchangeable.

Already on earth, with the passing of the years these changes in the state of one's soul become rarer and rarer. It is true that up to the moment of death one can always return to God or turn away from Him.

But it does happen that the habits a man has followed during his lifetime all too often affect his behavior at the point of death. Habit becomes second nature to him and he goes to his grave still following it. That is what

happened to me. For years I had been living far from God, and because of that, when I heard the final call of grace, I turned away from Him. What was fatal for me was not that I sinned a lot, but that when I had sinned I had not the will to pick myself up again.

Several times you told me to go and listen to sermons or to read spiritual books, and I usually said I had not the time. And yet what you said increased the uncertainty I felt inside like nothing else.

I must admit that by the time I left the young peoples association I had already learned so much that I could very well have changed my ways. I was ill at ease and unhappy with my way of life. But always something stood between me and conversion. You never suspected what was going on. You thought it would be so easy for me to come back to God.

One day you told me; "just make a good confession, Annette, and then everything will be alright." I felt you were right, but the world, the flesh and the Devil already had too firm a hold on me.

At that time I would never have believed that the Devil was at work, but now I can assure you that he has an enormous influence on people who are in the state I was in then. Only many prayers, from myself and from others, together with sacrifices and sufferings would have been able to tear me from his clutches, and even then it would have been a slow process. There may be few who are openly possessed, but many are inwardly. The Devil cannot take away the free will of those who put themselves in his power, but as a punishment for what you might call their calculated desertion, God permits the Evil One to settle within them.

I even hate the Devil, though at the same time I like him because he is out to destroy you people. Yes, I hate him, him and his hangers-on, those spirits that fell with him at the beginning of time. There are millions of them prowling about the earth like swarms of gnats, and you do not even notice them. It is not us, the damned souls, who tempt you. That job is only for the fallen angels. The truth is that each time

they bring a soul here it increases their torment, but what limit is there to hate?

I was wandering far from God, yet He followed me. I opened the way for grace by natural acts of charity which I performed quite often, simply because I was naturally inclined to do so. There were times when God drew me towards a church, and then I felt a kind of homesickness. When my mother was ill and I was looking after her at the same time as doing my job at the office, I was really making a kind of self-sacrifice. Those were the times when God's calls were especially strong. Once when you took me into a hospital chapel during the lunch break, something happened which led me to the brink of conversion I wept! But immediately the pleasures of the world flooded back into my mind and overshadowed God's grace. The good seed was choked by the thorns.

They often said at the office that religion was just a matter of emotion, so I took that excuse to reject that call of grace as I had

all the others. You told me off one day because instead of making a proper genuflection in church, I just did a half-hearted sort of bow. You thought I was just being lazy. You did not even seem to suspect that I had already stopped believing in Christ's presence in the Sacrament, I believe in it now, but only in a natural way, as you believe in a storm when you see the damage it leaves behind.

Already I had just made up my own religion to suit myself. I agreed with the others at the office that when you died your soul went into someone else so that it went on some kind of everlasting pilgrimage. That solved the agonising question of the 'beyond', and you did not have to worry about it any more. Why did not you remind me of the parable of Dives and Lazarus, where Christ amends the one to Paradise straight after his death, and the other to Hell? Oh, sure, you wouldn't have got anywhere with it, any more than with any of your other pious old maids' stories.

Bit by bit I made up my own God. A God who was properly dressed up to be called god and was sufficiently remote for me not to have any dealings with him. He was a vague sort of god, to be made use of when I needed him. A kind of pantheistic god if you like, the sort of abstract god who might come in useful for poetry but who wouldn't have anything to do with my real world. This god had no heaven to reward me with and no hell to punish me. My way of worshipping him was to leave him alone. It is easy to believe what suits you. For years I got on very well with my religion and so I was happy. Only one thing could have shattered my stubbornness; one lasting and deep sorrow. But it didn't happen. Now do you understand the meaning of the saying, God punishes those He loves?

One Sunday in July the young people's group arranged an outing to somewhere. I would have quite liked to go, but those old-hat talks, those old maids' ways of carrying on all put me off. Besides, for some time I had been keeping a very different picture

from that of the Madonna on the altar of my heart. It was that good-looking Max in the shop next door. We had already cracked a joke together a few times. Well, as it happens, that very Sunday he had invited me to go out with him. The girl he had been going out with was ill in the hospital. He had realised I had my eyes on him, though I hadn't then thought of marrying him. He was obviously well off, but he was too nice to all the girls, and up till then I had only wanted a man who did not think of anyone but me. I did not just want to be his wife: I wanted to be the only woman in his life. I was always attracted by well-mannered men, and when we were out together Max went out of his way to be nice; though you can imagine we did not talk about the pious stuff you and your friends go in for!

The next day at the office you were telling me off because I had not gone with the rest of you on the outing, and I told you what I had been doing that Sunday. The first thing you asked was; 'did you go to Mass?' Idiot! How could I have gone to Mass seeing we had

arranged to leave at 6:00 A.M.? And no doubt you remember that I lost my patience and said: 'God doesn't make a fuss about these little things like you and your priests do!'

But now I have to admit that despite His infinite goodness, God weighs things up much more exactly than all your priests put together.

After that first outing with Max I only went back to the young people's association once more. That was for the Christmas celebrations. There was still something that attracted me to ceremonies of that kind, but at heart I was not one of you anymore.

Movies, dances, outings; it was one thing after the other all the time. Max and I sometimes had rows, but I could always get him to make up. I had a lot of trouble with his other girlfriend, who went after him like a mad thing as soon as she got out of the hospital. That was a bit of luck for me because my 'noble calm' which was quite the opposite of her behavior, made a big

impression on Max, and he ended up opting for me. I had learned how to use words to turn him against her. On the surface I would seem to be saying nice things, but inwardly I would be spitting venom. Feelings like that, and that kind of behavior are an excellent preparation for hell. They are diabolical in the strictest sense of the word.

Why am I telling you this? It is to explain how I cut myself off once and for all from God. Oh, it was not that at that stage Max and I had become very intimate in our relationship. I knew I would have gone down in his estimation if I had let myself go all the way too soon, and that knowledge made me hold back, but deep down I was ready to do anything if I thought it would further my aims, because I was out to get Max at any cost. I would have given absolutely anything to have him.

In the meantime we were slowly learning to love each other. We both had valuable personal qualities which we were learning to appreciate in each other. I was clever, capable, good company,

and at least in the last months before we married I was his only girlfriend.

My desertion of God consisted in this: that I made an idol of a human creature. That kind of thing can only happen when you love someone of the opposite sex with a love which remains bound by earthly considerations. It is this kind of unbalanced love that transfixes you, obsesses you and finally poisons you. My worship of Max was really becoming a kind of religion for me. That was the time when, at the office, I started saying everything bad I could think of about churches and priests and rosary-jabbering and all that kind of tom-foolery.

You tried to defend it all, more or less subtly. You obviously did not realize that deep down I was not so bothered with insulting those things as with finding something to bolster up my conscience and find some justification for my desertion of God. Yes, the fact was that I had rebelled against God. You did not understand. You thought I was still a Catholic, and I wanted people to think I

was. I even went as far as paying my tithes. I told myself; 'a bit of insurance could not do me any harm.'

Sometimes your reactions struck home, but they did not have any lasting effect on me. I had made up my mind you were wrong. It was this strained relationship that made neither of us sorry to say goodbye when I left to get married.

Before the wedding I went to Confession and Communion once more, as was required. My husband thought the same way as I did about that. Why should we be made to go through those formalities? Still we did go through with it like everyone else. You people would call communion like that unworthy. Well, after that unworthy Communion, my conscience was a lot clearer. In any case, I never went to Communion again.

By and large we were very happy in our married life. He agreed about everything, including the fact that we did not want the responsibility of having children. At a stretch my husband might

have wanted to have just one, but, in the end I managed to get even that idea out of his mind.

I was far more concerned with clothes, fancy furniture, meeting friends, going out, taking trips in the car and other pleasures. The year between my marriage and my sudden death, was a year of sheer pleasure for me. Every Sunday we went out in the car, or else we went to visit my husband's parents, who lived just as superficially as we did.

At heart of course I was not happy, even, though I put on a smiling face for the world. All the time there was something gnawing away inside me. I should have liked to believe that death, which I naturally thought was many years away, would be the end of everything.

Once when I was a child I heard a priest say in a sermon that God rewards us for every good work we perform and that when He cannot reward us in the life to come, He does it on earth. That is very true. Out of the blue I inherited some money from my aunt Lotte, and at the same time

my husband started earning a very good salary, so I was able to fit out my new home very nicely. By this time the light of religion had become for me something very distant, a pale light, dim and flickering. The cafes in the towns, and the inns we stayed at on our travels certainly did not point us to God. All the people who went to those places lived like us, getting their pleasures from external things first and foremost instead of living a primarily interior life. If we did sometimes visit churches when we were traveling around on holidays we only did so for their artistic interest. There was a religious atmosphere emanating from those buildings, especially the medieval ones, but I could neutralize it by making some criticism which seemed to the point at the time. For instance, I would have a go at some lay-brother for making a bit of a mess of showing us around, or for being sloppily dressed, or I would think how scandalous it was that monks who pretended to be holy should sell liqueurs, or perhaps I would think about the endless bell-ringing calling the people to services when all the

Church was interested in was making money. That is how I turned away God's grace each time it knocked at the door of my soul.

I gave free rein to my bad temper, especially on the subject of certain medieval paintings of hell in cemeteries and other places showing the devil roasting souls over glowing coals while his companions dragged other victims with their tong tails. Oh Claire! People might make mistakes in the way they depict hell, but they never exaggerate!

I always had my own ideas about the fires of hell. You remember we were discussing the question once and I struck a match under your nose and said sarcastically; 'Does that smell like hell?' You put the flame out quickly. Well, nobody puts it out here. I assure you that the fire the Bible talks about is not just the torment of conscience. It is real fire. When He said; 'Depart from me ye accursed, into everlasting fire,' He meant it literally, yes literally.

You will say to me; 'How can spirits be affected by material

fire?' But on earth, doesn't your soul suffer when you put your finger in the fire? The soul doesn't actually burn, but what agony your whole being goes through. Likewise, we in this place are spiritually bound to the fire according to our nature and our faculties. The soul is deprived of its natural freedom of action. We cannot think what we should like, nor as we should like. Do not be shocked at what I am telling you. This state means nothing to you, but I can be burned here without being consumed.

Our greatest torment is the certain knowledge that we shall never see God. How can that torment us so much when we were so indifferent about it on earth? As long as a knife is left on the table it does not worry you. You can see it is sharp, but you are not afraid of it. But just let it cut into your flesh and you will be writhing in pain. It is now that we are actually feeling the loss of God, whereas before we only thought about it. Not all souls suffer to the same degree. The more maliciously and systematically a man has sinned,

so much the more heavily will the loss of God weigh down upon him. Catholics who are damned suffer more than members of other religions because usually they have been offered and have refused more graces and more enlightenment. The man who had more knowledge in his lifetime suffers more severely than the one who knew less. If one has sinned through malice one suffers more cruelly than if it had been through weakness. But nobody suffers more than he has deserved. Oh, if only that were not true! Then I should have a reason to hate.

You told me one day that it had been revealed to some saint that nobody goes to hell without knowing. I laughed, but afterward I reassured myself by saying secretly; 'In that case, if the need arises, I can always do an about-turn.' That is true. Before my sudden end, I did not know hell for what it is. No human being knows it. But I was fully aware that it existed. I said to myself; 'if you die you will go into the life beyond straight as an arrow aimed at God, and you will have to suffer the consequences. But, as I

have already told you, despite such a thought I did not change my ways. Force of habit pushed me on and I let it take control of me. For the older one gets, the stronger the power of habit becomes.

This is the way my death came about: A week ago, a week, that is, as you would reckon time, for from the point of view of the pain I have suffered I could well say I have been burning in hell for ten years already. However, a week ago, last Sunday, my husband and I went out for what was to be our last drive. It was a beautiful morning, and I was feeling on top of the world. A foreboding sense of happiness came over me and stayed with me all day. On the way home my husband was blinded by the lights of a car coming in the other direction, and our car went out of control. Automatically I uttered the name 'Jesus', but it was just an exclamation, not a prayer. I felt a searing pain in every fibre of my being, though it was nothing compared to what I am suffering now. Then I lost consciousness.

How strange it was that on that very morning a persistent thought had been nagging at me for no apparent reason. A voice inside kept saying; 'You could go to Mass once more.' It was as though someone were begging me. But I stifled the notion with a decisive 'No.' I said to myself; 'you have got to have done with that nonsense once and for all.' Now I have to suffer the consequences of my resolution.

You already know what happened after my death, what became of my husband and my mother, and of my body, and the details of the funeral. I know all about it with the natural knowledge we are allowed here. In fact we know everything that happens on earth, but only in a dim and confused manner. It is like that, that I see the place where you are staying now.

At the moment of my death, I found myself in a misty world, but then suddenly I emerged into an overwhelming, blinding light. I was still at the place where my body was lying. It was like being in a theatre. The lights go out all

of a sudden, the curtain goes up with a terrific noise and you find yourself faced with an unexpected scene. For me that scene was lit up with a horrible light: what I was seeing was the scene of my whole life. My soul was shown to me as if I were seeing it in a mirror, with all the graces I had rejected from my youth up until my final 'no' to God's call. I saw myself like a murderer on trial being confronted in court with his victim's dead body! Would I repent? Never! Was I ashamed? Not that either! Of course, I could no longer bear to feel upon me the eyes of the God I had finally rejected. All that was left for me was to flee from His Presence. Just as Cain fled from the body of Abel, all my soul could do was to flee from that vision of horrors. And that was my particular judgement. The invisible judge pronounced sentence: 'Depart from Me!' And then my soul, smothered in sulphur, hurled itself like a shadow into everlasting torment.

In place of Annette and Claire, a soul in Hell, the following dream of St. John Bosco can be read.

To Hell and Back

A Dream of St. John Bosco

I have another dream to tell you, a sort of aftermath of those I told you last Thursday and Friday which totally exhausted me. Call them dreams or whatever you like...

I spent the whole next day worrying about the miserable night in store for me, and when evening came, loath to go to bed. I sat at my desk browsing through books until midnight. The mere thought of having more nightmares thoroughly scared me. However, with great effort, I finally went to bed.

Lest I should fall asleep immediately and start dreaming, I set my pillow against the headboard and practically sat up, but soon, in my exhaustion, I simply fell asleep. Immediately

the same person as the night before appeared at my bedside.

"Get up and follow me!" he said.

"For heaven's sake," I protested, "leave me alone. I'm exhausted. I've been tormented by a tooth-ache for several days and need rest. Besides, nightmares have completely worn me out." I said this because this man's apparition always means trouble, fatigue and terror for me.

"Get up," he replied, "you have no time to lose."

"Where are you taking me?" I asked.

"Never mind, you'll see." He led me to a vast, boundless plain, veritably a lifeless desert, with not a soul in sight or a tree or a brook. Yellowed dried up vegetation added to the desolation. I had no idea where I was or what I was to do. For a moment I even lost sight of my guide and feared that I was lost, utterly alone. When I finally saw my friend coming towards me, I sighed in relief.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"Come with me and you will find out!" He led the way and I followed in silence, but after a long dismal trudge, I began worrying whether I would ever be able to cross the vast expanse, with my tooth-ache and swollen legs. Suddenly I saw the road ahead.

"Where to now?" I asked my guide.

"This way," he replied.

We took the road. It was beautiful, wide and neatly paved. The way of sinners is smooth stoned and at their end are hell and darkness and pain. Both sides were lined with magnificent verdant hedges dotted with gorgeous flowers. Roses especially peeped everywhere through the leaves. At first glance, the road was level and comfortable, and so I ventured upon it without the least suspicion, but soon I noticed that it insensibly kept sloping downward. Though it did not look steep at all, I found myself moving so swiftly that I felt that I was effortlessly gliding through the air. Really I was gliding and

hardly using my feet. Then the thought struck me that the return trip would be very long and arduous.

"How shall we get back to the Oratory?" I asked worriedly.

"Don't worry," he answered, "the Almighty wants you to go. He who leads you on, will also know how to lead you back."

The road kept sloping downward. As we were continuing on our way, flanked by roses and other flowers, I became aware that the Oratory boys and very many others, whom I did not know, were following me. I found myself in their midst. As I was looking at them, I noticed how one, now another, fall to the ground and instantly be dragged by an unseen force toward a frightful drop, distantly visible, which sloped into a furnace.

"What makes these boys fall?" I asked my companion. They have spread cords for a net, by the wayside they have laid snares for me (Ps. 139; 6).

"Take a closer look," he replied.

I did. Traps were everywhere, some close to the ground, others at eye level, but all were concealed. Unaware of their danger, many boys got caught, and they tripped; they would sprawl to the ground, legs in the air. Then they managed to get back on their feet, they would run headlong down the road toward the abyss. Some got trapped by the head, others by the neck, hand, arm, legs, or sides, and were pulled down instantly. The ground traps, fine as spider's webs, and hardly visible, seemed very flimsy and harmless; yet to my surprise, every boy they snared fell to the ground. Noticing my astonishment, my guide said;

"Do you know what this is?"

"Just some flimsy fiber," I answered.

"A mere nothing," he said, "just plain human respect."

Seeing that many boys were being caught in those traps, I asked, "why do so many get caught? Who pulls them down?"

"Go nearer and you will see!" he told me. I followed his advice but saw nothing peculiar.

"Look closer," he insisted.

I picked up one of the traps and tugged. I immediately felt some resistance. I pulled harder, only to find that, instead of drawing the thread closer, I was being pulled down myself. I did not resist and soon found myself at the mouth of a frightful cave. I halted, unwilling to venture into that deep cavern and again started pulling the thread toward me. It gave a little, but only through great effort on my part. I kept tugging and after a long while a huge hideous monster emerged, clutching a rope to which all those traps were tied together. He was the one who instantly dragged down anyone who got caught in them. It won't do to match my power with his, I said to myself. I'll certainly lose. I'd better fight him with the sign of the cross and with short invocations. Then I went back to my guide.

"Now you know who he is," he said to me.

"I surely do! It is the devil himself!"

Carefully examining many of the traps, I saw that each bore an inscription: Pride, disobedience, envy, sloth, anger and so on. Stepping back a bit to see which ones trapped the greater number of boys, I discovered that the most dangerous were those of impurity, disobedience and pride. In fact, these three were linked together. Many other traps also did great harm, but not as much as the first two. Still watching, I noticed many boys running faster than others.

"Why such haste?" I asked.

"Because they are dragged by the snare of human respect."

Looking even more closely, I spotted knives among the traps. A providential hand had put them there for cutting oneself free. The bigger ones, symbolizing meditation, were for use against the trap of pride, others, not quite as big, symbolizing spiritual reading well made. There were also two swords representing devotion to the Blessed

Sacrament, especially through frequent Holy Communion, and to the Blessed Virgin. There was also a hammer symbolizing Confession, and other knives signifying devotion to St. Joseph, St. Aloysius, and to other saints. By these means quite a few boys were able to free themselves or evade capture.

When my guide was satisfied that I had observed everything, he made me continue along that rose-hedged road, but the farther we went the scarcer the roses became. Long thorns began to show up, and soon the roses were no more. The hedges became sun-scorched, leafless and thorn-studded.

We had now come to a gulch whose steep sides hid what lay beyond. The road, still sloping downward, was becoming ever more horrid, rutted, guttered, and bristling with rocks and boulders. I kept going, but the farther I advanced, the more arduous and steep the descent became, so that I tumbled and fell several times, lying prostrate until I could catch my breath. Now and then my

guide supported me or helped to rise. Panting, I said to my guide:

"My good fellow, my legs won't carry me another step. I just can't go any farther."

"Now that we have come so far, do you want me to leave you here?" my guide sternly asked.

At this threat I waited:

"How can I survive without your help?"

"Then follow me."

We continued our descent, the road now becoming so frightfully steep that it was almost impossible to stand erect. And then at the bottom of this precipice, at the entrance of a dark valley, an enormous building loomed into sight, its towering portal tightly locked, facing our road. When I finally got to the bottom, I became smothered by a suffocating heat, while a greasy, green-tinted smoke rose from behind those enormous walls which loomed higher than mountains.

"Where are we? What is this?" I asked my guide.

"Read the inscription and you will know."

I looked up and read these words: The place of no retrieve. I realized that we were at the gates of hell. The guide led me all around this horrible place. At regular distances, bronze portals overlooked precipitous descents; on each was an inscription, such as: Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25; 14). Suddenly the guide turned to me. Upset and startled, he motioned to me to step aside.

"Look!" He said. I looked up in terror and saw in the distance someone racing down the path at an uncontrollable speed. I kept my eyes upon him, and as he got closer, I recognized him as one of my boys. His disheveled hair was partly standing upright on his head and partly tossed back by the wind. His arms were outstretched as though he were thrashing the water in an attempt to stay afloat. He wanted to stop,

but could not. Tripping on the protruding stones, he kept falling even faster.

"Let's help him, let's stop him," I shouted, holding out my hands in a vain effort to restrain him.

"Let him alone," the guide replied.

"Why?"

"Don't you know how terrible God's vengeance is? Do you think you can restrain one who is fleeing from His just wrath?"

Meanwhile the youth had turned a fiery gaze backward in an attempt to see if God's wrath were still pursuing him. The next moment he fell tumbling to the bottom of the ravine and crashed against the bronze portal as though he could find no better refuge in his flight.

"Why was he looking backward in terror," I asked.

"Because God's wrath will pierce hell's gates to reach and torment him even in the midst of fire!"

As the boy crashed into the portal, it sprang open with a roar, and instantly a thousand inner portals opened with a deafening clamor as if struck by a body that had been propelled by an invisible, most violent irresistible gale. As these doors, one behind the other, though a considerable distance from each other, remained momentarily open, I saw far in the distance something like furnace jaws spouting fiery balls the moment the youth hurled into it. As swiftly as they had opened, the portals then clanged shut again. I tried to jot down the name of that unfortunate lad, but the guide restrained me.

"Wait," he ordered, "watch!"

Three other boys of ours, screaming in terror and with arms outstretched, were rolling down one behind the other like massive rocks. I recognised them as they too crashed against the portal. In that split second it sprang open and so did the other thousand. The three lads were sucked into that endless corridor amid a long drawn, fading, infernal echo, and then the portals clanged shut

again. At intervals, many other lads came tumbling down after them. I saw one unlucky boy being pushed down the slope by an evil companion. Others fell singly or with others, arm in arm or side by side. Each of them bore the name of his sin on his forehead. I kept calling to them as they hurtled down, but they did not hear me. Again the portals would open I thunderously and slam shut with a rumble. Then, dead silence!

"Bad companions, bad books, and bad habits," my guide exclaimed, "are mainly responsible for so many eternally lost." The traps I had seen earlier were indeed dragging the boys to ruin. Seeing so many going to perdition, I cried out disconsolately:

"If so many of our boys end up this way, we are working in vain. How can we ever prevent such tragedies?"

"This is their present state," my guide replied, "and that is where they would go if they were to die now." Just then a new group of boys came hurtling down and the portals opened momentarily.

"Let's go in," the guide said to me. I pulled back in horror.

"Come," my guide insisted. "You'll learn much." We entered that narrow, horrible corridor and wizzed through it with lightening speed. Threatening inscriptions shone eerily over all the inner gateways.

The last one opened into a vast grim courtyard with a large unbelievably forbidding entrance at the far end.

"From her on," he said, "no one may have a helpful companion, a comforting friend, a loving heart, a compassionate glance or a benevolent word. All that is gone forever. Do you just want to see, or would you rather experience these things yourself?"

"I only want to see," I answered.

"Then come with me," my friend added, and taking me in tow, he stepped through that gate into a corridor at whose far end stood an observation platform, closed by a huge single crystal pane reaching from the pavement to the ceiling. As soon as I crossed its threshold,

I felt an indescribable terror and dared not to take another step. Ahead of me I could see something like an immense cave which gradually disappeared into the recesses sunk far into the bowls of the mountains. They were all ablaze, but theirs was not an earthly fire with leaping tongues of flames. The entire cave; walls, ceiling, floor, iron, stones, wood and coal; everything was a glowing white at thousands of degrees. Yet the fire did not incinerate, did not consume. I simply cannot find words to describe the cavern's horror

I was staring in bewilderment about me when a lad dashed out of a gate seemingly unaware of anything else, he emitted a most shrilling scream, like one who is about to fall into a caldron of liquid bronze, and plummeted into the center of the cave. Instantly he too, became incandescent and perfectly motionless, while the echo of his dying wail lingered for an instant more. Terribly frightened, I stared at him for a while. He seemed to be one of my Oratory boys.

"Isn't he so and so?" I asked my guide.

"Yes," was the answer.

"Why is he so still, so incandescent?"

"You chose to see," he replied.

"Be satisfied with that. Just keep looking."

As I looked again, another boy came hurtling down into the cave at break neck speed. He too was from the Oratory. More frightened than ever, I asked my guide:

"When these boys come dashing into this cave, don't they know where they are going?"

"They surely do. They have been warned a thousand times, but they still chose to rush into the fire because they do not detest sin and are lothe to forsake it.

Furthermore, they despise and reject God's incessant, merciful invitations to do penance. Thus provoked, Divine Justice harries them, hounds them, and goads them on so that they reach this place."

"Oh, how miserable these unfortunate boys must feel in knowing they no longer have any hope," I exclaimed.

"If you really want to know their innermost frenzy and fury, go a little closer," my guide remarked.

I took a few steps forward and saw that many of those poor wretches were savagely striking at each other like mad dogs. Some were clawing their own faces and hands, tearing their own flesh and spitefully throwing it about. Just then the entire ceiling of the cave became as transparent as crystal and revealed a patch of Heaven and their radiant companions safe for all eternity. The poor wretches, fuming and and panting with envy, burned with rage because they had once ridiculed the just. The wicked shall see and shall be angry. He shall gnash his teeth and pine away (Ps. 111; 10).

While I viewed the condition of many of my boys in utter terror, a thought suddenly struck me.

"How can these boys be damned?" I asked. "Last night

they were still alive in the Oratory!"

"The boys you see here," he answered, "are all dead to God's grace. Were they to die now or persist in their evil ways, they would be damned."

What a torment was theirs to remember each unforgiven sin and its just punishment, the countless, even extraordinary means they had to mend their lives, persevere in virtue. and earn paradise, and their lack of response to the many favors promised and bestowed by the Virgin Mary! What a torture to think that they could have been saved so easily, yet now are irredeemably lost! Hell is indeed paved with good intentions!

"And now," he added, "You too must enter."

"Oh. no!" I cried out in terror.

"Before going to hell, one has to be judged. I have not been judged yet, and so I will not go to hell!"

"Listen," he said, "what would you rather do: visit hell and save

your boys, or stay outside and leave them in agony?"

I breathed more easily, and instantly said to myself; I don't mind slaving if I can rescue these beloved sons of mine from such torments.

"Come inside then," my friend went on, "and see how our good almighty God lovingly provides a thousand means for guiding your boys to penance and saving them from everlasting death."

Taking my hand, he led me into the cave. As I stepped in, I found myself suddenly transported into a magnificent hall whose curtained glass doors concealed more entrances. Above one of them I read this inscription: The Sixth Commandment. Pointing to it, my guide exclaimed:

"Transgressions of this Commandment caused the eternal ruin of many boys.

"Didn't they go to confession?"

"They did, but either they omitted or insufficiently confessed the

sins against the beautiful virtue of purity. Others were not truly sincere in their resolve to avoid it in the future," my guide replied. "Always preach against immodesty. Tell them that by obeying God, the Church, their parents and their superiors, even in little things, they will be saved. Warn them against idleness. Tell them to keep busy at all times, because the devil will not then have the chance to tempt them."

I bowed my head and promised. Faint with dismay, I could only mutter; "thanks for having been so good to me. Now please lead me out of here."

Leaving that hall in no time at all, we retraced our steps through that horrible courtyard and the long corridor. But as soon as we stepped across the last bronze portal, he turned to me and said:

"Now that you have seen what others suffer, you too must experience a touch of hell."

"No no," I cried in terror.

"Do not be afraid," he told me, "just try it. Touch this wall. There

is a thousand walls and millions of miles between this and the real fire of hell. It is just a remote rim of hell itself."

When he said this, I instinctively pulled back, but he seized my hand, forced it open, and pressed it against the first of the thousand walls. The sensation was so excruciating that I leapt back with a scream and found myself sitting up in bed. My hand was stinging and I kept rubbing it to ease the pain. Having my hand pressed against the wall, though only in a dream, felt so real that later the skin of my palm peeled off.

What increased the Prodical Sorrow?

One day the Countess de Joigny sent for St. Vincent de Paul to prepare one of her servants for death. The saint went immediately. His great charity induced the sick man to make a general confession. And, indeed, nothing but a general confession could have saved the dying man; for he publicly declared that he

had never confessed certain mortal sins. The sincerity with which he declared his secret miseries was followed by an inexpressible consolation. The sinner felt that an enormous weight which had for many years oppressed him, was at length taken off. The most remarkable circumstance was that he passed from one extreme to another. During the three days of life that were still left him, he made several public confessions of the faults which a false shame had always prevented him from confessing hitherto. "Ah madame," he exclaimed on beholding the countess enter his room, "I should have been damned on account of several mortal sins which I always concealed in confession; but Father Vincent has, by his charity, induced me to make all my confessions over again. I am very grateful to Father Vincent, and to you for having sent him to me to prepare me for a happy death." Upon hearing this unexpected confession of her servant, the countess exclaimed: "Alas! Father Vincent, what must I hear? How great is my surprise! What

happened to this servant of mine happens, no doubt, to many other people. If this man, who was considered a pious Christian by every one who knew him, could live so long in the state of mortal sin, how great must be the spiritual misery of those whose life is much looser! Alas! my dear father, how many souls are lost! What is to be done? What remedy must be applied to prevent the ruin of so many souls?

"Ah," exclaimed St. Vincent, "false shame prevents a great many persons from confessing all their grievous sins. This is the reason why they live constantly in a state of damnation. O my God ! how important is it often to inculcate the necessity of a general confession. Persons who have concealed grievous sins in their confession have no other remedy left to recover the grace of God. This farmer himself avowed publicly that he would have been damned had it not been for his general confession. A soul, penetrated with the spirit of true repentance, is filled with so great a hatred for sin that she is ready to confess her sins, not only to the

priest, but to everyone else whom she meets. I have met with persons who, after a good general confession, wished to make known their sins to the whole world, and I had the greatest difficulty to prevent them from doing so. Although I had strictly forbidden them not to speak to any one of their crimes, yet some would tell me : 'No, father, I will not be silent; I will tell the people how great a sinner I am; I am the most wicked man in the world; I deserve death.' See, then, what the grace of God can do; see the great sorrow it can produce in the soul! This was the way in which the greatest saints acted. Witness St. A

ugustine, who made a public confession of his sins in a book which he wrote to that effect; witness also the great Apostle St. Paul, who tells us, in his Epistles, what sins he committed against God and the Church. These saints made this public confession of their sins in order to make known to the whole world the great mercy which God had exercised in their regard. The grace of God has also produced a similar effect

in the soul of this farmer. O my God! how important is it to inculcate the necessity of general confession."

To many persons a general confession is absolutely necessary for salvation. It is necessary, 1st, to all those who, in any of their former confessions, have wilfully concealed a mortal sin; 2. To those who have confessed their sins without sorrow and a firm purpose of amendment. But who are those that confess without true sorrow for their sins? They are;

1. All who do not intend to keep the promise to avoid mortal sin which they made in confession.

2. All who are not willing to forgive their enemies.

3. All who have no intention to restore ill-gotten goods, or the good name of their neighbour after having taken it away by slander or detraction.

4. All who are not fully determined to keep away from taverns, grog-shops, and such places as have always proved occasions of sin to them; and

5. All who do not break off sinful company. Now the reason why these persons must make a general confession is because their confessions were bad; instead of obtaining forgiveness by them, they only increase their guilt before God. In order to be forgiven they must, 1, confess over again all those mortal sins which they have committed from the time they began to make bad confessions; 2. They must tell in confession how many times they received the sacraments unworthily; and, 3. They must be very sorry for all those sins, and firmly resolve never to commit them again. There are, however, others to whom a general confession would be hurtful.

There are certain scrupulous souls who have already made a general confession, who have confessed even more than was necessary, and yet they cannot rest. They wish to be always employed in making general confessions, with the hope of thus removing their fears and troubles. But what is the result? Their perplexities are always increased, because new apprehensions and scruples of having omitted or of not having

sufficiently explained their sins, are continually excited in their minds. Hence, the more they repeat confessions, the more they are stirring up, as it were, a hornet's nest, being stung more than ever with thousands of scruples, and wounded all over with fears and troubles of spirit. The reason of this is that the alarms and terrors which agitate these scrupulous souls are grounded, not on solid reasons, but on baseless apprehensions, which the remembrance of past sins can serve only to encourage and to quicken, so as to double the disturbance in the mind.

But a person may say: "If the son be really a mortal son, and if I have not confessed it, shall I be saved?" "Yes, you will be saved," says St. Alphonsus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and all divines; "for if, after a careful examination of conscience, a mortal sin has not been told through forgetfulness, it is indirectly forgiven by the sacramental absolution; because when God forgives one mortal sin, He at the same time forgives all others of which the soul may be guilty."

He who makes as good a confession of his sins as he can obtain, by the sacrament of penance, the forgiveness not only of these sins which he confesses, but also of those which, through forgetfulness, he does not confess. In spite of this failing of the memory, the penitent is in God's grace and in the path of salvation. He should therefore be at peace and never more mention his past sins. He should understand that a general confession is useful for a certain class of persons, but very dangerous and injurious to a person that is always agitated by scruples; for the repetition of past sins may be productive of grievous detriment to such a soul, and may drive her to despair. Hence good confessors do not permit scrupulous persons to speak of past sins. The remedy for them is not to explain their doubts, but to be silent and obey, believing for certain that God will never ask of them an account of what they have done in obedience to their confessors.

Lastly, there are persons for whom a general confession is

most useful; for those who never made a general confession at all. A general confession gives our confessor a better knowledge of the state of our conscience, of the virtues in which we stand most in need, and of the passions and vices to which we are most inclined; and he is thus better able to apply proper remedies and give good advice. A general confession also contributes greatly to humble our soul, to increase the sorrow we feel for our ingratitude towards God, and to make us adopt holy resolutions for the future. Whilst the prodigal was feeding the swine, he could not help reflecting on the happiness of his brother, and even of his father's servants. He compared his life of degradation with the life he might have enjoyed had he stayed with his father. The grief which he had caused to his father, his ingratitude towards him, his bodily and spiritual misery, all the crimes of his life were before his mind. He could no longer endure this horrible prospect nor the bitter remorse of his conscience. He hastened to make a public confession to his father of all his

crimes, with tears in his eyes saying: "Make me as one of thy hired servants."

We too, on looking back at all the faults into which we have fallen during our whole life, cannot fail to be stirred up to a more lively contrition than can be excited by the recollection of those ordinary failings which usually form the matter of the confessions which are called "particular" as distinct from general confessions. Far different, indeed, is the confession and humility which fills the mind at the sight of a whole legion of sins from that which is occasioned by the consciousness of some single fault into which we have but recently been betrayed. One or two regiments cannot have that power against the enemy which is possessed by the vast, serried mass of the battalions of an army. So the one or two faults of which we accuse ourselves in our ordinary confessions cannot have the force which the whole host of our failings possesses to subdue our hearts, to soften them into perfect contrition, and to bring

them to a deep sense of humility and inward self-abasement.

This truth of the Catholic faith is wondrously illustrated by what may be read in the fourth step of the well-known Ladder of Perfection, by St. John Climacus. A most abandoned youth, touched by the grace of God, and sincerely repenting of his disorderly life, went to one of the monasteries most famous for the holiness of its inmates, and, falling at the feet of the superior, asked permission to be admitted into the community, in order to do penance for his sins. The young man was received. He declared himself ready to make t public confession of his sins in presence of all the monks of the monastery. The following, Sunday the monks, two hundred and thirty in number, were gathered together in church. The abbot brought in the young man, who was visibly touched with the deepest compunction. Prostrate in the church, the penitent began, with a flood of tears, to make public confession of all his crimes, distinguishing both their number and kind. Whilst he went on

accusing himself of all the murders he had committed, of his many robberies, and repeated sacrileges, the monks were wondrously edified at the sight of a penitence so rarely witnessed. Meanwhile a holy monk saw some one, of majestic and awful appearance, standing with a large roll and it bottle of ink in one hand, and in the other hand a pen. He observed, too, that as each sin was confessed the man crossed it out with his pen; so that, when the confession was ended, all the sins were cancelled from the paper ane, from the soul of the young man at the same time.

Now, what was thus visibly shown in the case of that repentant youth happens, in an invisible manner, to all who make a good general confession. All their sins are blotted out at once from the book in which our life is written by God, and from the book of our soul, which then regains its former unsullied purity. In the little book Triumph of the Blessed Sacrament over Beelzebub; or, History of Nicola Aubry, who was possessed by

Beelzebub and several other evil spirits, we read the following.

One day, during one of the exorcisms in church, the evil spirit was chattering and uttering all kinds of nonsense. Suddenly he stopped short and gazed fixedly at a young man who was eagerly forcing his way through the crowd in order to have a nearer view of the possessed woman. The devil saluted him in a mocking tone: "Good-morning, Peter," said he, calling him also by bit, family name. "Come here and take a good view of me. Ah! Peter, I know that you are a free-thinker, but, tell me, where were you last night?" And then the devil related, in presence of every one in church a shameful sin that Peter had committed the preceding night. He described all the circumstances with such precision that Peter was overwhelmed with confusion, and could not utter a word. "Yes," cried the devil in a mocking tone, "You have done it; you dare not deny it." Peter hurried away as fast as he could, muttering to himself: "The devil tells the truth this time. I thought that no one

knew it but I myself and God." Peter seemed to have forgotten that the devil is the witness of our evil actions, that he remembers them all well, and that, at the hour of death he will bring them all against us, as he himself declared. "For it is thus," he added in a rage, "that I take revenge on sinners." Peter had not been to confession for many years, and, as a natural consequence, his morals were not exactly of the purest order. He had been guilty of gross sins which, in the fashionable world, go by the name of "pardonable weaknesses," "slight indiscretions," etc. The public accusation of the devil filled him with wholesome confusion. He rushed into the confessional, cast himself at the feet of the priest, confessed all his sins with true contrition, and received absolution. After having finished his confession, Peter had the boldness to press through the crowd once more, but this time he kept at a respectful distance from his infernal accuser. The exorcist saw Peter, and, knowing that he had been at confession, he told him to draw near. Then, pointing

to him, the priest said to the devil; "See here, do you know this man?"

The devil raised his eyes, and leisurely surveyed Peter from head to foot, and from right to left. At last he said:

"Why, really, it is Peter."

"Well," said the priest, "do you know anything else about him?"

"No," answered the devil, "nothing else."

The devil then had no longer any knowledge of Peter's sins, because they had been entirely blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ in the holy sacrament of confession. We read of the holy Bishop Eligius that, desirous of attaining to a more exact purity of conscience, he made a general confession to a priest of all the sins he had committed from his earliest childhood, after which he began to advance with greater earnestness and fervour of spirit in the way of perfection.

It is related in the life of St. Engelbert that, having retired to his private oratory in company

with another bishop, he accused himself of all the sins he had committed with such a profusion of tears that they flowed down copiously over his breast, so that his confessor was no less edified than astonished at the heartiness and intensity of his repentance. The next morning he resumed the confession of certain other of his failings, with a like abundance of tears.

It is plain that this more lively repentance, this deeper, inward, and most real humility must have more power to cleanse the soul, and help it to attain more speedily to purity of heart, especially as the purpose of amendment is commonly the more efficacious the greater our sorrow is for having offended Almighty God. St. Paul teaches that the supernatural sorrow works lasting fruits of salvation. The Apostle means to say that penance, when duly performed, produces a lasting amendment. Various reasons can be given for this. In the first place, the very disowning our faults and the good purposes of serious amendment which accompany a well-made general

confession detach the soul from all affection for its past sins, and render it careful not to fall into them again. Then, again, the special grace bestowed in this sacrament strengthens the will in it's conflict with our own disordered inclinations and the deceitful suggestions of our eternal foes. So that a general confession not only cleanses us from past failings, but makes us more watchful and careful not to commit them again.

St. Bernard, in his history of St. Malachy, relates that there was a woman so subject to fits of anger, rage, and fury that she seemed herself like a fury from the bottomless pit sent to torment every one who came in contact with her. Wherever she stayed her venomous tongue stirred up hatred and quarrelling, brawls and strife so that she became unbearable, not only to her own kindred and more immediate neighbours, but even to her very children, who, unable to live with her, had purposed to leave her and to go elsewhere. But, as a last endeavour, they took her to the holy Bishop Malachy, to see

whether he would be able to tame the ungovernable temper of their mother. St. Malachy confined himself to the inquiry whether she had ever confessed all her outbursts of passion, all her many outrageous words, and the numberless brawls she had provoked with her unruly tongue. She replied that she had not. "Well, then," continued the holy bishop, "confess them now to me." She did so, and after her confession he gave her some loving counsel, pointing out suitable remedies, and, having imposed a penance, absolved her from her sins. After this confession the woman, to the astonishment of all who knew her, appeared changed from the fierce lioness she had been into a meek lamb. St. Bernard concludes his narration by saying that "the woman was still living when he wrote, and that she, whose tongue had up to that time outraged and exasperated everybody, now seemed to be unable to resent the injuries the insults, the mishaps, which daily fell to her lot." Behold, then, bow a good general confession has power to cleanse the soul from past defilement, and

to preserve it from falling again into grievous sin. In such a confession the source of sin is greatly weakened, temptation ceases, or is altogether tempered; grace is considerably increased; the mind is unusually strengthened; and the demon is enervated and confounded. Oh! what consolation of mind results from this practice, what peace of conscience, what reformation of life, what confidence of pardon from God, what lightness of heart, what a change of person, what a facility in good works, what an increase in devotion, in tenderness of spirit, in vivacity of intelligence, in purity of conscience, and in all spiritual gifts which conduce to eternal salvation!

Christ Himself has been pleased to give us a striking illustration of this doctrine in the instance of that well known penitent, Blessed Margaret of Cortona. Beholding the fervent conversion of this once sinful woman, our Lord began to instruct and encourage her in divers ways, showing himself to her overflowing with love and tender compassion, and

often addressing her as His "Poor little one!" One day the holy penitent, in a transport of that confidence which is the natural fruit of filial love, said to Him; "O my Lord, Thou always callest me Thy poor little one. Am I ever to have the happiness of hearing Thy divine lips call me by the sweet name of my daughter?" "Thou art not yet worthy of it," replied our dear Lord. "Before thou canst receive the treatment and the name of daughter, thou must more thoroughly cleanse thy soul by a general accusation of all thy faults." On hearing this Margaret applied herself to searching into her conscience, and during eight successive days disclosed her sins to a priest, shedding a torrent of tears at the same time. After her confession she went to receive, in a most humble manner, the most holy Body of our Lord. Scarce had she received it when she heard most clearly in her inmost soul the words "My daughter." At this most sweet name, to hear which she had longed so ardently she was rapt at once into an ecstasy, and remained immersed, as it were, in an ocean of gladness and delight. On recovering from

her trance she began to exclaim, as one beside herself, "O sweet word, My daughter, O loving name! O word full of joy! O sound replete with assurance, My daughter!

From this we may see how much a general confession, and the preparation it implies, avail to cleanse, purify, and beautify the soul; since by means of it this holy woman rose from the pitiable condition of a servant, in which she was at the beginning of her conversion, to the honorable rank of a well-beloved daughter. So that she who was at first gazed upon by the Redeemer's pitying glances, was afterwards contemplated by Him with love and most tender complacency.

A Dominican novice, having one night fallen asleep near the altar, heard a voice calling to him, "Go and have thy tonsure renewed." On awaking the youth understood how God, by that voice, would have him confess his sins again. He went directly to cast himself at the feet of St. Dominic, and repeated his last confession with greater care and with more

searching accuracy and diligence. Shortly after he retired to rest. In the midst of his slumbers he beheld an angel coming down from heaven, bearing in his hands a golden crown all set with priceless gems; and the angel, winging his flight towards him, placed this crown upon his head as an ornament to his brows. Let him who never made a general confession consider the above warning as made to himself. Let him take occasion of the approach of some special day or great festival, and say to himself, "Renew thy tonsure"; prepare for a general confession, which may cleanse thy soul, and render it wholly fair, bright, and pure in the sight of the Lord. Then he may confidently hope for the day when he will see himself crowned, not indeed in this life, but in the next, with a crown of resplendent stars.

Now in order to preserve and increase the purity of soul, acquired by a good general confession, we ought to have frequent recourse to the sacrament of penance. Blosius tells us how our dear Saviour said

one day to St. Bridget that in order to acquire His Spirit, and preserve the same when acquired, she should often confess her sins and imperfections to the priest.

The greatest gift God can bestow upon a soul is the gift of divine love. This gift of perfect charity he bestows on the souls that are spotless and pure in His sight. He imparts this gift to the soul in proportion to her purity. It is certain that frequent confession is one of the most effectual means of speedily attaining to purity of soul, since, of its very nature, it helps us to acquire that cleanness of heart which is the crowning disposition for receiving the gift of divine love.

"Blessed are the clean of heart." Some have imagined that cleanness of heart consists in an entire freedom from all sin and all imperfections whatsoever. But such cleanness of heart has been the privilege, only of Jesus Christ and His ever-blessed Mother Mary. No one else can be said to have led so spotless a life in this polluted world as not to have contracted some stain. St. Thomas

Aquinas says that a man can avoid each particular venial sin, but not all in general. And St. Leo the Great says of persons wholly devoted to God's service, that, owing to the frailty of our nature, not even such pious persons are free from the dust of trivial transgressions.

Since, then, cleanness of heart cannot mean an entire freedom from sin, it must imply two things: First, an exact custody of our hearts, and a strict watchfulness over our outward actions, in order to avoid, as far as possible, the committing of a single willful fault. The stricter the watch which a person keeps over his actions, and the more successful he is in diminishing the number of his failings, the more unblemished will be his purity.

Secondly, as, in spite of all the caution we can take, we shall ever be contracting some slight defilement of soul, it will be necessary to be constantly careful to cleanse our hearts from the impurities which accumulate through the more trivial faults into which we so frequently fall.

The cleanliness of a fine hall does not imply that no grain of dust shall ever fall upon the floor, walls, paintings, and furniture. Such cleanliness as this may not be looked for even in royal residences. It supposes only that the palace and its precincts be kept free from all accumulations of dirt, that all be often swept and dusted, and that everything opposed to cleanliness be removed. A lady, however particular on the point of cleanliness, does not require that her garments should preserve their first whiteness, for that, she knows, is impossible; but she is careful to keep them from all stain, and to have them frequently washed and cleansed from such stains as they may have contracted. The same holds good of purity of heart, which cannot, of course, consist in entire freedom from faults of every kind, but in carefully watching over self, in guarding against any willful defilement, and in frequently purifying the conscience.

Now, these are precisely the two effects which frequent confession

produces in the soul. Hence we attain by its means, more speedily than by any other, to that purity of soul which is the crowning disposition for receiving divine love. Nothing in the world can cleanse our garments so completely from soil and spot as sacramental confession can purify our souls from every stain. In this sacrament the soul is all plunged into a bath of Christ's blood, which has a boundless efficacy for taking from it all that makes it hideous, and for rendering it whiter than the lily, purer than the driven snow. This is what the Apostle St. John assures us when he says, "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity."

Bodily medicine, if very sparingly used, gives relief, it is true, while, if frequently applied, it restores or preserves health; thus too confession, if made even but seldom, produces saving effects in the soul, while, if made frequently, it begets in it the fullness of perfection.

To this may be added another most important reflection: it is that confession, made frequently, is a most effectual means of disarming our ghostly enemy, and thus disabling him from doing us injury and hindering our spiritual progress. It is easy to account for this, since all the power which the enemy has over us comes from the sins that we commit. If these be mortal, they put him in full possession of our souls; if venial, though they do not confer a dominion on him, yet they embolden him to attack us with greater violence. It thence follows that if we confess duly and frequently, the soul will be habitually free from sin; and thus the devil will be deprived of all dominion over us, and will have no courage or power to harm us; so that we shall be more free and unshackled in our pilgrimage towards heaven.

Caesarius relates that a theologian of blameless life, being about to die, beheld the devil lurking in a corner of his room; and he addressed the

fiend in the words of St. Martin: "What art thou doing here, thou cruel beast?" He then, by virtue of his priestly power, commanded the devil to declare what it was that most injured him and his fellows in this world. Though thus adjured, the devil remained silent. Not allowing himself to be baffled, the priest conjured the demon, in the name of God, to to answer him, and to answer him with truth. The evil spirit thereupon made this reply:

"There is nothing in the Church which does us so much harm, which so unnerves our power, as frequent confession."

Hence whoever aspires to cleanness of heart, and to perseverance in it, should make a general confession, and then confess often and see that his confessions are good.

Jesus Christ

By Whom is Accomplished the Return of Man to God

The mystery of Jesus Christ is so profound, so extraordinary, that it

would seem more natural to adore Him in silence than to speak of Him. For we must rightly fear that our words, like our thoughts, are vastly inadequate to express all of the riches contained in the ineffable sanctuary which Jesus Christ is.

St. Paul certainly thinks so: "Praying withal for us also, that God may open unto us a door of speech to speak the Mystery of Christ... that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak" (Col 4; 3-4).

St. Paul's descriptions of Our Lord are marvellous, and incite us to make of Jesus Christ our life: "For to me, to live, is Christ" (Phil 1; 21), and always to become more Christian: Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature; for in Him were all things created in Heaven, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominations, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and in Him; and He is before all, and by Him all things consist" (Col 1; 15-17).

The presence of the Incarnate God in the history of humanity cannot but be its centre, as a sun, towards which everyone goes, and from which everything comes. And if one thinks and believes that this mystery of the Incarnation is for the mystery of the Redemption, then it goes without saying that without Jesus Christ, there can be no salvation possible. Every act and every thought which is not Christian is without saving value, without merit for salvation.

To try to place this mystery, we will reproduce a beautiful page of Father Pegues in his catechism of St. Thomas Aquinas, which puts us in contact with the mystery of Jesus Christ or man's path of return to God:

What do you understand by the mystery of Jesus Christ - that is, of the Word made flesh?

I understand the fact, absolutely incomprehensible for us on this earth, that the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the Word, the only Son of God, Who being from all eternity with His Father and the Holy Ghost, the same One

and Only True God, by Whom all things were created, and who governs them as Sovereign Master, came upon earth in time by His Incarnation in the bosom of the Virgin Mary of whom He was born. He lived our mortal life, preached the Gospel to the Jewish people of Palestine to whom He was personally sent by His Father, was repudiated by this people, taken and surrendered to the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate, condemned and put to death on the cross, was buried, descended into Hell, rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into Heaven forty days after, sits at the right hand of God the Father, from whence He governs His Church, established by Him on earth, to which He sent His Spirit, which is also the Spirit of the Father, sanctifying this Church by the Sacraments of His grace, thus preparing it for His Second Coming at the end of time, when He will judge the living and the dead, having made them come out of their tombs to establish the final separation of the good from the evil, that He might take the good with Him to the kingdom of His Father where

He will anchor them in eternal life, and that He might chase away the wicked, accursed by Him, and condemned to the torture of everlasting fire.

This brief diagnostic and historic survey of the mystery of the Incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ enlightens us somewhat on the gifts and privileges of God Incarnate, and the consequences which proceed from the Incarnation for all of humanity and for every man taken individually. For all are profoundly affected by the coming of God among them and thus the future, for eternity will depend henceforward on their relationship with Jesus Christ, whether they be conscious of it or not, whether they wish it or not.

We could never meditate enough on the riches of the treasure which is Jesus Christ. "If thou didst know the gift of God," said Jesus to the Samaritan. "There hath stood one in the midst of you," said St. John the Baptist, "whom you know not... the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to loose." God the Father

and God the Holy Ghost manifest themselves that we might discover the mystery of Jesus: "And forthwith coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit as a dove descending, and remaining on Him. And there came a voice from heaven: Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased;" "I saw the Spirit coming down, as a dove from heaven, and He remained upon Him. And I knew Him not; but He who sent me to baptise with water said to me: He upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining upon Him, He it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and I gave testimony, that this is the Son of God.

Everything which followed confirmed this judgment of St. John the Baptist. From the Annunciation of the angel to Mary on, all events concerning Him had shown this to be true.

Jesus is indeed the Emmanuel - God among us.

If this man is God, what an abundance of gifts must fill His soul and His body! God's own

taking to Himself a soul and a body confers on this man unique attributes, rights, gifts, and privileges, which surpass all that we can imagine.

Let us draw near this divine sanctuary so as to better appreciate Him and adore Him more perfectly and more profoundly, so as to consecrate ourselves, with enthusiasm and without limit, in His service. How can we not feel called, like the apostles who immediately abandoned everything in order to follow Him?

Three particular graces adorn the body of Jesus, from the moment of His conception in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and from the very infusion of the soul into the body which had been prepared for Him.

The first grace, which is also the source of the other two, is unique in all of creation. By His eternal decision to unite to His Person a soul and a body, God the Word communicated to these creatures in an ineffable and mysterious manner His own divinity in all abundance, inasmuch as these

creatures, by the divine will, were capable of receiving it. It is spoken of as the Hypostatic Union, which conferred upon this soul and this body a divine dignity. All of the acts of this soul and this body are consequently divine, and are justly attributed to God, Who assumes the responsibility for every activity of this soul and this body.

Necessarily, by its very nature, this grace of union conferred upon this Person, living in this human nature, some unique titles: Mediator, Saviour, Priest and King. All mediation, all priesthood, all royalty among creatures is by participation in these properties which are the natural and proper jewels of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

How, then, can we not be convinced of the sublimity of the priesthood, which is a participation in the grace of union which is proper to Our Lord? It is, by His Priesthood that Our Lord exercises His mediation, His role as Saviour; and the essential act of His Priesthood, His Sacrifice on Calvary, by which He merited

for us all the graces of salvation. The Cross appears already, by this grace of union, as the sign of the immolation of His divine body and the oblation of His holy soul to His Father, a supremely efficacious prayer.

This is the essence of the heritage which He bequeathed to the Church: His eucharistic and propitiatory Sacrifice, continued on the altars by those who are chosen to share in His unique priesthood.

Would that the seminarians, priests and bishops, find the meaning of their priesthood in these few fundamental truths on the grace of union in Our Lord. Would that they might perceive for its true worth the sublimeness of the heritage which is bequeathed to them, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which ought to be the source of their sanctification as of their apostolate. Our Lord's act of sacrifice being the act which constitutes the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the life of Christ, Priest and Victim, must be the basis of their interior life and also the

basis of their mystery: the giving of Jesus to souls.

This indissoluble union of the Sacrifice and the Sacrament which the Word Incarnate in His wisdom willed, is precisely that which the Protestants reject and that which the innovators of Vatican II have practically made disappear by ecumenism!

The grace of union confers on Our Lord's body and soul a sanctifying grace which is quite unique in the world. It is so abundant that it becomes the source of all sanctifying grace, which is but the communication of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Charity of Our Lord; "of His fullness we have all received." This sanctifying grace produces in Our Lord's body and soul marvellous effects. His soul, as soon as it came into being, received the Beatific Vision. He enjoyed this vision in His soul right throughout His existence and even on the Cross. It is indeed a great mystery that His soul was at the same time inundated with the most perfect

bliss and flooded with pain and sorrow!

Since He had in His soul the Beatific Vision, Our Lord could only have the theological virtue of charity, but not faith and hope, which disappear in the Beatific Vision.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the profoundness and riches of the charity of Jesus' soul. It is quite clear that this grace, which was created although of ineffable perfection, cannot be compared to the infinite source of charity from whence it proceeded, which is none other than the divine life of Jesus in the bosom of the Trinity.

This sanctifying grace, unique in its riches, filled up the soul of Jesus with the virtues, gifts, beatitudes and fruits of the Holy Ghost.

To this grace, source of the sanctity of Jesus' soul and body, were added as well all other extraordinary graces. By these latter Jesus was able to accomplish His unique role of Saviour, Sanctifier, Glorifier: graces of healing, miracles,

marvels, of diversity of languages, of interpretation of speech, and especially of prophecy. Jesus being the Prophet by His divine and human nature, no other prophet was to follow Him. The apostles were not prophets, but instruments of the Prophet, to constitute by Tradition and Scripture, the deposit of the Faith, which was closed at the death of the last of the apostles. The successors of the apostles simply have to faithfully and exactly transmit the truths contained in this deposit.

The prophetic period thus gave place to the dogmatic period, during which the popes and bishops have the charge of conserving and transmitting the deposit without alteration until the end of time.

Thus appears as of capital importance the true notion of Jesus Prophet.

Jesus' body also possessed marvellous gifts of performing miracles. It should have been glorious, as a fruit of the Beatific Vision. But it is by an additional miracle that Jesus did not

manifest the glory of His body, except on the day of His Transfiguration and of His Resurrection. The entire Gospel manifests the power of the body of Jesus. Even in the sepulchre, the incorruptible body of Jesus remained united to the Word, Who returned His soul to it and caused it to rise from the dead.

Jesus' grace is such a unique and abundant source of salvation that it justly carries a name which is proper to Our Lord: Gratia Capitis, the grace of the leader, or of the head. This signifies quite clearly that it is to Jesus Christ alone, to the Son of God Incarnate, that everything in the work of salvation and all that is ordered towards supernatural good must ultimately be related to and return to.

"There is no salvation outside of Our Lord." It is based on this principle of the capital grace of Our Lord that those who work to save souls must found their actions. Anything that can be done without any regard at all for Our Lord, either directly or indirectly, is vain and is in no

way profitable for eternal salvation.

This must be a directing principle of all our activities. We must strive to supernaturalise everything, by prayer and charity, refusing to involve in our activities too many participants who manifest their opposition to any religious and Christian act. But it is another thing to accept those who have good dispositions, but are ignorant and can convert to Our Lord. Since everything in God's plan is ordered to the salvation of souls by Jesus Christ, and by Him alone, we are to encourage in every domain, social, political, economical, familial, those who strive to attach their actions to the law of Our Lord, both natural and supernatural. For Our Lord rules all; His law should be that of all nations, and of all men without exception.

In time, as in eternity, the reign of Satan is opposed to that of Our Lord. Satan is not the head of the wicked in the sense that he can communicate evil from within as Jesus Christ communicates good,

but in this sense that, in the order of external government, he tends to turn men away from God, like Jesus Christ tends to bring them to Him, and that all those who sin imitate the rebellion of Satan and his pride, as the good imitate the submission and obedience of Jesus Christ.

We will never fully understand the struggle between the good and the wicked throughout history, as long as we do not see it as the personal and unyielding battle for all time between Satan and Jesus Christ.

What duty befalls upon every man because of this fundamental and unyielding battle between the two opposed leaders of mankind? It is the duty never to compromise, on whatever it may be, with that which is of Satan or his followers, and to enlist ourselves beneath the standard of Jesus Christ, and there to remain always and fight valiantly.

Let us not forget that every grace, that every increase of grace, the blessings of sanctifying grace coming to us through the hands of the priest and the Catholic

Church, comes to us from the inexhaustible source of the grace of Jesus, and can only come from Him, our only Saviour.

This reality of Jesus' divine life circulating in our souls and our bodies should be for us a subject of continual thanksgiving and also a source of active vigilance so that we don't let our lamps go out like those of the foolish virgins.

Let us meditate and contemplate the transpierced Heart of Jesus, whence come the fountains of eternal life.

The ornamentation of this sanctuary which Jesus is, is not limited to these three graces about which we have spoken. The union of the person of the Word to the human soul of Jesus confers on this soul the unique privilege of the Beatific Vision from the instant of His creation.

Certainly, Jesus-God has no need of this knowledge. His divine knowledge infinitely surpasses the knowledge of the Beatific Vision, but nevertheless the Creator of all things, having wanted to

personally assume a human soul and body, assumed also their faculties of knowledge and understanding and carried them to their greatest possible perfection.

It was thus that the soul of Jesus possessed the Beatific Vision, the infused knowledge of the angels, and experiential knowledge of men and this, to the most perfect degree which can be given to all angelic creature and a human creature.

Thus from the very first instant, the Incarnate Son of God could see by His human nature everything and all things in the Divine Word that He was Himself, in such a way that there is nothing whatsoever in the present, past or future, whether actions, words or thoughts, with respect to whomever and of whatever time period, that the Incarnate Son of God did not know from the first instant of His Incarnation, by the human nature that He hypostatically united to Himself, in the Divine Word that He was.

These divine realities in Jesus Christ clarify His intimate and

personal relations with all the created spirits in Heaven and on earth. Even in His human soul, Jesus knew us all, and in all the details of our lives. Nothing escapes Him, neither as Creator nor as Saviour. And this knowledge gives rise to a boundless love for the souls who turn towards Him, who give themselves to Him, who accomplish His will. His soul ardently desires to communicate His glory to them. That is why Jesus will be the judge of all souls.

Let us be aware of these realities, of the absolute necessity of offering ourselves to Jesus, as the prayers at the Offertory of the Mass say, and of living this offering unceasingly. Let us be a part of the: "as many as received Him," in order to be His children: "He gave them power to be made sons of God." These words weigh heavily in the history of souls. They are eternally powerful and will separate the just from the unjust.

Jesus is not optional. "He who is not with Me is against Me." To

deny this is the fundamental error of religious liberty and ecumenism.

The consequences of the union of the Word of God, of God Himself, with a human soul and body (over and above those of which we have just spoken in the last few pages), are such that the

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