

CHRISTIAN HUMILITY

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I. THE DIVINE LAW OF PROBATION

I.

Spiritual natures are on the summits of creation; there is nothing but God above them. There is no master so large-minded, so generous, or who is so well acquainted with you and your requirements, as God; no father so loving and bountiful; no friend so free from all jealousy; none who so completely loves you for your greater good. Whilst there is no tyrant so narrow-minded, so proud-hearted, so exacting, so suspicious, so utterly bent on keeping you to your own littleness, as the one we all know so well, of whose tyranny we have had such bitter experience, and who goes by the name of Myself. Yet God or yourself you must choose for your master.

The whole design of God's beneficent government of souls is to draw them out of themselves and to bring them to His truth and good.

II.

This ever-moving earth is not only attracted to its own center, as all that constitutes man is held together by the central force of the soul, but it is held on its rapid course by the attraction of the sun; and as it turns towards that mighty luminary it receives his image, and partakes his light, warmth and fertilizing power. Yet his rays are intercepted by the vapors which the earth produces, and by the turbulence arising from their conflicts. And so by His creative influence does God hold the ever-active soul, in which He has placed His image, in her dependence. But when she turns her face with desire to Him who attracts her, He sends forth the celestial influence of His light, grace and charity upon her, attracting her to move towards Him by faith, hope and love, and she becomes a partaker of His goodness. But as the soul is not necessitated

like the earth, but free to make her choice, if she prefers her own central attraction, and the drawing to herself of the small things around her instead of the divine attraction, and her own uneasy love instead of the divine love, that soul is left to her own littleness, is clouded and darkened by her own vapors, and troubled in herself.

III.

Who can express the magnificence of the light of faith as compared with the light of reason? In the things of God and the soul, reason but gropes among the shadows reflected here below; whilst faith, with its light direct from God, opens out the infinite and eternal prospect of divine truth, which, though obscurely seen, is yet surely seen by the humble mind, giving a breadth and firmness to the mind that nothing can explain but the action of God in the soul.

God and His angels are near to the man of faith--so near that the gross veil of the body alone intervenes between our soul and the presence of God and our guardian angels.

IV.

It is the fostering of minor troubles till they swell to a flood of sadness and discouragement that gives the devil a turbid pool in which to cast his nets. If those minor troubles befall you, let them drop. Be not disturbed: turn your heart to God. Do not look at them; do not dispute with them; answer them not a word. Only turn your mind from them and let them drop.

V.

Only the power of God can bear us up to God. Our will is free, and if we follow the divine attraction, the grace of that attraction will bring us to His presence. But if we choose the attraction of these base and low things among which we are placed for our probation, and prefer the sordid limits of our nature to the heights of the divine goodness, we remain in the bonds of our disordered existence, distressed in spirit and far from God. The whole plan of our happiness is defeated from our want of generosity. What does God ask of us? Not that we should be stronger than we are, but that we should confess our weakness and accept His strength. For God has provided all things for us in great abundance. Nothing is wanting but our will. If we are in a low position and short of sight, He has sent forth His light and His truth to lead and guide us. If we are weak of will, He sends His grace to strengthen and lift up our will. If we are uncertain of His ways, He has sent His Son in our likeness to teach us His ways, who has ordained His Church for every place and time, that His truth and will may be always at our door. Our will may be weak, very weak; He asks for that will that He may make it strong. All that God asks of us is our will; when given to Him, in whatever condition, He will make it good. But, without our will, every provision to help and strengthen us is in vain; they cannot be ours.

II. ON THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN VIRTUE

I.

When virtue in all perfection did appear in visible form to the eyes of men, when Christ, "the wisdom of God and the power of God," was seen, and heard, and touched by men, the humble alone were drawn to Him with wondering love. The sensual and the proud scorned and crucified Him. Something more than human eyes is required to love that virtue which descends from God. We cannot love that of which there is no element within us; and as the divine grace is the principle of Christian virtue, we first require the grace of humility to open our eyes to the divine beauty of that virtue which alone is worthy of God.

II.

Christian virtue differs so widely from natural virtue that its power begins from God. The effect of virtue is to make the person good as well as his work, and to perfect the soul according to the quality and degree of the virtue exercised. Virtue, then, is not a sentiment or a feeling, or any conscious enjoyment of one's own goodness, as some people are blind enough to imagine; the pleasure of virtue is derived from its object and is a result of its exercise, whilst the reward of Christian virtue is neither the virtue itself nor the enjoyment of it, but the God of virtue. As St. Ambrose says: "He who quits himself and cleaves to virtue, loses his own and gains what is eternal."

III.

The exercise of every habit of virtue includes five distinct elements. These are the object of the virtue, the motive, the law of the virtue, the decision, and the action.

The object of a virtue is that upon which, or towards which, it is exercised. The object of faith, for example, is the invisible truth revealed to us by God.

The motive is the end we have in view. If a man helps the poor because it becomes his station in life, or because he accounts it honorable that no one in distress should leave his door unrelieved, this man has no higher motive or end to his virtue than his own honor, which is the heathen virtue of self-respect, beginning and ending in the man himself. If another assists the poor from the natural feeling of sympathy and kindness, and looks to no higher motive, this is the natural virtue of benevolence, but nothing beyond. If the Christian helps the helpless not merely from kindness but from the love of God, the motive is charity; and whilst his object is to help his suffering neighbour, his final motive is the love of God. "A work is then truly excellent," says St. Augustine, "when the intention of the workman is struck out from the love of God, and returns again and again to rest in charity." What a prodigious waste of value is caused to the virtues by exercising them on low motives and with low intentions, when they might be exercised on the very highest motives. The higher the motive, the nearer the soul is carried towards God and this is true even in the lowest occupations.

Man sees in the face, but God in the heart. Man looks to the present value of the virtues as they affect this life, but God looks at the inward motive and intention as it regards eternity. The soul may draw near to God whilst the body is humbled down to the lowest toil; but this the world cannot see. There is a sublimity arising from the high flight of the intention above the meanness of the work, whilst both unite in the will of the workman, which angels may admire, but which the world, that sees but the mean work, can never understand. The poor man, rich in faith, who toils for the love of God and is generous of

the little fruit of his labors, is much nearer to heaven than the rich man who spends a fortune in good works from no higher motive than his natural inclination to benevolence.

IV.

Restlessness and excitement betray weakness; tranquillity is a quality that belongs to solid virtue.

The Christian virtues are the feet and wings whereby the soul moves in the direction of her final end; for even those duties that have their immediate end in this life, when directed by spiritual motives have their final end in God.

V.

Our share in the world's affairs is too apt to take us from ourselves and from the divine examplers seated in the inward man, and so bring us down from supernatural to natural habits, and from divine to human motives. It is, therefore, a great advancement in the virtues when the soul can be as simple, as sincere, as little given to vanity and as well habited in Christian goodness abroad in the world as at home. This depends much upon interior watchfulness and the keeping of the center of the soul in a state of calm recollectedness.

It belongs to the man who is in quest of his supreme good to draw as near to divine things as his condition of life will allow.

To this we are often urged in the Gospel. our Lord says: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added to you."(St. Matthew vi, 33.) And, again, He tells us: "Be ye perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."(St. Matthew v. 48.) That is to say, as your Heavenly Father is perfect God, be you perfect man, formed upon the type of the one perfect man.

III. ON THE DIFFICULTIES OF VIRTUE

I.

The two fundamental efforts of Christian virtue are these: The first is to leave our own selfish affections as much as we can, and to get as near to God with our will and affections as we may. The second is to get the habit of acting as much on principle and as little on sentimentality as we can.

The whole labor of virtue consists in transferring the will from the attractions of nature to the attractions of grace, and in getting out of that narrow selfishness and away from those morbid sensibilities, to reach the divine atmosphere of truth and justice.

The only insurmountable obstacle is want of humility, to obtain which is the greatest labor of the soul.

II.

The chief reasons why the real beginning and each great step in advance on the way of divine virtue are laborious are that they demand self-renunciation and self-denial; they involve the breaking up of old and cherished habits to which nature clings; they require an ever-increasing humility descending further and further into the soul, pulling down the last remains of the pride of life and opening the innermost soul to the influence of grace; they have to master human respect; they have to detach the will from self-love, a detachment that rends nature to her center before the healing and restoring life of charity can enter thus far and close the wound of nature; they have to transfer our powers more completely from nature to grace, and to raise what still acts in us under human motives to divine motives. All this requires that we be subject to trials.

III.

The difficulties to be overcome in these ascensions to better things are not in them, but in ourselves, and there is a grandeur in the enterprise, a magnificence in the venture, that is full of encouragement. What a charm to be linked and united more closely and ever more closely with the eternal mysteries! What a help in the divine power! What a glory for us mortals to be always approaching nearer and nearer to the Supreme and Infinite Good! What are all the petty interests of this mortal life, that they should absorb the soul, compared with the wonderful things above us that hang on the tree of life, and are always ready for the soul that is willing to reach up to them. We have also a Divine Leader, not in the remote distance of history, but with us, always with us; God in our nature, God with us, God within us, our way, truth and life, lighting us to the virtues, giving us the force to practice them.

IV.

Nothing cramps the freedom of the soul in a greater degree than the fear of what others will think and say. The first thing to be done after taking the narrow way is to shut the world out of consideration and look only to the approval of God.

The burden of life is from ourselves, its lightness from the grace of Christ and the love of God.

V.

Charity gives peace to the soul. For whoever loves God above all things rests his heart on the eternal peace. "God is greater than our heart." He can fill all our desires, and when the heart knows this, the nearer it draws to the Divine Fountain of Good, the more it finds repose. But we

must keep in mind that charity can never come from oneself; it can only come from God.

VI.

Let it be plainly understood that we cannot return to God unless we enter first into ourselves. God is everywhere, but not everywhere to us. There is but one point in the universe where God communicates with us, and that is the center of our own soul. There He waits for us; there He meets us; there He speaks to us. To seek Him, therefore, we must enter into our own interior.

IV. ON THE NATURE OF HUMILITY

I.

Here are four Virtues, the fruits of divine grace, which in their union bring the soul to God: these are humility, faith, purity and charity. With the loss of the knowledge of the true God they were lost to the world, and our Lord Jesus Christ brought them down anew from heaven to mankind. Their union in the soul is the distinctive sign of Christian holiness. When pride throws off obedience to God, humility dies. When the mind rebels against the authority of God as the Revealer of truth, faith dies together with humility. When the graceless soul allows the body to revolt and defile the soul with uncleanness, holiness is extinct. When self-love holds the place of charity, the spiritual life of man is no more. When these virtues have departed, the man is left to nature and the world, but to nature in cruel disorder, and to the world, not as God has made it in His goodness, but as man has made it in his concupiscence, to the world as it is taken up for a final end in place of God.

The men of the world have their measure of virtue, but that virtue falls short of God, and ends in this life. They measure their virtues upon the requirements of their fellowmen.

II.

The least known amongst the virtues, and consequently the most misunderstood, is the virtue of humility, and yet it is the very groundwork of the Christian religion.

Humility is a grace of the soul that cannot be expressed in words, and is only known by experience. It is an unspeakable treasure of God, and can only be called the gift of God. "Learn," He said--not from angels, not

from men, not from books--but learn from My presence, light and action within you, "that I am meek and humble of heart, and you shall find rest to your souls."(S. J. Climacus, "Sea la Paradisi," Grad. 25.)

The more we are subject to God, the nearer we are to Him. He is infinitely above us, but by this very subjection we ascend to Him, and find in Him whatever is truly great.

III.

Humility consists in the confession of the grace of God.

The first office of the grace of God is to make us sensible of the giver.

The grand object for which we came into existence is more than the light and grace of God; it is God Himself, and those gifts are given to guide and lead and help us to Him. We are not our own good, nor are the things around or beneath us our good, however useful in their place and order, but God is our good, and whatever comes from God that is better than ourselves helps us on to Him. We have but the capacity for good, and the power of working with the good we receive. Pride is the practical denial of this truth, a truth that springs from the constitution of our nature. And therefore it is said in Holy Scripture that "pride was not made for man."(Ecclesiasticus x, 22.)

IV.

Again, humility is the interior, spiritual, sacrificial action through which, with the profoundest veneration and gratitude, we offer to God the being and life we have received from Him, with the desire and prayer that we may die to ourselves and

live to Him; that we may be wholly changed and transformed into His likeness, detached from earth and united with God. But as we come to our God from sin and dark ingratitude, we owe more to Him than our being and our life; we owe Him the contrition, the breaking to pieces of our sinful form, with regret and sorrow that we have defiled and defaced His beautiful work; we owe to Him that we throw away every breath of vanity, falsehood and evil, which, when cast out of us, is nothing.

V.

Perfect humility is the fruit of perfect charity. The more we love God the less we value ourselves. He who is truly humble, truly empty of himself, is a vessel of election to God, full to overflowing with His Benedictions. He has only to ask to receive still more. He is the child of all the beatitudes, poor in spirit, meek of heart, hungering and thirsting after justice.

When humility finds nothing in herself to rest upon, she finds her true center, and that center is God. For the humble soul alone has got the divine as well as the human measure of things.

V. ON THE GROUNDS OF HUMILITY

I.

The first ground of humility is our creation from nothing. We are of a short time; our beginning was feeble, as became our origin, and nothing was the womb of us all. Whence are we? From the creative will of God. What are we? An existence dependent on the will of God. Whither are we going? Onwards, ever onwards, the body to the dust, the soul to the judgment-seat of God. God is the one, absolute, perfect Being; we are but existences, the products of His will, dependent on Him for all we are and have; and all this great scene about us that fills our senses is of less value than the last soul that was created and born into this world; for the soul is for God, but this visible universe for the service and probation of the soul.

II.

The second ground of humility is our intellectual light. That light makes us reasonable creatures. In that light we see the first principles of truth, order and justice; it is the foundation of our mind and of our conscience. Man is variable and changeable, and one man differs from another; but the light of truth and justice shines one and the same to all, and the chief difference between one man and another is in the degree of his communion with that light.

III.

The third ground of humility is in our dependence on the providence of God. Our life with all its conditions is in the hand of God.

The fourth ground of humility is our sins, whereby we have deformed and denaturalized our nature, ungraced ourselves before God, and incurred His reprobation.

The fifth ground of humility is in the weakness, ignorance, and concupiscence that we have inherited from original sin, and have increased by our actual sins.

The sixth ground of humility is in the open perils and hidden snares with which we are surrounded. Error in all its forms, unbelief in all its modes and varieties, move in their motley shapes through nearly every grade of life, with the apparent unconsciousness that truth is one and comes from God. The widespread evil of modern life is the amazing indifference to the well-being of the soul. An intense activity outside the soul pursues its many ways in the name of progress, although the object or ultimate aim of that progress is neither thought of nor spoken of. But it is chiefly a progress, not to, but from the soul, not to, but from God.

The seventh ground of humility is in the special odiousness and deformity of pride, which is in direct opposition, beyond every other vice, to the order, reason, and truth of things. Pride turns all things from God; humility turns all things to God.

The eighth ground of humility is in the consideration of what this virtue does for us. It opens the soul to the truth of Christ, and the heart to the grace of Christ.

The ninth ground of humility is the knowledge of God and His divine perfections.

IV.

The tenth ground of humility is the secure rest provided for the soul in the unspeakable benefits of our Divine Redeemer.

The eleventh ground of humility is in our distance in this vale of suffering and tears from the Supreme Object of our soul, and the risks we run in the meanwhile from our infirmities.

The twelfth foundation of humility is the holy fear of the judgments of God. For unless we shelter ourselves well in the humility of Christ, and do penance, and use the world as though we used it not, we are not safe. Unless, again, a humble dependence on God be the foundation of our life and the love of God be our ruling affection, we know not in what state God will find us in the hour when we shall pass from this world.

VI. ON HUMILITY TOWARDS OUR NEIGHBOUR

I.

If the virtue of humility is often misunderstood when directly exercised towards God, the same virtue is liable to still greater misconception when exercised towards our neighbour.

There are two things to be considered in every man, and these two things have to be well and carefully distinguished from each other; what the man is of himself, and what he is by the superadded gifts of God. Every man ought to subject what is purely his own to what is of God, whether that which is of God is in himself or in another.

This is the principle of humility in its exercise towards our neighbour; it is not a reverence given to human nature, but to the gifts of God within that nature.

II.

But the same humility forbids the unreasonableness of judging another man's soul. We can only act on what we know, and we always know much more of our own internal weakness and defects than we can know in the case of another person.

Few persons, perhaps, reflect on the beauty of the reward we receive for humility to our neighbour. This humility opens the soul to all the good that God has planted in other souls.

Those are the happy, sunshiny souls that are open to see all the good influences of God around them, and that receive into themselves the reflection of the divine good which God has given to other souls. This is one of the great privileges of a truly religious society where humility and charity are the dominant virtues, that each soul is always receiving a beautiful and powerful influence from all the rest of the community.

The very spectacle gives a light to the words of our Lord, that "where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst of them."(St. Matthew xviii, 20.)

III.

It is the will of men acting apart from God, and preferring in their pride to see the evil rather than the good in their fellowmen, that so bitterly entangles this world of human nature. It is the myriads of self-wills, impelled each by its own self-love, that produce the knots, the ravel and the interminable complications that make this world such a wearying perplexity to thoughtful minds devoid of the wisdom that descends from God. Even David was perplexed in his musings on these things until he remembered the judgments of God.

The tragedy of human life is not that strife of free-will with fate that the ignorant Pagans imagined, but it arises from the collision of pride with the providence of humiliation, of self-will, destined always to defeat, against the will of God. There is such an enormous distance between what we are by nature and what God would have us to be by grace, that we may pass from misery to happiness; and the obstacles within us that hold us back or throw us the other way are of such a kind, tending to seek false instead of true greatness, in the exaltation of ourselves, and not in ascending to things greater than ourselves, that this alone shows us what a great part humility must take in replacing us on the path that leads to God.

Although the light that descends to us from God is the chief principle of self-knowledge, the watching of our conduct towards our neighbours also helps us very much to know ourselves.

VII. HOW HUMILITY RESPONDS TO THE BENIGNITY OF GOD

I.

Although all the virtues imitate God, God Himself has not our virtues, but He is one infinite virtue and perfection. Our virtue is a struggle against frailty, a progress to better things, a triumph over weakness, and it is perfected, as St. Paul says, amidst infirmity. It is the effect of good will, helped by the grace of God, to bring us near to God.

II.

The Father gives all He has to every creature He has made, and to His intelligent creatures, capable and willing to receive them, things divine as well as earthly; but with them He gives the law of justice, which demands that we give them all back to Him. To do this is humility in man.

Humility, therefore, is nothing less than the reflection in our life of the truth and justice of God. By humility we also imitate the purity of God.

III.

What, then, is the benignity of God but the lowering and diminishing of Himself in the minds and hearts of His rational creatures, that He may adapt Himself to our limited understanding and contracted sense?

God descends into our ways to raise us to His divine ways, and we obtain the divine likeness in the degree in which we love Him.

God delights to call Himself our Father, and by that holy title He seems to preside over His human family in a homely and familiar way. It is unspeakable what service God is always rendering to us, and what benignity and condescension we are daily and hourly receiving from our Heavenly Father.

The humble ways of God in this world are His tender, loving ways. They are the sublimest of all lessons to the proud, if the proud could only learn them. But whilst they attract the humble, and fill their souls with sweetness, proving, above all things else, the love which God has for them; they repel the proud, who could not receive them without the utter condemnation of their own evil condition.

IV.

Had we the true spirit of God, and a humble trust in His benignant care of all humble things that do His will, we should never want in anything that might conduce to our eternal good. For His special love and care is for the humble, whose sincere spirit resembles His own.

All the examples of divine condescension that we can accumulate cannot bring home to the truly humble soul a conviction equal to the loving sense within that soul of what God is to the humble. If He rejects the proud, it is because they are alien to His nature; if He receives the humble, it is because they are conformable to His life. Those humble spirits who look to nothing but His goodness are His true children, and He loves to yield to their prayers and expostulations.

God loves to be resisted in His displeasure, and to be restrained by the humble from inflicting punishment. One

saint will often save a nation; so true is it that humble souls are the hinges on which God moves the world.

Humility so perfects man for God that when the SON OF GOD took our nature He could find no other virtue so capable of uniting that nature with God.

VIII. THE DIVINE MASTER OF HUMILITY

I.

The Scriptural sense of the word Master signifies one who teaches with authority, and this title was given to the Son of God both by His disciples and His adversaries.

Who is the true Master but He who is all that He teaches and incomparably more than He teaches? Jesus Christ was the substantive Master of humility.

When we speak of Christ as the Master of humility, we speak of something preeminently great and excelling. The Son of God could not take the nature of man without making that nature morally perfect, and He has shown in Himself that the foundation of moral perfection in a creature is perfect humility. He could not, again, take the office upon Him of our Mediator and Redeemer without showing us in a pre-eminent way by what virtue we are reconciled to God and made open to His sanctifying gifts. This virtue He therefore manifested the most conspicuously in Himself. He took it as His singular prerogative because it was the perfect subjection of His humanity to His divinity, because it was the virtue by which He redeemed the world, and because it is the one virtue by which every soul that He came to redeem returns to God. TO this virtue, therefore, as to His great human prerogative, He especially appealed as to the chief lesson that we are to learn of Him, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." (St. Matthew xi, 19.)

II.

The Son of God could never have accepted this condition of humility but for the divinest reason of glorifying the Holy Trinity, which He did in taking the headship of humanity, in

perfecting that humanity in Himself, in recovering that humanity to God when lost, and in restoring that humanity to the great and divine end for which every intelligent soul was created. He took this humble condition to drive back and destroy the huge invasion of pride that was the ruin of the human race. "Being in the form of God, He thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* In which form of a servant He was less than the Father, less than Himself, unequal to Himself, unlike Himself, emptied to all appearance of Himself, in this land of misery and sorrow, that by restoring us to humility He might restore us to God.

Thus through His Incarnation the Son of God both consecrated and deified humility, making it more glorious to be humble with God, than to be exalted with pride among the children of men. To imitate Christ in His humility is something truly great.

III.

But pride was not the only evil that withheld men from God; the covetousness of the things of this world, and the appetite for sensual pleasures drew them with an overpowering fascination from the knowledge of God and from the love of eternal good. On this account it was necessary that we should not only have the example of humility but also of self-abnegation, which is so intimately connected with humility. Our Lord, therefore, united His humility with poverty, and His poverty with self-abnegation. Nor was this merely for our example, but because the life of humility, poverty and self-abnegation is the most perfect of human lives, as depending on God alone, and as setting the things of this mortal life at their true value as compared with the things of eternity. Yet through all the humility and poverty of Christ His Divinity

shines; as in the humility of His Saints the Spirit of God shines through every abasement.

IV.

The calm and gentle way in which the Son of God first makes Himself known to the people of Nazareth, to those who had known Him for thirty years from His infancy, and let them know that He, whom they had only known as an obedient son and a pious working man, was the expected Messiah, and the fulfillment of the Prophets, has always appeared to me to be one of the most remarkable passages in the history of His divine life. It is not only remarkable for the calm gentleness of His bearing at so solemn a moment, but for the humility with which He makes an announcement so startling to His audience. There is none of the excitement or fervor of enthusiasm with which mere human nature would have announced a great personal claim for the first time, especially when contrary to all the preconceptions of his hearers; there is the calmness of God in the figure and voice of man. He reads the prophetic description of His divine mission in the ordinary course of His duty as a reader in the Synagogue, and then, when all eyes are fixed upon Him, He gently drops the word to their attentive ears, "This day is fulfilled this Scripture in your ears." All the rest He leaves to the silent inference of their own minds.

V.

Let it be further observed that in all His humble words and ways, our Divine Lord never speaks directly of His own humility but once. He lives and breathes and personifies the virtue, as what is inseparable from Him; but of his own humility He spoke but once. He spoke once because that was necessary for our instruction; He spoke once to consecrate this wonderful virtue; He spoke only once because of the exceeding delicacy and hidden nature of the virtue, which, like

purity, is far too modest to be spoken of by its possessor except in a case of absolute necessity. And in this, too, He conveys to us a profound instruction. "Come," He says, "to Me, learn of Me;" "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father except through Me.(St. John xiv, 6.) He is the way to heaven, the truth from heaven, the life that brings heaven; and He says, Come to Me; learn this one thing from Me, and you shall know all things; learn this one thing from Me, and you shall possess all things; learn of Me to be meek and humble of heart. There is nothing so wonderful in power as the humility of Christ, who, resting the created nature of His humanity wholly upon His Divine nature, ascribes nothing whatever to that human nature, which He knew so perfectly to be nothing without God.

VI.

Having once learnt from Christ that the great lesson He has come to teach us is His own meekness and humility, we then discover that His Incarnation, His birth, all the actions of His life, His sufferings and death, all speak to us, and breathe into us, this divine lesson of humility; and everywhere, even when His voice is silent, His life and conduct say to us: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."

VII.

The passion of our Lord presents all the great virtues in their perfection for our imitation, whether self-denial, poverty of spirit, obedience, silence, humility, purity, patience, prayer, resignation, contempt of the world, or charity. But among all these virtues He pre-eminently appears as the Master of humility. His passion is the book of humility, His Cross is the throne of humility, the terrible way from the Mount of Olives

to Mount Calvary is the substantive exposition of the words, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

The Cross is the instrument of contrition upon which the earthly man is broken to be reformed upon the heavenly man. The Cross is the divine school of patience; the school of self-abnegation; the school of penance; the school of charity. The foot of the Cross where Mary stood with John, and where the prostrate Magdalen wept her loving grief, is the great school of humility, where the soul is purified and brought to God. There for ever sounds the great command of the Divine Master, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

IX. HUMILITY AS THE RECEPTIVE FOUNDATION OF THE DIVINE GIFTS AND GRACES

I.

It is impossible to imagine holiness in any of God's creatures without humility and purity. For as chastity is the body's purity, humility is the soul's purity, and purity is the first condition of sanctity.

The more humble and pure a soul is, the more she looks away from herself into the perfect type of holiness in whose light she sees nothing in herself but the gifts of God and her own defects.

Humility is the virtue that measures our failures from justice, and our distance from the Eternal Justice, and that labors to make and to keep us truthful and honest within ourselves and before God.

What God seeks in man, what He loves in man, what He rewards in man is humility.

II.

St. Paul calls the true Christian God's building and God's husbandry. He lays in us the foundation of faith that we may know Him, of hope that we may desire Him, and of charity that we may love Him, serve Him and rejoice in Him. But this can only be done in a soul that is duly disposed. For God cannot build a divine edifice on an earthly foundation, not upon self-love, not upon self-elation, not upon self-seeking, not upon hollow, delusive, revolting pride; not upon animal concupiscence. A building upon such quicksands would soon be swallowed up. All this creation of our own, if anything so

vain ought to be called a creation, must be swept away. And why? That God may find His own creation, and not a mere falsified creature made into a lie by vanity and pride, but His own creature as He made it, pure and simple, and duly subject to Him, that He may work what is good and holy on His own foundation.

We are not created with virtue, but with nature; we are not created with grace; that must be given to our nature.

III.

Empty yourself, and see that I am God."(Psalm lxxii, 20-28.) Humility is the animated capacity of the soul, vacated of self-seeking, and looking to God with desire to be filled with His light, grace and goodness.

God will not throw away His noble gifts upon those who cannot be made worthy of them even by the gifts themselves. If the soul is not subject to God as well as open, she cannot receive the grace of the Christian virtues.

Frail as man is, humility will make a foundation in him strong enough for God to raise an edifice upon it that shall last for eternity. The progress of humility is the progress of the soul. We may know the extent of the grace that is given us by the strength of our humility. Our very perfection is humility. The gifts and prerogatives conferred on the Blessed Virgin were all given to her humility; this she expressly declares in her Canticle of gratitude.

X. ON THE MAGNANIMOUS CHARACTER OF HUMILITY

I.

Christian magnanimity is a most generous virtue, because it is essentially opposed to selfish considerations. It is greatness of soul opposed to littleness of soul. It is also concerned with security or tranquillity, which rests with a sincere conscience on God.

Great generosity gives to every virtue the quality of magnanimity, because generosity proceeds from greatness of soul, great in aiming to please God, and to do Him honor. The sons and daughters of the Eternal King, ought to have great souls, they ought to be ready to do great things for His honor and glory.

He is magnanimous who rudely mortifies his senses, giving no more to the body than it needs, that the spirit may hold command, and be free, and the soul filled with good things. He is magnanimous who will not let his soul be ruffled by offensive words or violent deeds. He is greatminded who has his chief conversation with the eternal truth and justice. Why should that truth be always near us, and we commonly far away, unless from our little-mindedness? He is great-minded who keeps himself in the Divine Presence, and is never long away from the sense of the Eternal God. God is always with us, why should we not always be with God? The great souls of all ages have walked with God.

Soft and pusillanimous souls are too weak to walk steadfastly before God through the pilgrimage of life; but the great-souled are subject from their inmost heart to God, accounting that nothing can be greater for them than to be in the hands of God.

TO be great-souled is to be full of faith, of a faith that so lights up the eternal world to them, that the mortal things of this world fade before their eyes like dying flowers. The great-souled are magnanimous in sacrificing the love of self to the love of God, until all their strength flows into charity. Happy they who are released from bondage to themselves, that they may be large and free in the generous atmosphere of light and grace. All that we require is that the soul be open and generous. Humility opens the soul, charity makes her generous.

II.

For nigh two thousand years the world has known the Son of God in human nature.

Christ Jesus was the perfect man in perfect union with God, the model of manhood to all men, most perfect in magnanimity as in all virtues, yet the world could not understand Him; so very different is the Divine from the human view of magnanimity.

Although both heathen and Christian magnanimity aim at making the soul great, and that by seeking great things and despising little things, there is an immeasurable distance between them, which is still visible in the man of the world as compared with the servant of Christ. The man who prefers himself to God, or the things of this world to the things of God, or the interests of time to the interests of eternity, or the being honored by men to the being honored by God; not great-souled, but little-souled.

The sublime way of humility is, that a man be poor in himself and rich in God.

XI. ON THE DETESTABLE VICE OF PRIDE

I.

As pride is the root of all evil, the vice of vices, and destruction of the virtues, it is the chief enemy of God and of man. It contradicts the whole reason of humility. It is not only irrational, as all sins are, but it is an uncreaturely sin, which other sins are not.

The proud man does not behave like one whom God has recently created from nothing, and whom He may summon to His presence at any hour. He acts as though he were not dependent on God, and as if what he is, and has, were not altogether owing to the divine will and bounty. This vice is so thoroughly opposed to the nature and condition of man, as well as to the rights and claims of God, and is so destructive of all spiritual good, that God has proclaimed to us this warning in His Scripture, "Pride was not made for man."

II.

The greatness of the soul is her capacity for God. A soul without the Spirit of God is an existence without its object, a mere failure from the reason of its existence, like a house that is never inhabited, or a body that is never animated. The soul can only be perfected, as the very constitution of her nature is an image of God, in so far as she possesses the life of God.

Sin is an aversion from God and a conversion to the creature, accepted as a good in place of God against all reason and justice; and pride is the aversion from God in all sin.

Inordinate self-love is the cause of pride.

III.

From the beginning to the end of the Holy Scriptures, we shall find if we study them attentively, one fundamental truth, and one unceasing admonition. We hear it in Paradise, we see it on the Cross. It runs through the sacred histories, is loud in the prophets, frequent in the sapiential books, continuous in the Gospels, and rises in many pages of the Apostolic writings. This fundamental truth instructs us to know, this constant admonition exhorts us to act on the belief, that what God accepts from man is humility, and that what He rejects is pride. His blessings are for the humble, His maledictions are for the proud. In every virtue it is humility that He rewards, in every vice it is pride that He punishes. And when we remember that it is humility that subjects the soul--and the virtues to God, and that it is pride that sends the soul away from God, and inflames the vices with its malice, we shall see that it cannot be otherwise.

Let us, then, entreat of God with our whole powers, that in His mercy He would deliver us from pride, and would grant us the inestimable gift of humility, that we may not follow the evil spirits in their pride to destruction, but Christ, the Divine Master of humility, to sanctification. Which may God in His goodness grant us now and for ever. Amen.

XII. THE WORLD WITHOUT HUMILITY

I.

The light of reason is sufficient to teach the knowledge of God, but not to bring man into union with his Creator. For the light, naturally implanted in the human mind, bears witness to God, and the conscience is His voice. But the pride that is in man separates him from God, turns his soul from the light, corrupts his interior sense, and smites him with spiritual blindness.

In the Scriptures and the Church we learn that the true progress of man is towards God, and that the path of this progress is upwards to greater truth and higher justice.

But the heathen world teaches us the terrible lesson of the final end of false progress, of progress away from God through the dreary downward path by the ways of negation and false liberty. First, the sense of dependence on God is lost, and so the virtue of humility departs. Then man forgets his Creator, forgets Him until he no longer knows that he is a creature, and so the intellectual principle of humility disappears from his mind. Pride, then, remains master of his heart without a rival, but still wanting a God, though a God consistent with his license, he begins to deify the creature.

II.

The rejection of the humility of faith and of the Gospel, is rapidly bringing the world at large to the old heathen conditions of thought and conduct, and to the old heathen confusion of substituting the powers of the world for the sovereignty of God. This is manifested in many ways. Again, the idolatries of the modern world are in various respects more

gross than the idolatries of the ancient world. For the ancient world idealized nature, and, however erroneously, still associated that nature with some ideal of the divine, and ascribed divine attributions to its departed heroes; but the modern idolatries are given to the gross, unidealized facts and products of nature. and to human inventions, without having associated any divine ideal with their powers; the ancient world had a sense of religion, however corruptly applied. But modern heathenism has dismissed every sense of the divine, and has given its devotion to the bare powers and phenomena of nature; or to the worship of poor fallen humanity; to the deification of accumulated wealth; to the veneration of mechanical inventions; to the cultivation of material luxury; and to the superexaltation of pride, independence and self-reliance. Whatever a man seeks, honors, or exalts more than God, that is the God of his idolatry. There is no need of temples, altars or statues for material, mental or social idolatry; whatever is preferred in mind and heart to God, whatever is chosen as the chief end of man's pursuit in place of God, constitutes the idolatry of these times.

III.

Modern states have certainly not claimed divinity for themselves like the old heathen Government; their tendency is to discard religion as a foundation, and to remove its sanctions from beneath their constitutions and laws Hence the ever-growing tendency to substitute temporary expediency for the fixed principles of wisdom, and the unstable voice of the multitude for the maxims of experience and the long foresight of prudence. There is everywhere visible an enormous jealousy of the authority of religion over the souls of men; and like the heathens of old, the ambition of States is to reign alone, and to have no power above their own in the world. In nothing is this shown more than in those secular systems of

education held in the hands of the State, in which all minds shall be trained by compulsion upon the mind of the State, after the fashion of the Spartans, leaving the rights of God and of the family out of consideration, and reducing all minds to one dead level of rationalism.

XIII. ON THE FOOLISHNESS OF VANITY

I.

Vanity, or vain-glory, is the off-spring of pride, and the eldest daughter of that detestable vice. Pride is her father, self-love is her mother, and cobwebs are her clothing. She is such a light, fond thing, that were it not that her seductions weaken and undermine the best-formed minds and hearts both of men and women, for her own sake she would be unworthy of any serious consideration. A man or woman given up to vanity is filled with light follies unworthy of the dignity of the soul and the noble end for which the soul is created. It may be more secret, as a rule, in men than in women, but it is not the less dishonest for that reason.

The word vanity sounds of things hollow, shallow and trifling; but that is no trifle which makes the soul light and trivial, and unrobes her of her dignity. Every creature has in it a natural vanity, because created from nothing, and unless supported by God, of its own nature it would go back to nothingness. It is vain also, because by the mere force of its own nature no creature can come to its final end.

II.

The worst effect of vanity is that it makes the soul empty and inane. It not only destroys good but leads to evil. As nothing in human nature is so sensitive as vanity, there is nothing that suffers more. It is easily wounded, often mortified, and frequently disappointed. What vanity tempts is the empty soul, and the soul inflated-with the ruinous pride of ambition.

The remedy for this disorder is in the exercise of that most sincere of virtues which wars against pride and all its offspring, and which bears the name of holy humility.

XIV. THE HUMILITY OF FAITH

I.

Our life begins in utter ignorance of all things, and our mind is first opened by the instinctive faith that we place in those around us. Without this faith we could make no beginning of knowledge. The simple, open, confiding spirit of childhood enables us to learn much in a short time. But youth advances in knowledge through faith in the teacher as well as childhood. We are now speaking of human faith. There are three moral elements in this teachableness. The first is the consciousness of ignorance, which is an element of natural humility. The second is the opening of the mind to the teacher, which is a second element of humility. The third is the belief given to the teacher, which is a third element of humility. This is the human way of knowledge; it begins with faith, and the greater part by far of every one's knowledge has no other ground than faith.

II.

The principles of divine faith are totally different from the principles of human faith. Human faith rests on the testimony of man; divine faith on the testimony of God.

The natural man cannot understand divine faith; he must be prepared for it, and God alone can prepare him.

As the truth revealed by God is above all created nature, and is divine, the grace of God must dispose the soul for its reception; and this disposition is obtained not by study but by prayer, not by disputation but by humility.

Faith is the first light, the heralding light, the foundation placed in us of what in its final perfection will be the beatific

vision of God. It is the beginning of the eternal ways in us, the commencement of our union with God, and is compared in the Scriptures to a first espousal of the soul with God: "I will espouse thee to Me in faith."(Osee i, 20.) It is the first thing that makes us acceptable to God, for as Paul says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."(Hebrews x, 6.) We please Him by the humility with which we acknowledge Him to be the fountain of truth, and subject ourselves to Him as the children of His truth.

III.

Faith is by its very nature a subjection of the mind and will to God as He is the Sovereign Truth, a subjection to His divine authority as the illuminator and teacher of the soul, and a subjection to the truth which He teaches by revealing. Moreover, as a test and trial of this subjection to Him, God is pleased to require that this subjection of faith shall be openly made and manifested before all men, by our open submission to the Church which He has appointed to represent His authority, and to the voice of her teaching, and to her ministry of grace, as exercised in His name and by His power. This is not only faith, but the humility of faith, because it is the subjection of the mind and heart to the authority of God, and to His truth in the way that He imposes and prescribes. Humility must remove pride and open the soul that the grace of faith may enter.

IV.

What prevented such numbers of those who followed our Divine Lord, and, attracted by curiosity, heard His words and saw His mighty power in His miracles, from believing in Him? Our Lord Himself has proclaimed the three causes of their unbelief: their pride, their love of this world's interests, and their, human respect. And He proclaimed the two conditions which would alone enable them to follow Him as

disciples, and to become members of His kingdom. These were humility and self- abnegation. Humility, then, is the groundwork of faith, and faith the groundwork of the other Christian virtues, which are all exercised in the light of faith. Humility frees the soul from pride and error, faith fills her with light and truth; humility opens the soul that faith may enter; humility brings us to the knowledge of ourselves, and faith to the knowledge of God. But the knowledge of God brings so great an increase to the knowledge of ourselves, when we use that knowledge rightly, that humility may be said to rest on faith as much as faith rests on humility.

The force and wisdom of faith is the love of God and our neighbour. For charity is the light of faith, and faith is the light of charity.

Wherefore let us cultivate humility, that we may have a larger soul for faith and charity; and faith, that we may have a greater light from God and deeper knowledge of the eternal mysteries, and charity, that we may obtain the fruit of faith and humility through the closer union of our soul with God. But faith is cultivated by prayer, and by meditation, and by contemplation, and by living, and thinking, and acting in the light of faith, and in the presence of God.

XV. ON THE SCHOOLS OF HUMILITY

I.

Every science is founded upon certain fixed and unchangeable principles of truth, and is guided by rules that spring from those principles. The science of humility rests upon the knowledge of God and of oneself; it fills the whole distance between the creature and the CREATOR. The Giver of this science is God, whose light descends into our interior, and shows us what we are in His sight, and what we ought to be. Hence the science of humility is profound, descending as well as ascending beyond the sphere of human comprehension; for the depths of the soul are unfathomable and the heights of God are unattainable in this day of probation. We must, therefore, learn the great laws of humility from God, who has sent us His SON to teach them, who is himself their great example, and whose Cross is lifted up as the beacon-flame of His doctrine over the whole troubled sea of human life.

II.

There is one unrivaled master in every science, and our Lord Jesus Christ; the Supreme Master of Humility.

But the science of humility is not humility; the science only provides the knowledge and the rules for its exercise. Humility is a virtue, and belongs to practice; it is a divine art or discipline exercised in the deeper regions of the soul. By this discipline the soul is opened, enlightened, purified and invigorated to act with freedom in the gifts of God.

The rules that guide the science of humility spring from all the relations that ought in justice to exist between the soul and God.

III.

The Church has her great schools of humility in her Monastical and Religious institutions. They may be properly called the schools of the Beatitudes, devoted as they are to the methodical cultivation of the divine counsels that were delivered to mankind by the Son of God. They are founded on the virtues of humility and charity; their system of training is based upon humility; and their discipline is perfected in the exercise of that virtue, whose spirit pervades the Beatitudes as it begins with the first of them, and whose true disciples are the choice and privileged portion of the Church of God.

XVI. ON HUMILITY AS THE COUNTERPART OF CHARITY

I.

Let us ascend in mind through the grace of God to the Divine Fountain of all charity. God is charity; charity is the life and perfection of His being. What an infinitude of life and love is expressed in these three little words: God is charity. As the shell on the sandy shore cannot contain the ocean that rolls round the world; as the laboring breast of man cannot contain the pure and boundless ether that fills the heavens; as the body of man could not pass into the intense conflagration of the sun without instant destruction; neither can the soul of man embrace, comprehend or enter into the infinite charity of God. Yet some drops of the ocean are in the shell; some little modified breath of that ether is in the breast of man; and some tempered rays of the warmth of that sun are in our earthly frame. Some created rays from His uncreated charity has God also deigned to impart to the soul of the humble Christian, which are full of divine life and love; and in virtue of that sublime gift, the moment the words are sounded in his ears, he knows and feels to his inmost core that God is charity.

II.

There is no other reason for the existence of this world than the charity of God and the communication of His charity. The world was made for man, man for the soul, the soul for charity, and charity unites the soul with God. From charity God created the world, and by charity He perfects the end for which the world was made, for that end is the happiness of souls possessed of charity.

There is a kind of life in the soul without charity, but it is not the life for which the soul was made, not true life, but

initiatory and mere infantile life, which is life in pain and sorrow from want of our true life.

III.

Humility disposes the soul and prepares the way for charity, and greater humility prepares and disposes the soul for greater charity. True humility never was, never is, and never can be without charity. Humility is the sacrificial element in all sincere love. For as love is the transfer of our affection from oneself to another, it includes a surrender of self-love, and this surrender is humility. But when we give up our love from ourselves to God, this giving up of our love of self to God is humility, and the love that we give to God is charity.

To humble souls--for they alone are capable--the grace of charity will never be wanting; for the God who is charity does not mock His children, but when He commands them to love Him with their whole heart and soul and strength and mind, He gives them the charity by which they may love Him.

True charity to our neighbour is to love him, whether friend or foe, as we love ourself, in God, unto God, and for God's sake. For the charitable love of our neighbour is embraced in the love of God, proceeds from the love of God, and ends in the love of God.

Nothing makes us more like to God than to forgive those who offend and injure us; and we may certainly obtain more grace and glory from God through persecution than through kindness if we know how to use it rightly. Of this true test of charity our Lord gave us the example in His conduct to the traitor Judas.

Charity is the way to man as well as to God. It conciliates all intelligences. And though there may be much excitement in what the world calls pleasure, there is no solid joy of life or

peace of heart except in charity. "He who abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."