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**The Inner Life
of Dame
Gertrude More**

Augustine Baker





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The Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More

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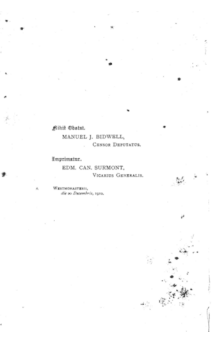
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PREFACE

Nearly half a century has rolled by since Abbot Gregory wrote of Father Baker's "Life of Dame Gertrude More" that "This [work] was in two volumes; the second is unfortunately lost. In the Life the Father describes the whole method of his guidance of his spiritual daughter. It is full of the most practical instruction, and we cannot too deeply regret that any portion of such a work should be lost to us. The first volume was accidentally picked up in Germany a few years ago; perhaps the second may yet be discovered." The pious hope of the Abbot has been fulfilled. Some years ago the "Life of an Englishman" which, as it was described in the catalogue, was picked up by a monk of Engelshausen Abbey for a trifling sum, and upon examination the volume was found to contain in manuscript the volume of Father Baker's "Life of Dame Gertrude More," with a few passages here and there omitted by the copyist for the sake of brevity. This precious work of Father Baker, by the courtesy of the Abbot of Engelshausen,¹ I am now able to submit to the public for the first time.

¹ This applies to the main part of the Life only. The first part is taken from a manuscript which has long been in the possession of the monks.

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In former days, till the devastating Reformation swept over this land, nearly every county was dotted over with monasteries. Not a county but could boast of some religious house, the greater number by far belonging to the Cistercian or Benedictine Order. Few indeed were the counties which were not graced by the presence of one or more of the latter, sometimes, as on the eastern border of England, the number rising to a dozen or more.

From authentic records it is easy to obtain a fairly complete picture of the manner of life pursued in Benedictine convents, and their influence on the world around them. Let it suffice here to say that while, on the one hand, they pursued the contemplative life, on the other, they were not unmindful of the needs of the world about them. And such a good level of observance was maintained that the Royal Commissioners who had been appointed for the purpose of finding pretences for the dissolution of the monasteries were fain to admit that there was but little cause for complaint.

Long, however, before the subject of this biography saw the light, the storm of the Reformation had passed over the English monasteries, and there was nothing left to show what care had been save blackened walls and deserted churches. Indeed, so entirely was the memory of the life obliterated, that Father Baker was able to observe that "at this time" when

¹ The reader must be referred to Abbot Gasquet's "Henry VIII. and the English Monasteries" for fuller details. In the sixth chapter of the second volume will be found a very complete account of the nature of the and observance of Benedictine communities in England up to the time of their dissolution.

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Helen More was a maid of twenty "the religious state for women was little understood in England."

There were not wanting, however, devout men who naturally desired to see restored the past glories of Benedictine monasteries. Prominent among these was Father Robert Jones, an active and distinguished member of the late recently revived English Benedictine Congregation. Father Jones had under his direction a number of young students, many of good family, in whom he fostered an ardent inclination towards the religious state. Of these he gathered together the more promising, and, like another Cranch, led them forth from their father's houses and country to seek God and the religious state in a strange land. Among these young ladies was Helen, afterwards Gertrude, More. The difficulties the little company had to contend with in securing a habitation are sufficiently indicated by Father Baker. A house in a ruinous condition was lent to them at Cambridge. Nothing was thought of till the first term was over, and these were so crowded that the workmen engaged to repair the house were obliged to work night and day beyond another thirty years. However, at considerable outlay, the house was made habitable, and the little company took possession on Christmas Eve, 1623, and on the following Sunday the same parliament received the habit from the Archbishop of Canterbury, assigned by the President, and the house was formally and canonically established.¹

¹ An interesting paper is to be found in the next volume of *Cambridge, description of the convent buildings and what the tower*



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The new Benedictine house at Canterbury was not, however, an exact reproduction or revival of the ancient English monasteries. There was an aged surviving relic to recall or lead down to the thing forgotten: the monastery of departed genius and tradition. The foundation was in many respects a new organism and established on new lines. Interest was with the same world was to be much more restricted than heretofore: equal beyond the enclosure walls was to be strictly prohibited; grilles were to be erected, and the stranger without was on no account to be admitted.

A number of circumstances, on which, continued to bring about this change from the older order of things. There was first of all the inherent difficulty of adding external good works to the pursuit of contemplation. In many cases it is found in practice that monks are prone to substitute good works for contemplation rather than add them to contemplation. Thus external good works become a positive hindrance to the pursuit of contemplation.

thought of the community. The foremost is work involving and may be the best created. The situation of the house of these English monks is highly and abnormally peculiar, but not when the history of the very early and middle periods, composed of both. Their church is necessarily small, but perhaps both very old and, and hence the Divine Office is unimpaired in an abiding manner. The men themselves are very obedient of their kind. Particular as to the maintenance of the English House in Canterbury is a relic of the old monastery in the town, for we see only an eye of an eye in the municipality, as they relate on their own doors, etc. etc. but also many others are attracted from England to live these men of their own country.

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of contemplation. Then, there was the fear arising from the extreme luxury and dissipation of the times, which rendered the residence of monasticism in country districts, and still more the presence of religious women in the streets and public places, most undesirable. Even the presence of convents was not safe, but soon and infrequently involved by nuisance, who dragged forth swarming armies and forced them into the marriage state. Influenced doubtlessly by these and similar considerations, the Council of Trent used the weight of its authority to tighten up the laws which regulated the observance of enclosures. Not only was the law which forbade entry from entering the enclosure enforced under severe penalties, but the ingress of the sisters from the enclosure was strictly prohibited, except for a just cause approved by the Bishop. For these and other reasons which may easily be conceived, the new foundation at Canterbury was established on lines

of St. Thomas (1264, O. c. 1264, art. 12). The active life may be considered as consisting of the active service of justice, and from this point of view it is manifest that the active life involves the contemplation, as much as it is inseparable from it. The object of this statute should be the well of those who are engaged in the danger of falling a prey to wicked men and other evil influences and other superstitious observances, if they do not expedient to transfer these communities to other places in some proper terms to prevent abuses, and that the said statute may be revised, if need be, to bring it about."

"It is to be noted that the present usage of the Divine Office for men is not the same as that of the monks, but is rather a mixture of the two, except for some slight differences approved by the Bishop, Council of Trent, etc. etc."

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more strictly and exclusively contemplative than had been customary in pre-Reformation times in England. To give effect to these ideas, the Divine Office—the *Opus Dei*, as St. Benedict calls it—was given in the new foundation in traditional importance a great part of the time of the religious being devoted to its recitation. Every night the Matins bell rang the men to choir at 12.15, and more or less of the Divine Office was chanted, and often the whole of Lauds, according to the dignity of the feast. It must have been often a clock in the morning before the Sisters could snatch a short rest, till the bell again summoned them at 6.30 to resume the practice of God at Prime. This was followed by half an hour of mental prayer, and then the Communion Mass was celebrated. A short interval of rest was then allowed, and again at 10 o'clock the Sisters assembled for the solemn General Mass, which was often sung. Dinner usually was at 12.15, except on feast days, when it was at 6.30. Besides the Divine Office, there was half an hour of mental prayer in the afternoon, and at the double-line weary Sisters retired to rest. With such a full day of prayer, one is almost disposed to wonder what time they could find for anything else, yet we know that they did do other things. Besides a fair amount of manual labour, they found time for serious reading. Such a varied selection of books as St. Gregory's "Moral," the writings of St. Augustine the Aeropagite, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, St. Gertrude, to mention only a few of them, found place in their library and were in constant use. Their work, too, as transcribers and translators of ancient writings



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was so remarkable as to elicit words of praise from Father Richard Ingham and others. A high standard of mortification was reached and maintained in the refectory. Fish meat was excluded from table through the whole of Advent and Lent; indeed, even during the rest of the year, for the most part, there were two or three days' abstinence in the week. The fast was, also, more far more numerous than anything that the Church prescribes.

With a life so mortified and so fully accepted, it may well be supposed that the nuns had but little leisure or inclination for external interests, or for going abroad, even if it had been permitted. But this was not the case, as I have already intimated, was closed to them. They held but little intercourse with the outer world, except, perhaps, by correspondence.

The external discipline and observance, however, of the new foundation was comparatively easy to dispose of and arrange. The real difficulty lay in the religious training, and still more in the formation of the interior life of these young, inexperienced, but well-disposed novices. To meet the former want, three diocesan nuns were borrowed from the English Benedictine Convent at Brussels. The first of these was Dame Frances Green. She had been twenty-eight years in a house as a hand for Richard Green, Father Ingham's superior. "They like you as an eminent and serene one to us, we try to imitate, unless it be only an unprofitable exercise; but we do not think our day is both as yet done or nearly got to them." It is interesting to note that the observance at Brabant Abbey, the most rigorous of the Cistercian families, is in substantial agreement with the present house, the girls having been required and once required to wear every day the same age.

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religion in the convent at Brussels, and was chosen for her industry, piety, and charity, to rule the young community as their first Abbess. This office she fulfilled for the space of six years, "over more than twenty dining and laboring," as her chronicler puts it, "to advance the progress of the community of all respects." After ruling the community for six years, she retired into private life, and, to quote again the words of her chronicler, "edified her sisters with good examples of humility and obedience, practicing amongst them in her life and conversation what she had taught them with great zeal." She died at the age of sixty-four, after a long and tedious illness, which she bore with much patience. With Dame Frances were Dame Susan Dutton and Victoria Yaxley. Dame Paludina had been eighteen years in religion in the convent at Brussels, and appears to have been an edifying religious, and a careful observer of regular discipline. She was distinguished for her good natural abilities and sound understanding and judgment, and was appointed to the office of Novice-Mistress and Prioress. She also held the office of Procurator, and it is said by her chronicler to have diligently discharged her duties, "giving great and of regular observance with a motherly affection to all and care of all." She suffered much from continual infirmities, which she bore with great patience. She died at Canterbury, at the age of sixty-four.

Dame Victoria had only been professed five years when she was chosen to assist in the new foundation. But though so young in years, she was remarkable for her "zeal and religious carriage" and was on that

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account deemed suitable for the work in hand. She spent twenty-seven years at Canterbury, being at different times the office of Mistress of Novices and Janitor and Prioress, in all which, says her chronicler, "she made appear her capital desire of the good of the convent, her spiritual direction, her aid of regular discipline, and of the true advancement of those under her care, together with a motherly consideration of their infirmities." At length, seeing the convent finally established in discipline and regular observance, she turned her love of her old home to prevail, and at her own request was transferred again to Brussels, where she ended her days happily.

Entirely chosen to work the three nuns from Brussels, the selection of a Confessor, on whom so much depended for the spiritual training of the young religious, was not by any means so happy. Indeed, considerable difficulty appears to have been found in securing one with the requisite qualifications for the important task. Confessors appear to have followed one another in quick succession in the early days, each, on being found deficient, giving place to another. They were mostly men of maturity, who had been for years on the English mission, and, as they particularly considered, were more accustomed to studying how to work the salvation of straying souls than to directing contemplative souls (Confessors, vi). The result obtained of these successive though well-meaning Confessors was far from satisfactory. Dame Gertrude wisely says:

"I Father Richard Ingham, writing to the Prioress at Ingham, says: 'I got from the nuns of Brussels five of the best qualified of their company to be their guides.'"—(Confessors, v, viii)



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them up by saying that they "all agreed in points necessary to salvation; but as to what were the means and way to attain to perfect union with God, she could not at all learn" from them.

It is to the credit of the President, Father Rudolph Barlow, that he was fully aware of the need of a skilled instructor, and he appears to have named Dame Gertrude that, if a suitable director could not be discovered in the Order, he would not hesitate to search the whole world over till one were found!

It will be well to enter a little more fully into the difficulties of these young religious. Here were nine young fervent souls, eagerly desirous to serve God in an interior life to which their interior propensities strongly inclined them. They enjoyed abundant solitude and abstraction from all distracting employments and conversations, but for the food of their interior life they knew of nothing but vocal prayer and that kind of mental prayer which is known as meditation. This they found to be wholly insufficient, but not only were most of them without any natural aptitude for discursive prayer—which prevented them from requiring much benefit from it—but also an account of the solitude and abstraction of their lives and the innocence of their bringing up, they had little need to chase away distracting images by such exercises of the imagination. Through want, therefore, of suitable

* Dame Gertrude's words are that Father Paulinus "would have sought out all the world over to find one who could give assistance to our souls, for which benefit our charity is full; I beseech Thee, my Lord, to reward him as he deserves Thy infinite goodness."

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instructions how to address themselves to God internally by a more effectual way, it is not surprising that some of them found their spiritual exercises dry, tedious, and even burdensome, instead of being the support and life of all other duties. In the minds of some, notwithstanding their goodness, there arose scruples, fears, and dissatisfaction at seeing themselves unable to comply properly with that duty for the sake of which principally they had left the world.

Dame Gertrude was amongst the greatest sufferers, she has recorded in her "Confession" how she had recourse to say that she heard of an heretic still in interior ways, and so took that she could recommend or could lay her hands on was neglected, but all to no purpose; for some of her counsellers was practised in interior affective prayer, whereas others by the contrary.

But God, out of compassion for tender souls, whose grief consisted only in not knowing how to love Him as much as they desired, at last, when they least looked for it, sent them the spiritual guide they so much needed. Father Augustine Baker was at this time staying at Downy. He had come there, as he believed, under a Divine impulse, but had not settled down, feeling that the Spirit of God destined him for some other place. Father Rudolph Barlow therefore decided to send him to Cambrey, not only as a place likely to be more congenial, but also hoping that he might prove a spiritual comfort and guide to his novices, and be able to report on their minds and hearts a true spirit of recollection and interior prayer that would serve them through life. Thus it came

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about that Father Baker was sent to Cambrey—not, indeed, in the capacity of Visitor, but as a hermit. At the same time, Father Barlow writes to the Mistress of Novices, recommending Father Baker to her as a most spiritual man who was well able to assist her novices to acquire a true interior spirit. He, moreover, gave general leave to the novices to have recourse to him. Many of these who, through ignorance, had made little complaint, but had really suffered considerably from the want of direction, now hastened to avail themselves of the permission, and soon found the benefit of his instructions. The Sister-Matron, too, at first much apprehended Father Baker and gave her novices every encouragement. The end for his teaching did not last long. A change of feeling came over them, and novices and Matrons began to drop off; till none was left save Dame Catherine Gausgion, who from the first fully appreciated the course into which Father Baker put her, and she never relinquished it, for which perseverance she no doubt reaped an abundant reward.

This apparent failure, however, did not discourage Father Baker, who appears to have had a most assured sense from God that his words would not fall upon stony and unproductive ground. He awaited, therefore, God's time in patience. Meantime he continued to reside at Cambrey till Chapter, which met in the following year, 1715, and in all probability he would have been removed from Cambrey had not Dame Catherine Gausgion, who was now professed, interposed, and brought the President to allow him to remain. Returning to Cambrey after Chapter, Father Baker



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became Confessor to the Community till the newly-appointed Vice should arrive. The choice of Chapter III upon Father Edmund Malrow) has to appear to have been in fitting health, as he did not resign his appointment. He arrived at Cambridge, and passed away towards the middle of September exactly two months after his nomination. Father Malrow was followed, though probably after a considerable interval, by Father Edward Benedict Smith, who appears to have been much sorer from the current on business; for Cray states that during the six years following the Chapter of 1867, Father Baker discharged the duties of Confessor to the nuns on various occasions for periods which amounted in all to about three years. It was at the commencement of this period that Father Baker's spiritual work for the current began to current. Several of the Sisters who told him at the beginning, but fell away, were returned to him, and again placed themselves under his direction, following carefully his instructions, and this time with excellent results. One of the last to submit herself to his influence was Dame Gertrude herself. Others would also exclaim, as she remarked how much better and more at peace some of her Sisters were through his instructions: "Ah, it is well for you that you can get good from them, for I can get none!" At last, on the advice of her Mistress, she made another attempt, and this

* It was on this 15th of June in the 4th century of Francis' Abstinence, besides being Confessor, the office of Vice general authority over the nuns, as the first result of his appointment without his approval. This office was abolished about the year 1870.

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time with more success. She thus describes in her "Confessions" the change which came over her: "Having received some general instructions about prayer and other things, and having put them in practice as best I could, within fifteen days after I found myself in quietude and that I understood all myself, and found myself fitted with instructions and satisfied." It also made my own thing that happened very tolerable to me, and made me capable of understanding anything that was necessary for me in a spiritual life," etc. So marked was the change produced in Dame Gertrude that it attracted the attention of her Sisters, and others who had never before been under Father Baker's direction were persuaded to give him a trial. He had practically all the Sisters now under his guidance and wonderful was the progress they made in an incredibly short time. Peace reigned in their hearts, prayer and meditation were pursued, and their whole exterior conduct indicated a marked change for the better.

Not only were the Sisters encouraged to approach Father Baker by the sweetness of his teaching, but also by the modesty and simplicity of his manner with them, so that even the most timid and shy amongst them were able to disclose their troubles to him freely. Still, he was careful to hide any natural tenderness or affection from arising in their minds towards himself. Indeed, it was one of his principal endeavours to cut off all dependence upon himself as soon as possible, teaching his disciples and putting them in the way to attend to, and follow the guidance of, the Divine Spirit only. Hence, so soon as he had given his disciple certain



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general instructions for their prayer, he left them to themselves, and, so far from examining them on their progress, he, on the contrary, advised them not to interrupt their time by needless narrations or manifestations to him.

Superiors observing the benefits resulting from Father Baker's instructions, took care to accommodate their orders and the observance of the house to his methods, so that several customs and practices which were thought prejudicial were laid aside. Their regular order and peace reigned in the community. And afterwards many declared that if it had not been for Father Baker they would have passed their lives in much dejection and misery—not, indeed, from want of goodness or a sound vocation, but only from the want of help how to transcend their fears and scruples, and how to have immediate recourse to God in their interior.

The method of Father Baker's direction is fully unfolded in the following pages, but perhaps, for greater clearness, it will be useful to gather together here the underlying principle of his teaching. Father Baker's great aim was ever to bring the soul into immediate contact or union with God. To this end he demanded that the soul should give extraordinary attention and diligence to Divine calls and inspirations. The Divine calls are made known to the soul by the rules, constitutions, observances, and regulations.

* The principal change indicated in the signature of Father Baker will be seen at the end of the writing these pages. The one arranged at first appears to have been more conducive to sleep than to union with God.



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of the laws, commands of superiors, accidents or accidents over which she has no control—all these are to be entered as the instrument of the will of God; and the soul is to comply with what is required by them, as in obedience to God Himself. Thus, as regards the conduct of the soul in indifferent matters—matters that do not concern either eternal regulations, as, for example, the manner of making prayer, way of exercising time, employment of time in study, etc.; whether to speak or be silent, whether to ask for a permission or not, etc.—in these and similar cases which might be multiplied indefinitely, Father Baker did not give the soul liberty to make her own choice, but he still required her to subject herself to God, as in the former cases, and to act according to His inspiration and in obedience to Him. Thus the soul is ever kept in intention, communion and relation with God, and all that she does and all that she refrains from doing is in obedience to God. In this way the soul's whole life becomes one of prayer. For her rectification will differ from the rest of her life in this principally—that during her rectification she will be wholly occupied upon God; whereas at other times she will endeavor to carry out in her life what she saw in her rectification to be God's will, making at the same time to abide in His presence, and to perform her actions as under His eye, in obedience to Him, and purely for His love.

To practice this manner of life effectually, meditation, mortification, silence, and abstinence, are absolutely necessary. Rectification is requisite, for this is the way by which God is approached and where He is found; mortification, because the soul



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must deny herself in many things if she is to attend to God and obey His commands and inspirations; silence, because it is impossible, unless for the perfect, to converse much with others without being withdrawn from interior attention to God's abstractions, because if the soul pours herself out upon external occupations and interests, she will have consumed over herself, and be unable to obey God, even if she should perceive His internal advertisements. Hence Father Baker writes as much, as will clearly be seen in the following pages, upon these practices as a necessary condition, and even the very atmosphere, of an interior life.

It will be readily seen what a subordinate part the external director plays in such a system. His business principally consists in bringing the soul into touch with God, and in encouraging her to adhere to her course of attention and abstinence. And when once the soul has established relations with God, He Himself becomes her director, and then her will has the soul need to turn to her external director for help.

The system in which Father Baker's teaching was held by the Company is clearly shown in the conduct of its President, Father Edmund Barlow. On one occasion when he was on a visit to Cambridge he found fault with a Sister for holding back from Father Baker and desiring to work his abstractions. The Sister defended herself by saying that she thought his doctrine too high and extraordinary; whereas Father Barlow replied that "Father Baker's directions differed from others in that that others taught to go round about by a broad, beaten road, but he taught a soul to pass over bridge and ditch, the direct way to



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God, and to permit nothing to stop a soul, nor any impediment to remain between a soul and God." On another occasion a young man who was thinking of embracing the religious life went to Father Barlow to ask him, which he was principally to aim at in that state. Father Barlow at once referred the young man to Father Baker, advising him to go to Cambridge, that he "might be by him fully instructed."

It is not to be supposed that a course of spirituality so much esteemed by prudent men, and producing, as we have seen, such striking effects in such a small time, escape the malice of Satan. Where God sows His seed, there will Satan follow with his tares. Where God's working in bringing forth much fruit, there will the enemy of souls stir up opposition. It would not be necessary to make more than a passing allusion to the hostility in this case, were it not that our author makes frequent reference to it in the following pages, and calls attention to the intense suffering and distress to which Donna Gertrude was subjected in consequence. It will be seen, therefore, as gather together and set forth the facts as far as they have come down to us.

It will be remembered that Father Baker discharged on various occasions the duties of Confessor to the nuns.*

* This was Father Peter Sabin. He joined St. Gregory's and died in 1851.

† It would seem probable that the day of Confessor was discharged by the Vice, and though Father Baker held doctrine, he exercised them only in the absence of the Vice. The confession seems to have been used principally in the administration of the Sacraments of Penance, direction and instruction were given at the grave.



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disciple of Father Baker, in these words: "As you may see, we have not touched any of the substance of Father Baker's doctrine as to the course of mental prayer and tending to God, for that we all judged to be good and solid," etc. Father Claude White, according to his office after his death, wrote a public letter addressed to

offer at the end of the publication. For whereas the said assembly has been erected to pray only, and we must have the number of years, either in age or in religious regard for the abstinence, change and progress of them must be equal. Hence, the Congregation should have been equally in the right to put offer, because they precede the rest in the habit, in discipline, and in regular observance, and have fulfilled other offices with distinction. Gertrude, for whom they desire the profession, is also the principal benefactor of the monastery. The profession of vows in the government of the monastery is to be found from their lack of opinion, besides the confusion (as I say) without whose consent they are in making a great mistake. August 17, the President is also the approved Ordinary of the said monastery, who will take care that the said Gertrude or Catherine shall not fall into any error. And for this reason, which God's will after further correspondence with the Holy See, the desired sentence was obtained. In the above-mentioned profession appears to be given to Dame Gertrude, but ultimately the dignity was conferred upon Dame Catherine, who was almost probably early in life. She ruled over the convent with much edification for nearly forty years, till the point to be awarded. Dame Catherine was born at Barrow, in Yorkshire, and was the daughter of Sir John Gresham. He was afterwards, according to one authority, first to Baron Gresham, and Duke of Norfolk, and afterwards of Henry V, when Duke of Wales. One of her brothers was Beaufort, count and a third became a cardinal priest. One of her sisters married a Duke, and was the mother of Father Beaufort, Superior, at one time President of the English Benedictine Congregation.

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the Abbey and community, and which was signed by himself and his secretary, Father Christian Gresham. In this letter he endeavours to allay the fears and apprehensions which the action of the Vice had excited in their minds, assuring them that all the past opposition and hostility of their Vice to their spiritual course and to the teaching of Father Baker was entirely founded upon mistake and misunderstanding; and for their further satisfaction on that point, he enclosed with his letter the above-mentioned form, which begins thus: "Both of them do accord that the Divine call, inspiration, invitation, inducement of God's grace, joined with the frequent, humble use of the Sacraments of Christ, are the most noble and sublime means of spirituality, without which no endeavor is said to contemplation and perfection were to endeavor to be without wings. And that these calls and holy lights and inspirations are always to be regarded (not chiefly in prayer and spiritual conversation with God, and that whatsoever neglects his interior, but bestowing to the interior voice or the illumination of the Holy Ghost, nor labouring to direct his exterior observance to taste God more sweetly, to see Him more clearly, to love Him more abundantly, and enjoy Him more intimately in His soul and spirit, can never attain to purity of intention or the spirit of contemplation, though he be ever so exact in external observances and austere in corporal mortifications."

¹ The rest of the form is to be found at the end of Father Baker's treatise "The Glasses." This treatise is the same volume which he addressed to Chapter. The "Vice Glasses" has never been published.

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It is satisfactory to know that the Vice fully accepted Father Baker's relation, and concurred with the decision of Chapter. And he declared at the time, and repeated the same afterwards, that he would never have flinched at the site and disturbance had he known how little ground there was for it all. And on his death-bed, according to the testimony of his Confessor, he pronounced himself ready to lay to the whole community how sorry he was if any of them had been prevented from enjoying such fruit from Father Baker's teaching through his misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the said Father's doctrine, or rather, through certain abuses or practices which were falsely attributed to his teaching.

Though the greater part of the vindication of the teaching of Father Baker, and consequently of the spiritual course of the monks, took place after the death of Dame Gertrude, it is probable to think that at least the letter of the President, Father Sigheant Bagshaw, reached Canterbury in time to be communicated to her before her death. The President died on August 19, and it is probable his letter to the Abbess was written not later than the second week in August. This would give ample time for the good news to reach Dame Gertrude before her death, which took place on the 19th, just two days before the President. We can well imagine what joy and satisfaction filled the much-tried

¹ This sentence rests on the authority of Canon, but as Father Bagshaw sent to the Vice after Chapter of which being executed by Father John Mearns in Northall, and was writing on the time of his death at St. Mary's, the words cannot be taken as a literal sense.

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hours of the community on hearing the contents of the letter; it must have afforded special comfort to the dying man. The subsequent issue of Father Claud White, with a more detailed account of the action of Chapter, could have reached Cambridge only after the death of Dame Gertrude.

For the purposes of this biography I might leave the subject here; but as the subsequent action of Chapter is so closely woven with the early history of this country, and dated their terms, and indirectly the teaching which produced it, to shirk out so lightly, I must make an apology for pursuing the subject further.

No sooner was the substance of Father Baker's teaching approved than Chapter proceeded to consider his writings. Though most of them had been formally approved and much commended by two of the most learned Fathers of the Congregation—Father Leander Jones and Father Rufinus Hudson—not being, however, read with less attention and care than under the circumstances was desirable. Chapter, therefore, ordered that the said two Fathers, assisted by two other capable members of the Congregation, should examine now with all possible exactness the writings of Father Baker. The examiners assembled at Cambridge, and were much impressed with the submission and candour of the religious, who rendered up for inspection whatever they had, even the very least important papers, and in some cases their private devotions, written for their own use. As a result, the examiners not only testified to the solidity and sound-

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ness of the doctrine, but also acknowledged that they saw cause to admire very highly the effects of Father Baker's teaching. The deputed examiners, therefore, a second time reviewed formally their approbation and commendation. On the conclusion of their labours, Father Leander addressed the whole community, commending the writings of Father Baker, and recommending them to the practice of the religious. Moreover, he praised the zeal they had shown in transmitting them. Father Rufinus also spoke to several of the community generally words to the same effect, so that it may be said that seldom have the writings of anyone in any Congregation been so cordially received or more substantially approved. But the most striking testimony to Father Baker's teaching was undoubtedly the lives of his spiritual daughters. Their humble simplicity, their refined conduct and fervent devotion, deeply impressed the Fathers, so that one of them, who had had much experience in the direction of souls, observed that Father Baker had done more good among them than if he had wrought miracles. "For it was more than a miracle," said he, "that his doctrine and words should work so efficaciously in the heart that it had drawn them [the religious] out of their former ignorance and error. And, by means of his writings, which laid open the ways to the Divine light for all those human creatures, God had had and still to the whole Congregation such a foundation for spirit, that if Superiors would do their part (as I was to be hoped they would) in a right and judicious manner, the Congregation would be a most perfect example and mirror of the information in all others. Whereas, if

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they were neglected or discontinued, a more severe account would be required, without all doubt, by Almighty God.

When one considers the origin of the facts about the safety of Father Baker's teaching, or the subsequent examination of his writings, or, finally, the striking fruits of his method of direction in the souls of his disciples, and words should work so efficaciously in the heart, one is at a loss to understand how fast, or at least a distance about his teaching, could survive even to this day. It is sometimes said, "Given a fair start, and death will never catch it up," and the saying is not without its application here; for all the pains of the appointed examiners, the holy lives of Father Baker's disciples, and the reputation of the original author of the teaching, have never been quite able to alter a certain dissent which originally arose in the mind of one man through a misapprehension of Father Baker's teaching.

After Dame Gertrude's death a number of papers were found in her cell, the value of which Father Baker was not slow to recognize. These he grouped into two parts, the one consisting of a collection of acts, which she had gathered from various sources, and which served in times of anxiety, which was frequent in the early days of her religious life, to provide matter for prayer. This collection Father Baker arranged for publication, and it was issued at Paris in 1659, under the title of "The Holy Tradition of a Divine Love," or "The Sincerely Ignorant Christian." The edition has been recently issued by Dom Hildbrand, Lant Pim, monk of Fribourg.

The other part of Dame Gertrude's papers—and the

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more interesting—consisted of her outpourings to God, reflections and thoughts which had occurred to her in prayer or at other times; with these she conferred herself in the time of need. This collection received the title of "Confessions Amantia" or "A Lover's Confessions, and Lady's Devotions," and was issued in the following year, 1784. This has been reprinted and revised, and is issued with the Life, but as a separate volume, for the convenience of those who wish to use it for their prayer.

Besides these writings, we have from Dame Gertrude's pen a very able "Apology for herself and her Spiritual Guide and Director, Very Rev. Father Baker." Father Baker cites a good deal from his text in her biography. In the original edition the "Apology" is printed as "An Advertisement to the Reader," and continued at once an introduction and a defence of the spirit of which the "Confessions" were the fruit. The importance of the "Apology" from this point of view is no longer great or urgent, but as it contains many gems of spiritual wisdom, I have preserved it and printed it in the Appendix. As in the Life of Dame Gertrude's while moderating its language and condensing its phraseology, I have endeavored to keep closely to Father Baker's sense and meaning, and to preserve the spirit and character of the original.

Father Baker probably began the Life after he had edited Dame Gertrude's papers, and some misunderstanding occurred in the session during the two years he remained at Cambridge after her death. He was then removed to Orono, and thus severed his connection with the cause—a connection which had lasted in all high years.

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It only remains to express the hope that those for whose sake and at whose request I have edited these writings may find in them a mirror, which will reflect to them something of the beauty and holiness of the lives of the first dames of Cambridge, and which may help them to shape their lives in accordance with the model therein depicted.

R. W. B.
AMES OF ONE YEAR OF CONGRUATION,
BOSTON,
Autumn 1899.

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AN ADVERTISEMENT TO THE READER

In the relation that we mean here to make of a life I wish the reader not to expect any of those great external matters which, both in these days and in former times, are usually related. They are things above the condition of man, though assisted by ordinary grace; and although they manifest the glory of God in Himself and His works, yet are they of that nature that we cannot or do not much turn them to edification or other good use. We are apt rather to turn them to curiosity, or a wonder, or at the most to the praise of the holy person by or on whom the things were seen, without further relation to the true benefit of the soul. Of this kind are those we have heard or read even in our present age—of miraculous healings, shewings, workings, and other corporal and external devices, as visions, stigmata, apparitions, revelations, and other supernatural and extraordinary operations, true or supposed. None of these great matters (the truth of which otherwise every mortal) shall the reader find in this present relation, but some other things more suitable and more teaching

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An Advertisement to the Reader

to the edification of souls, and for use in this present age. Here he shall find the example of a religious virgin of very good parentage who, by nature and education in the world, was virtuous and innocent. She had a call from God to leave the world and become a religious. Accordingly, she left country and friends that were dear to her (as she was to them), and much temporal fortune, which she did enjoy and might still have enjoyed if she would have remained in the world. He will see how she, simply coming over and entering into an Order which of its nature was contemplative (as are most enclosed Orders for women, because secluded and retired themselves) and having still in her a good will towards God, she, for all that, could not tell how, nor find the means for a long time by which, she might serve God in soul, as she ought and desired, or satisfy her own conscience and call from God. But, for want of this, she extremely and miserably decayed in what was good in her by nature and education, without increase in anything that was supernatural.

Then it will be shown how she, by the help of God, found the means of entering into a spiritual course consisting of prayer and mortification. She prosecuted her prayer with industry and diligence, and by means thereof there began to revive (nourished by grace) that which was naturally good in her, and she increased much in grace, and attained to contemplation, which wrought in her humility and a total subjection to God and obedience

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An Advertisement to the Reader

to man, according to the Divine will. Thence she at once satisfied God, her own soul and conscience, her Superior and others with whom she lived, and in such fashion spent the rest of her days, and happily died therein.

The frequent of the ensuing work is, as it were, a period, specifying her birth, parentage, vocation to religion, her coming over for that purpose, and her expectation afterwards to be clothed with the holy habit. The reader, considering her life and death in religion, may be distinguished into four general periods.

The first station contains about the space of two years, in the beginning of which she took the habit. In this part it shows how she, having a call to an internal life, could not find the means to enter into it.

The second station begins with the end of the said two years, and covers the six years following. At the beginning of this period she found the means and way to become meditative and to lead an internal life, wherein she continued thenceforth during the rest of her days.

The third station is from the end of the said six years for the space of the two years following. In this period is related a certain great and extraordinary affliction and probation of soul, which God provided or permitted to fall upon her, and which continued during these two years, and was a very great and good preparation for a happy death.

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An Advertisement to the Reader

The fourth and last section is from the end of the
afforded two years till her death, being the space only
of about eighteen or nineteen days. In this period is
shown her behavior in the time of her last sickness
and her disposition and preparation for a good death,
and, lastly, her happy demise.

I have not further observed the order of the said
sections, but have sometimes interrupted the matter
of the one with the matter of the other, bringing some
things in one place which were properly pertaining to
another. But the reader, having this warning from me,
may easily supply such disorder or defect by ordering
each thing to its proper place.

I have been so full in expressing the particulars of
our virgin's life, because I have heard down well-
minded souls, apt for an internal life, because that they
could get little benefit by books which daily come forth
of the lives and examples of holy persons, because
these books do rarely specify the nature of their
spiritual exercises in their internal castings, whereas
naturally true spirituality and perfection consist.
When treating of their prayer and mortification these
writers speak in a general manner, without distinguish-
ing the nature thereof, and they tell us of their external
duties, and not of their internal demeanor, which is
the best kind of knowledge for us, as being the root
of the external, and the life and goodness that are in it.
These authors tell us of the necessity and perfection
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An Advertisement to the Reader

of those whose lives they treat, but tell us not of the
means which brought them thence, being principally
their internal duties, whereas all external good pro-
ceeds. Or they tell us of miracles, the knowledge of
which is not of such use and profit as examples that
instruct us for our practice. These considerations have
made me express, as best I could, the particular manner,
both internal and external, both with and by our virgin,
wishing what good may come by it to whomsoever
shall take the pains to read it.

But, indeed, I have especially insisted upon one
general point, which consists in it all necessary
particulars, and without the knowledge and observa-
tion of which all the particular instructions in the
world are insufficient to bring a soul into an internal
contemplative life; and yet this is a point not usually
much handled in spiritual books, nor in the lives of
spiritual persons. And the point is this: the observa-
tion of the internal divine lights and inspirations or
calls, which were the principal or only master or
guide of the religious virgins whose life we are to
read of, as will appear in the Life itself. Without
this knowledge and practice of the doctrine by her,
her soul would never have been satisfied or happy.
And no more will other souls be who have in them
an aptitude and call to an internal contemplative life.
Lastly, I am to admonish that the doctrine con-
tained in this Life does not concern its respects
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instants) say but those who have in them an aptitude
and call to an internal life, which not all intelligent
souls (not even the greater part) have. These latter
should either not read these things at all or read
them with such care that they do not misunderstand
what is said. And let them not take upon themselves
to practice that which in no sort pertains to them,
though they be otherwise of a good spirit; for if
they are otherwise, instead of benefiting themselves
as they intended, they will more likely harm them-
selves. Indeed, it may well be that the reason why
spiritual authors do not more frequently handle in
particular these matters of inspirations and internal
conduct is the peril to which some indolent readers
might be exposed by misunderstanding or misapplying
their instructions. But the warning we have now
given on this point, I hope, or at least wish, may
serve to prevent all such danger.
AUGUSTINE BAKER.



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THE INNER LIFE OF
DAME GERTRUDE MORE

CHAPTER I

DAME GERTRUDE MORE'S EARLY LIFE

I recount the life and death of Dame Gertrude More worthy of record, because, as we shall see, there is good reason for thinking that she is now a happy soul in Heaven. Here was a soul led in a somewhat extraordinary way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as may be gathered from her own writings, and from what I can add of my own knowledge, and from other credible sources.

Gertrude More's parents were devout Catholics, and belonged to two distinguished families that adhered to the Faith, and, indeed, had adhered in that cause. Her father was Mr. Cressacre More, lawfully descended from the illustrious ancestor, Thomas More, and was owner of as much of the money's worth as Queen Mary of England had been able to restore to her family. Cressacre More was the son of Thomas More, and grandson of John, the son and heir of Sir Thomas More. Mr. More received the name of



Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More

Cressacre at his baptism in memory of the Colman, a Yorkshire family settled not far from Doncaster. The last of the Cressacres married John, the eldest son of Sir Thomas More, and it was through her that the More derived most of their property, in the greater part of Sir Thomas's possessions were collected upon his estates, and only a small portion of them, as we have seen, was recovered by the family.

Dame Gertrude's mother was sister to Sir John Gage, Bart., of Fife, in Sussex. Sir John was the legal descendant and heir of the Sir John Gage who for many years was Comptroller of the Household under Henry VIII., and was afterwards made Lord Chamberlain by Queen Mary, and was much employed by her against Wyatt, the heretic and rebel. The Queen reposed much confidence in Sir John on account of his well-known fidelity to the Faith—a quality in which many faltered at that time, even among the greatest names in England.

Mrs. Cressacre More died young, leaving a son and two daughters. The elder daughter is the subject of this narrative; of her sister I shall speak presently. Dame Gertrude was only about four or five years old when her mother died, and her education, till she entered religion, was almost entirely conducted by her father. She was born at Lewinston, her father's house in Essex, on March 29, the Feast of the Blessed Virgin, in the year 1566, receiving the name of Helen in baptism, perhaps after the mother of Constantine, St. Helen, who is said to have been born at

1. Lewinston was a new village, but a town in the parish of Epping Forest.



Early Life

Malden in Essex. On entering the religious state Helen took the name of Gertrude, in honor of the great Benedictine saint who has been known as the Truth. It is no great marvel that a singularly holy soul should proceed from a family so devoted. For not only was Gertrude's mother a very devout woman, but her father also and his brothers and sisters were all very religious persons. Cressacre More was the youngest son. Thomas, one of the brothers, became a priest, and died young at Rome, while acting as Procurator at his own cost, for the English secular clergy. Another brother was professed at Amiens in the Order of Minims, founded by St. Francis de Paula, and died there. Cressacre More himself spent ten years in English seminaries studying philosophy and theology, with the view of becoming a priest; but on the death of his elder brother he was reluctantly persuaded by his father and friends to abandon the ecclesiastical state, but the Catholic branch of the family should do every thing to preserve the hands of strangers, Cressacre being the only son of the surviving brothers at liberty to marry. As to the sisters, they were all married but one, who declined to take up the burden of the marriage state. They were all women of much piety and piety, according to their state and condition.

Cressacre More was soon in the society of his wife. After four or five years she died, and Cressacre, though still young and healthy, did not seek another wife, but remained single to the end of his days. Cressacre More's only son at first sought to receive

2. This is St. Gertrude the Great.



Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More

marriage, being much attracted to the religious state, but, like his father, and for similar reasons, he at length yielded to the persuasion of his friends, and took a wife. Crispe More's other daughter, three or four years younger than Dame Gertrude, remained in the world some time after her sister. And though much sought after in marriage, and her father also to give a handsome dowry, she always refused to marry, but single until, at length, at the age of eighteen, she joined her sister at Cambridge, and was professed, taking the name of Felicity. Thus her life was passed, to the profit and satisfaction of her soul, and the edification of others.

Of Mr. Crispe More's parents, brothers, and sisters we must needs be silent, but I become no dilligent. They were all of singular piety and steadfast in religion. Mr. Crispe More's mother was a noblewoman, and a member of the distinguished family of which the head bore the title of Lord Scroppe. Both Mr. and Mrs. More lived to a ripe age, reared the long and severe penitence under Queen Elizabeth, brought up their children piously, and at their own expense educated their sons at the English College at Douay. Their daughters, though pious, did not embrace the religious state, partly because no religious houses existed in England, and partly because the religious state for women was not well understood at that time, the practice of former days being almost forgotten.

Dame Gertrude lived for the most part with her father in England till she attained her eighteenth year. Of this period of her life I have little to say, partly because I was not at that time acquainted with her,

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Early Life

partly because little about it is recorded, and partly also because, from what I have gathered, there was nothing extraordinary or notable about her from a spiritual point of view at that time. She was, however, of a good disposition, gentle, affable, kind, docile, merry and pleasant, and of quick understanding and sound judgment for her years. Her father desired so much pleasure from her society and conversation, that it greatly abated his otherwise solitary life. Indeed, he loved her so well that he intended, out of his abundant means, to bestow on her a very liberal marriage portion should the occasion arise. This, however, was not to be. Her Confessor, Father James, an English Benedictine, much esteemed, observing her good disposition, suggested to her that she should embrace the monastic state, of which habit she had heard little. Her father's advice was doubted upon, as Gertrude did not seem to understand sufficiently the nature of the state, or at least its special fitness for herself. Two or three years later, however, after the school had been well considered and discussed with her father as well as with her Confessor, the conclusion was arrived at that Gertrude should proceed to France and make trial of her vocation to the religious life. Father James had under his direction some other holy women, who also desired to try their vocations to the religious life in an English Benedictine convent. But at that time there was no convent subject to the English Benedictines, and the desires of these ladies were insufficient alone to found a house, so, after consultation with Mr. More and his daughter, it was arranged that Mr. More should contribute a sufficient

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Inner Life of Dame Gertrude More

sum to establish a house subject to the English Congregation. In due course these plans were carried out, and the following summer, in the year 1594, Gertrude and eight other gentlewomen crossed over to France, under the care of the above-mentioned Benedictine priest.

The postulants, on arriving at Douay, took up their abode in a good house, a refuge belonging to the Abbey of Valenciennes, the Abbot, Philip Carpentier, kindly allowing them the use of it till they could provide suitable accommodations for themselves. During her residence there Gertrude More fell seriously ill, and was in danger of death, but it pleased God to restore her to health.

Shortly after Michaelmas in the same year the first company of virgins moved to Cambridge, some hope being entertained of making a foundation there. They took refuge temporarily at the Hospital of St. James. The town appeared to them very amiable for their purpose, and the Archbishop, Right Rev. Francis Van der Burch, solicited them so warmly that he not only encouraged them to settle there, but graciously yielded to their request from his jurisdiction and their immediate subjection to the English Benedictine Congregation.

Gertrude More was now in the middle of her seventeenth year, and was still remarkably bent on making trial of her vocation, and on discovering, if possible, some holy God's will in her regard. Mr. More, who hitherto had accompanied the devout women, about this time returned to England, and their Benedictine director, Father Darlow, who was now President of the

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Early Life

Congregation, took these pious souls under his special care. About the Feast of All Saints, three nuns who had been removed from the Benedictine convent at Brighthelmston to the foundation settled at Canterbury. They were Dame Frances Grew, Dame Palmentina Dawson, and Dame Virginia Vesty.

At the time when Gerture More's vocation was under discussion, Mr. More acted with great liberality towards his daughter. Seeing that she had an inclination to marry, he offered her the choice of going abroad to try her vocation, or, at least, of residing in a convent for a time, to see the nature of the life, whether, or, finally, of remaining in England; and he undertakes in any case to provide for her abundantly both during his life and after his death. And well was Mr. More able to do this, for not only had he ample means, but also a very great affection for his daughter—an affection which she abundantly reciprocated; so that the thought of separation was most painful and repugnant to both of them. Indeed, Gerture More was naturally of an exceedingly affectionate disposition, especially towards kindred and friends. Hence I do not remark, but, on the contrary, think it very natural, that her affections being once directed towards God, she should conceive a great sensible affection towards Him; and this, in fact, was the case, as will appear later from her writings and in other ways. Besides abundant natural affection, Gerture More had a strong propensity towards God, partly the result of grace, and partly a natural endowment in which, as I think, the sanctificative soul in some degree at least appeared in paradise.

¹ Written after Penitence or Professions Declined.

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CHAPTER II

THE NEW FOUNDATION AT CANTERBURY—DAME GERTURE RECEIVES THE HABIT

The preparations for the new foundation were now advancing apace. Negotiations were in progress between the Benedictine Fathers and the Abbot of St. Andrew's, a monastery of our Order at Canterbury, for the use of a certain refuge at Canterbury, which belonged to the Abbey of Faversham, and was united to the Abbey of St. Andrew's. The result of the negotiations was that the Right Rev. Abbot Anthony de Maresbury kindly consented to the nuns having the use of the refuge, as soon as it was ready.

The houses, or refuges, having been adapted for the use of the nuns, they took up their abode there on Sunday, December 24, 1653. The Archbishop honoured

¹ It was said that the Abbey itself of Faversham was founded by King Ethelbert, which would seem to be an error of fact, inasmuch as the possession of the town till the French Revolution, after their expulsion the town and property passed through several hands, till it came into the possession of the Marquis de Sade. Little remains of the original convent buildings. There are no fine stone remains, such as the priory. One house is occupied by Mr. Moxon and family, worked by Mr. de la Piche d'Arceville, and the remaining one by Miss Fitch-Pearce. They are all devoted Catholics, and it is interesting to mark that there is not a single Protestant in any of the houses.

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them with his presence on that occasion, and celebrated the first Mass in the chapel.

On the following Sunday, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord, the nine postulants were solemnly and publicly clothed with the habit by the Archbishop, assisted by Father Rudolphe Barthelemy, at that time President, and were placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation, and exempted from episcopal authority.¹ The names of those who were admitted to the habit were as follows: First, there was the subject of our biography, Helene More, who took the name of Gertrude, by which I have hitherto called her; to her were given the first place, next came Margaret Verbeke, some daughter of William Verbeke, of Brussels, the son of a certain Verbeke, who took the name of Lucy; then Anne, now called Benedictine, Marguerite, sister of Thomas Morgan, of Wotton in Warwickshire; Catherine Gaudin, daughter of John Gaudin, of Brussels, in Flanders; Genevieve, now called Agathe, Marie, and Anne More, sisters of Dame Gertrude, and descended from Sir Thomas More; and Francis, now called Mary, Widow, daughter of Richard Wotton, of Elmington Park, in Berkshire. Sister Mary Honora and Sister

¹ A few days after the clothing the President wrote a letter to the Princess of Wales, in which he describes, among other things, the habit which she wears, and which she has since worn, and adds: "I have seen her several times, and she has been I am sorry to see them several and yet to write. I got from the Queen a French letter of the best quality of all that I ever saw to be her guide." The letter is dated January 3.

² The marriage took its name from the fact that it was celebrated in a part of the house and name of Anghel, and was probably



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Jane Martiel were by Sisters; the rest were choir nuns.

Dame Frances Gawen, one of the three nuns from Brussels, was appointed the first Abbess of the little community.

The following record of Dame Gertrude's clothing is found in a note, in her own handwriting, and may be here inserted: "I entered the monastery of our Blessed Lady—for to our monastery had been given the name of our Blessed Lady of Comfort—in the sixth day of December, being a Sunday, and took the habit in the year of the same month and year. I was professed in 1516, in the 1st of January, the Feast of the Names of Jesus, falling that year on a Wednesday, it being also the year of Jubilee. I was sixteen years old, and a small portion of Anghel Park, which was called 'the Great Park.' Anghel was a great estate, and Dame Gertrude of Anghel resided there during the process mentioned above by Henry VIII. It is interesting to note that the village was named by Father Thomas Wotton, of Elmington Park, the same."

"Jane Martiel took the name of Marie, and was professed at the end of the year with the rest, but only married five or six years, and the child was born in the country of the name of Filly, in the County of Anjou, in France. There also was Dame Gertrude's husband, master of the name, Dame Marie Martiel, in the country of that time had no wife, and she had a child. The three ladies at Filly had a number more sons each at their parents, and each had her own separate children. At the time of the French Revolution the Anghelians were expelled from their convent, and the country passed into the hands of some private owners, and the name of the place was altered. It now belongs to a Catholic family, Mr. and Mrs. George West, who have reconstructed it into a charming garden. It is no longer possible to identify the spot where Dame Gertrude's remains were laid.



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as much as from the 24th of March [i.e. since martyr].¹

Now that I have brought Dame Gertrude into an enclosed convent, clothed her with the habit, placed her under the rule of an Abbess and the guidance of a Confessor, it is fitting that I should indicate, as far as I can, how she stood with regard to the religious state. I will not take upon myself to determine what call she had to religion. For the present I will confine myself to the following observation. It seems as if Dame Gertrude had no decided call to the world. She had no liking for the marriage state, nor for the riches or honors of the world. Still, when she lived in the world, it cannot be said that she had any great devotion towards God, and Divine things; but I am believer she always was, and of a gentle pleasing nature, of blameless life, and of good intelligence and judgment proportionate to her rank. Her education and industry are evident from the fact that she was brought up almost entirely at her father's house in England, where good order was kept, piety observed, and well enough taught, and this temporary confinement.

Nevertheless, how could Gertrude's nature be exactly described, as Simon witnesses of the son Paschalis in Treviso, when still young, and when the awe of authority blinded the full manifestation of her natural inclinations and desires? Her character and nature will be more fully disclosed when she entered religion, as the sequel will show.

In her "Confession,"² Dame Gertrude thus bears witness to the watchful care of her father: "Certainly my sins deserve to be punished in an extraordinary manner." The Confession forms the second volume of this publication.



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maner, because I committed them more wilfully than as it were, blisfully, not well knowing what she did, being more drawn by her imagination and by what was said of the religious state than from any determinate purpose, till the time came for her to make her profession. And even at her profession, it is impossible to say whether she had any definite or distinct notion. I do not really think that she had a call from God that she could perceive. Having crossed, however, at France, and leading a life of greater seclusion and devotion than in England, she undoubtedly became better disposed for the religious life; and though as yet she perceived no call to it, not being in a disposition to practice it, yet surely she had a true and effective call, as may be gathered from subsequent events. It seems as though God reserved the notification of His call till she entered into a course and state more capable of accepting it.

Having been clothed, God gave Dame Gertrude the grace to have a great desire to serve Him in the best manner. She had also a great judgment and understanding—in fact, in a somewhat extraordinary degree for her age and years. Moreover, she was unconsciously placed in a state of life where there were fewest impediments, and all the helps usually found in Contemplative

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Order. Her vocation and aptitude certainly were as an interior life, and without the pursuit of it her soul would never be content in religion, nor would others be satisfied with her. But her difficulty lay in getting into her interior and in knowing how to lead an interior life. Indeed, she scarcely knew what an interior life meant, nor had she heard much about it; yet, nevertheless, she had a distinct call to it.

Dame Gertrude had two defects, or impediments, which hindered her from getting into her interior and leading an interior life. The one impediment was that she lacked teaching, like any other saint, by God or by man, for of herself she could not discover the way. The other hindrance was her natural character. She was of a very extroverted disposition, with an active imagination, and much prone to talking and conversation, and to every kind of interest imaginable, seeing no harm in them. Besides, she had very great moral scrupulousness in some ways that was good for her further advancement in an interior life. And here a natural disposition such as this could be brought into an interior course with the difficulty, and a very great one, both spiritually and physically. Hence and some light of grace made Dame Gertrude see that little or no perfection was to be found in external things considered as such, so she made small account of them.

"As the most advantageous of other states is to take the meaning of it but know he made clear. *Faustina's* name never entered." It appears that the eye of the soul is turned upon or taken up with inward things—namely religion. The exterior is governed by the exterior appearance, which is turned and applied to the eye of the soul in inward things, and occupied with the thought of God and the things present and spiritual things.

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though she performed them with as good intention and as well as she could. Still, her soul was not satisfied with them, nor with all that she did, and this chiefly, as I conceive, because she had a strong inclination or inclination to apply to spiritual union with God, as will be seen more fully later. She knew that a true religious life consists chiefly in the interior, but she knew not how to do it or how to get into it, so that of necessity she had a wholly extroverted life, though still an unworldly religious, and obeying the external regulations of the Rule and the ordinances of the house.

For these reasons, Dame Gertrude was far from contented in her interior: her consciousness daily became more restless, and her imperfections grew again. Indeed, every day she receded further from perfection, and from God, and from the sight of her interior. Even her natural disposition began to deteriorate, and the great difficulties, willful, foolish, and full of every kind of defect. And having a good capacity and a penetrating mind, she soon perceived the multitude, pollution, and straggles that may be found in a religious house where men spiritually does not flourish, and where the doctrine of self-abnegation is not practiced.

By these means Dame Gertrude's character showed for the worse. Of this she was not insensible, for sometimes when in her cell—which was her solitude save as bedtime—she would reflect upon her condition, and inwardly sigh, and might now and then be drawn in natural and inward virtue, and bitterly deplored her state. God, indeed, gave her eyes at this time a good will to do better, to amend her life, and to tend to perfection; but, as we have seen, she knew not how to do it. She did, however, the best she could, but without avail.

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When Dame Gertrude was able to render privately with an intimate friend—and she had great aptitude for friendship—she drew on good out of it, but, on the contrary, more often harm, by pouring out her grief and complaints and lamentations; so that by such opportunities of conversation she lost the benefits of the good inspiration and implies the receipt of a subtle and at her devotions.

As I have said, however, God gave Dame Gertrude a great desire to amend her life, and to this end she made use of all the means suggested by reason. She read all the books in the house, and all she could get from England that might serve her purpose, and read them seriously—and great store of books there were in the house. In particular, she read the whole of the Bible from beginning to end, besides special portions at divers times. All she read when she thought it all likely to be able to set her in the right way she sought seriously and acutely question them on points of prime importance, for instance, In what does perfection consist? By what means or exercises should she tend towards perfection? or, What was the means used by Saints of our Order or in other Orders to attain to holiness? and so forth. And so much to the point were her questions, that I verily believe that some of those she consulted had enough to do to find answers that appeared reasonably satisfactory to themselves.

Dame Gertrude's state of mind at this time and her difficulties are well depicted in the following passage:

¹ There is cause of thanksgiving above a cup of a silver tenn, Father Baker, when he was chaplain to the community at Cantorbury, speaking in a street in England to books the like manner.



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from her "Confessions": "For I had suffered so much before God did bestow the favour upon me of being put into a house that was proper for me, and that for nearly three years after my coming over, and had fallen into great discouragements and miseries, that some could believe it, but I that felt it. And though I made a shift in the daytime to get a good face on it, yet at night I bewailed my miseries with more than ordinary tears, which God and our Blessed Lady were witness of, though few else on earth were. And yet I did rouse up and peruse all the books in the house, which witness I found that any had done to please God I took notice of it, and did practice it as well as I could. And this course I had always hold since I came into religion. I also used to counsel with all the monks I could meet, all that any other had found good by in the house. And all this would do me no good: I was still as great a stranger to Almighty God as I was in England, where I never thought on any good, whether there were any God or no. And being thus perplexed with a thousand imaginations, my Mistress advised me to go to Father Baker, telling me that four or five in the house had found some good by him, and that at least it was no harm for me to try what good I might get by him."

Elsewhere in her writings Dame Gertrude affirms that her soul at this time "was grown to be as hard as a stone as to God and Divine things," and that nothing could have softened it save the special means which God provided for the purpose, as we shall presently see. By all I have said you will understand the difficulty that Dame Gertrude had in getting into her instance, or for others to bring her into it.

¹ The House of Names.



CHAPTER III

DAME GERTRUDE'S AFFECTIONS

To turn now to another side of Dame Gertrude's life—her prayer. The Divine Office first claims our attention, and in this respect Dame Gertrude must certainly be called a good choir nun. Moreover, she had a good and powerful voice, both for singing and reciting, considering she was not strong. She always loved singing, both in choir and out of choir; Dame Gertrude used vocal prayer and other external devotions, as much as others did. But these exercises gave her no internal light, nor satisfaction of soul or mind. She was advised, and herself desired, to use meditation or discursive prayer, but she found herself utterly unable to do it. Nor did any kind of internal consideration move her affection towards God, or help her to pray. And this inability (though in the end it proved to have its advantages) remained with her even till her death. Dame Gertrude's incapacity to meditate did not arise from any want of intelligence. For merely human and natural purposes she could speak with force and ability. And even on spiritual subjects, when thinking over some point, or when discussing it with another, she showed herself both capable and ready in the use of her

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Imagination, and tongue, and pen. Of this her "Confession" her sisters and yet her writing was much inferior to her ability in conversation. The same grace may be given to her judgment, which was wonderful, considering her sex and years, and the absence of training in the schools. But when she attempted to turn her abilities to the exercise of meditation, and to more her will by considerations, she was quite at fault, and as unable to do it as if she had had no brains at all.

Dame Gertrude seemed to have four or five contradictory qualities that at first sight appear almost incompatible with one another. She was very merry, yet very much subject to sadness. She had a friendly, unpretentious concern, yet had much courage, boldness, and even hardness. She had a propensity to extroversion, and yet a strong one also to introversion. So that in some respects more was more agreeable and kind, and in others more fiery and bold; some more merry and cheerful, and yet some more prone to sadness, or easily cast into it; some more inclined to extroversion, and yet some had a greater calm, or more aptitude for, true introversion, but as yet she knew not how to do it. And, indeed, none but the Divine Spirit could reach her this, or bring about a reformation of her life. For that the reward was to be brought about a simplicity of soul which in the immediate disposition of the Divine with God, and that can be done only by the Divine working with the soul's cooperation, aided by the Divine grace. There was necessary also a recollection of the conflicting qualities and characteristics I have mentioned. All this Dame Gertrude fully realized even to the moment of her death, and this is the

Dame Gertrude's Difficulties

reason that both in her writings and in her practice (after she had once entered in the way) she had such close attention to the Divine guidance or call, and that led her to choose for her motto the words:

"Regard your call!"
"That is it."

I have now indicated three of Dame Gertrude's contradictions; there is yet a fourth, which was at least usually present after she had made some progress in an interior life. She used to oscillate between periods of great and true internal light and periods of the greatest obscurity. Her remedy was still to adhere during these periods of darkness to the practice she pursued in times of greater light.

Dame Gertrude's ill-humour was, as I have already indicated, her inability to discuss properly,

"With Dame Gertrude was still in her simplicity, and in the miserable plight which I have tried to depict, it happened that my Superior sent me to Caubery,"

"As she said not only respect also some it would be well to finish the morning. In and a single in coming, or working, or action of God on it in the soul. Other times she used to study the same thing, or Divine inspiration. Other times, after some admission, admission of all those things, there were. There are several more which I regard as the nature of the matter, especially with the Divine will."

"The ones which we have such numerous results in the life of Dame Gertrude, took place about the middle of July, 1570. It had to open the Father's house at the time of his marriage with my dear personality. It calls the same time English Government, and through the life of a certain personage who was the first minister of the crown. And at present we are really Father have been, I have, for the sake of character and

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intending me to make a considerable stay there. A proclamation had been lately published in England, banishing all priests, and, fearing the disturbance that would result from the threatened persecution, I left England and went over to France, thinking, with leave of my Superior, to remain where the saint should blow over. I was not engaged in missionary work, but, with leave of my Superior, I attended to myself, leading a retired, contemplative life—a manner of life I had pursued for some years.

The community in the course of the summer had increased by the addition of three new postulants. They were Margaret Vandy, who received the name of Francis; Jane Tempier, who received the name of Scholastica; and a lay Sister, Florin Brown. So that, together with the three nuns from Etampes, the community on my arrival numbered fifteen. I was hospitably entertained and lodged in the parsonage, which was outside the convent enclosure.

Before very long some of the religious, having heard that I had followed a retired and spiritual life, sought to speak with me, to obtain some spiritual direction at my hands. This they received, and for the time they were satisfied. All, however, did not adhere to the instructions, because they found or imagined that the advice was not suitable to their spirit. Some of the religious persevered. Now, Dame Gertrude, before she left England, had heard the kind of life I was leading; yet, in spite of this knowledge and her great need, she was loath to tell the house to which she had come. The reason simply, discarded the English, and made Father's house and (perhaps intended, so in the first year.

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with, as she afterwards acknowledged what she knew was better, that she found her own nature as suited to a life of retirement and sanctification—the consequent mine to be—that she said to herself, What can I have to do with such a man? In consequence, she not only did not seek to hold spiritual intercourse with me, but, if any there were, was among those who thought there was some peril in my method of direction, and that therefore I was safer left alone. And so this, as on other occasions, she took the lead, which was always considered to be an instance of her quick-witted tongue and her spirited character. Nevertheless, Dame Gertrude was most delicate and courteous in her language—indeed, none more so than she; so that sometimes she would come to converse with me by way of entertainment, but not much on spiritual subjects.

About the end of November, and in the year of her novitiate, Dame Gertrude fell dangerously ill, but speedily recovered, and was quite well some time before the day of her profession, which was arranged for January 4.

All this time, there can be little doubt, Dame Gertrude had a clear call from God to serve and please Him in the best manner, and she had a very good-will to do so, and corresponded with God, as far as she knew how and her faculty would allow her. But her knowledge being only natural, her reason is no way enlightened, her affections much given to creatures and to all kinds of enjoyments, and not knowing how to become impoverished, what advancement of life could be expected of her, or what satisfaction could she obtain for her own soul and conscience.

CHAPTER IV

DAME GERTRUDE MAKES HER PROFESSION

ALWAYS a full year had elapsed by since the death of Dame Gertrude and her eight companions, and the time of their profession was near at hand. This was arranged to take place on January 1, the Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord. But though all was ready outwardly for the great event, there is reason to believe all was not ready inwardly—at least in the case of Dame Gertrude. It appears to me that she was in considerable perplexity as to what she should do. On the one hand, she saw that she was full of defects, which she could not on her way toward. In particular, through immortification, she entertained an aversion for her Superior, which made it very difficult to obey her as a Superior should be obeyed. In fact, it went against Dame Gertrude's conscience to make her profession in such a state and frame of mind. And yet, without, as we have seen, she had a strong interest in God to amend all, and to seek Him in the best manner. On the other hand, she saw many reasons—while, after all, were grossly natural reasons—why she should make her profession as best she could. First, there was the maintenance of the house, which greatly depended for

Dame Gertrude is Professed

By very sinners upon her dowry, and how much of it, if any, would be left by her father if she made not her profession was very problematic. Then, again, what was she to do if she did leave? She had a little wish to marry as soon as she had. Besides, her having been in a convent for a time might, likely enough, hinder her from making as good a match as might otherwise have been the case. Moreover, she felt a certain sense of shame at the fact of returning to the world which she had abandoned for any reason other than sickness; and in this respect she had working over to complete it. These and similar considerations which she later at in her "Confession" she seemed to set free in her mind, and they left her still undecided, even on the very eve of her profession day. In the end, however, she made her profession with the rest, taking as before, the first place. The Archdeacon who gave the history of the habit now received that vocation, and performed the ceremony, the President, Father Rudolphus Haver, being also present. Upon what grounds Dame Gertrude decided finally to make her profession will never be fully known; but as she had a good natural judgment, a most sensitive conscience, and a clear call from God, as I have repeatedly intimated, we may reasonably suppose that she made both cheerfully and sincerely a deliberate and voluntary solution of her life's problem, although perhaps with so great shyness and with some sense of fear and impingement.

I will here insert what one who was very intimate with Dame Gertrude has communicated to me. My informant writes: "Dame Gertrude told me, after she had entered into the spiritual course into which you,

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long after her profession, had put her, she could not be quiet in mind nor satisfied in conscience until our Right Rev. Father President who then was had given her leave to renew her vows privately to him. To this he yielded for her satisfaction, and so she did so, and that on account of a doubt, or fear at least, of the validity of her former profession."

Having been professed in the way we have described, Dame Gertrude very likely for a time made additional efforts to live more in accordance with her profession; but before long she found herself more than ever deeply plunged in her miseries, which even seemed increased by her profession. Besides, her external virtues wonderfully decayed, and her heart, as she herself declares, became as hard as a stone as regards God and the exercise of virtue. Indeed, her life was as discontented as can well be conceived. Realizing her distressing state, Dame Gertrude set herself to find a remedy. But one thing, indeed, would restore her peace of mind, and that was to be put into the spiritual course which corresponded with her call from God. But as she despaired of this, having already tried and failed, she sought relief of another remedy. She imagined that if she were removed to another house she would be happier, for then she would be rid of two difficulties—an aversion to her Superior, which still troubled her, and an excessive attachment to some of her Sisters. Here, indeed, was a plain temptation, for as likely as not she would meet with the same or similar difficulties elsewhere; but she had reached to such confusion of mind as to be unable to recognize the temptation.

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It happened just at this time that Dame Gertrude's beloved father, Mr. Crispin More, retired at Canbery, and was lodged by the monks in the guest-house. Here he remained two or three months, not almost daily enjoying the company of his daughter, which afforded him the greatest pleasure in the world. Not to detain her father, Dame Gertrude put the best face she could on her life, and did her best to give satisfactory answers to his inquiries about her welfare. But at length, her interior trouble growing almost unbearable, she was strongly disposed to touch her design to her father, and to seek his help to procure her transfer to another house, where she might live more contentedly than at present. Indeed, on one occasion she mentioned the matter to her father, and he, at the last moment for him, or rather God, would not allow her. For certainly, had the option, the great joy which she took in her would have led him to make every effort to gratify her desire—and much he could have accomplished under the circumstances. Dame Gertrude, however, restrained herself, and nothing was said. Hence we may see the working of God's providence towards her, for by retaining her God would have, as we shall presently see, to obtain what she stood in need of, whereas if she had left, it would probably have been for otherwise.

The account receives confirmation from the friend I recently quoted: she wrote as follows: "Dame Gertrude did not at the gate, nor in any other ways, request her father for her removal out of this house. Nor did she ever speak one word to him of her interior grief and difficulty in that matter, which yet

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did so wonderfully affect her (as she hath sometimes told me) that since she often marvelled thereof, how she had withstood herself from doing it, or how she so contented it from such a father, that was so tender of her, and to whom she could so freely have imparted the very secrets of her soul. But she said that surely it was not God's will she should do it. And it was He only that strengthened her in it. "I was indeed very weakly, said she, and unwilling to speak anything that might be a grief to my father, and therefore I did always set the best face I could upon it, and said as much as I could that might be a comfort to him. And what I could not well speak of I did forbear, and would say nothing at all of it."

About the middle of August Mr. More left Canbery for Artbury, where he remained for some time.

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CHAPTER V

DAME GERTRUDE ENTERS ON AN INTERIOR LIFE

After the time of her profession—a little before or a little after I can not say which—Dame Gertrude came to me for some spiritual direction, which I gave her by word of mouth, according to my custom. She accepted the proffered advice, but at the time it produced no great effect, and this chiefly, I think, because she did not hit upon the right method of prayer, or, through ignorance, did not stick at it during the periods of interior darkness and desolation to which she was subject. All Dame Gertrude's spiritual good and refinement was to come by prayer. But being as yet some the better for the advice given, she held to her course both towards me and others, mocking and putting to her gilded way as those who followed my instructions. Sometimes, however, noting that her Sisters were better or more at peace through these instructions, she would say to them: "Ah, it is well for you, but you can get good from them, for I can get none."

This matter stood with Dame Gertrude till about the Feast of All Saints, about eleven months after her profession. Then she came to me a second time, and

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I again imparted to her directions which she asked for. This is the occasion to which reference has already been made, when she came on the advice of her Superior. Now, the difficulty which Dame Gertrude's director had to face was to find for her a suitable method of prayer. Verbal prayer was insufficient. Meditation or any immediate act she could not do, at least, to any good purpose. For though she could resolve images in her mind, and thereby discourse and draw inferences, yet this did not serve to move her will towards God, and enable her to break forth into acts of love. On the contrary, she remained as cold as if she had discoursed or preached to a stone. And this is the case with many good and well-disposed souls: so that what benefited Dame Gertrude may also prove salutary to others.

Dame Gertrude's case, as I conceive it, was this: God had given her—partly by nature and partly by grace—a wonderfully strong propensity in her rational will to seek after God and eternal felicity, and a discernment or conscience for all the necessary things of this life. But this propensity, though so strong and efficacious, is in its own nature a very profound and spiritual thing and cannot be more fully explained. Moreover, it is of such a nature that to be able to make use of it there is required a proper and suitable action on the part of the person; for of itself it does no good. So in Dame Gertrude there was this propensity to exercise herself by her own activity, if she could find a method that was suitable to her propensity and would afford her a relief. In her case the suitable method was not by any discourse of her imagination, nor by the use of

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sensible images, but merely the exercise of affection, which as her propensity moved her to do by itself, or as she chose herself out of a book, or by custom, or from memory. For this purpose she reached out of the "Confessions" and "Meditations" of St. Augustine quite a store of affective sentences or ejaculations which wonderfully suited her propensity. And by this means she came to have ordinarily a very efficacious prayer, accompanied by much reflection and inward sight of herself, through which she was enabled to discover her inward affections and other defects, and also to chain through great strength of will for their amendment. Moreover, this method of prayer afforded her a good interior light, and, in conjunction with the propensity of her will, which was constant and much illuminated by Divine grace, fully satisfied all the needs of her soul. Now at length she found that she had really entered on the right way for her, and that she had no further need but to hold fast by it.

Though Dame Gertrude was now in the right way, her path did not always run smooth. Frequently it fell out that some of her inward affections were excited, but, nor could she profess them with pleasure. She would fall into a certain darkness or sadness of will, which could her some perplexity. My advice was that she should stick to her prayer, and not doubt for any difficulty whatsoever. And she herself soon found by experience that even in those periods of darkness of will and desolation, by doing what she could she made spiritual progress, acquiring strength of will, through the secret working of the Holy Ghost, and light to see her defects and how to amend them.

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In the beginning of her spiritual course Dame Gertrude was much subject to these desolations, and one day it happened that I was reading to her and another Sister from a Latin book called "De Sanctis Crucibus Divini Amoris," which I translated for them as I went along, and I came to the following passage about desolations: "There are some souls who are led by great ardor, indolence, and without sensible perception of Divine correspondence, inasmuch that they know not where to turn to find means to devote themselves to God. In such times of spiritual poverty and aridity they cannot do better than rest contented and do the best they can. And let them comfort themselves with the Divine will, and accommodate their courses so as to arrive at the true love of God." After I had read some further passages to the same effect, Dame Gertrude appeared to be deeply moved, and exclaimed: "Oh! oh! That must be my way! I pray you let me have that piece translated into English." I gave her the passage in English, and she took it and made great use of the doctrine, continuing her prayer notwithstanding all her frequent desolations. This spiritual information and the way it was brought about are thus described by Dame Gertrude in her writings: "Though of myself I had no need to go to him [the Chaplain, Father Baker], yet upon my Mistress's bidding I went to him. Having done this, and received some general instructions about prayer and other things, and having put them in practice, the Lord I think within three days set at I alone myself so quieted in soul that I wondered at myself, and found

¹ "The Secret Ways of Divine Love," by Berthmann.



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myself fitted as to instructions and satisfied. Those instructions were, for example, that I must give all to God, without any willing reservation of any inordinate affection to any creature. This I found my soul very willing to do. And next I was to meditate, pray twice a day, which I found myself capable of. And though I found little of that which is called sensible devotion, yet I found that with a little industry I was able to use prayer with much profit. It also made any cross thing which happened very tolerable to me, and made me capable of understanding anything that was necessary for me in a spiritual life. Moreover, it discovered daily to me those things that were impediments between God and my soul, and made me labor to do anything in the world for any other intention than out of regard of God, and because God would have me to do the thing. And I had that by and in the exercise of prayer God doth find such means to humble me, that all the creatures in the world could never have found them out for me. God also sends me what I should do in them if I were to choose my soul by them, as He showed I should that it were but to observe my soul to do such and such things, and will I or will I, I must bear them. And that later that God will temper everything that He speaks upon me, that it is just as much as and no more than I am able to bear, and is convenient for me. And methinks I see that anything I conceive is so wholly to be attributed to God that I cannot presume to be able to endure the least cross in the world, and should think it an extreme presumption to expose myself to



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beated by wilfully putting myself of my own accord to the suffering of anything but what obedience and necessity do provide for me; and this I find to be enough.¹ In another place Dame Gertrude writes thus of her spiritual state and method at this time: "By exacting virtue and the practice of it shows the grace and ability of a simple beginner, they make obedience and other virtues seem to be in practice an insupportable burden. Such disciples by such means find ease at the beginning of their way; whereas if they had been taught to do things with discretion, they would have been able to go on faster every day than the other. This one point is of such moment that for the want of the due practice thereof counsel many times, that the hardness of religion seem so heavy as they do, even to many good and well-ensuing souls. In this point do most men differ from Father Baker in their directions of souls for as I could understand them more than in any other point."² If this course had not been held by him in an extraordinary manner, and that he daily for a long time encouraged me not to be distressed with my sins and imperfections, assuring me it would all turn to my good, if by prayer I would endeavor, yet, with all possible patience with myself for my defects, to tend to God, and use the best means I could to refer myself in all inordinate affections to created things, and that more by vigilance than by extraordinary force, I could never have proceeded, nor held out in the said course, or in any other course that had been proper for me. But by the said way and means divers imperfections to



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which I was seldom kind which I desired to reform, yet could not at first decayed, and by little and little fell off when God Almighty did not I was very one His time for it. This was a quite contrary course to that which was expected by some of those whom before I had met with, who for the most part can give no other advice than to overcome all things by force and violence. But God did show me plainly in reading Father Baker's books that my way was to overcome myself as I could, and not as I would, but expect God's good pleasure. Thus when He pleased, if I did my best, I should by His grace get the better hand of that which, with all my industry, I was not able to overcome. This showed me much my own frailty, and how little we are able to do of ourselves—yes, indeed, nothing that is good. For when I have been able to overcome myself in a long many a time, yet when I thought myself thereby secure, that I was able to do it again, I have failed more than ever before. This made me never to dare to presume of my own strength in anything, how little soever I do, if I do, I am sure to fail.



CHAPTER VI
THE NATURE OF DAME GERTRUDE'S PROPENSITY

This propensity, or thirst for God, to which I have already alluded, is not impulsive, but is a very real spiritual thing, and causes in such a kind of repugnance for discursive prayer, or any exercise in which sensible images are used to move the will towards God. This propensity leads the soul to seek God in an impulsive manner in her own interior, and not to external deeds, not by means of sensible images. Still, there are some souls with this propensity who are unable to seek God in this way through a secret defect in their internal reason, which prevents them from discerning aright the secret ways by which the Divine Spirit would guide them, so that they are more apt to take the wrong way than the right. They take the suggestions of their own imagination for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and cannot possibly continue in the right internal way any longer. God can at the external guides in the world supply the deficiency. No such defect, however, had place in Dame Gertrude. Her internal reason was perfect and capable of distinguishing right Divine admonition from secular impulses, so that it was not I who brought her into the right



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way. I merely prepared and disposed her for it. What brought her into the way was her facility in my general instructions, her careful attention to the Divine light and impulses, and her constancy in the pursuit of prayer as best she could by the means or assistance. Indeed, her principal care, or request for internal way was to observe and follow the Divine light and impulses, so that the Divine Spirit was her end and principal business in it. Moreover, the Holy Spirit not only counsel and strengthened the propensity of her will, but also concerted with her passions, industry and perseverance, so as to enlighten her in what to do and what not to do, how to attend her times and duties, and how to avoid the occasions of them. The principal means, I think, by which the Holy Ghost enlightened her was by leading her to renounce all inordinate affections, so that by detaching her soul of the clouds of passion, whereby the natural reason is obscured, she was able to see much more clearly the light and help imparted by the Holy Ghost, to distinguish good from evil, and her way to the spiritual life, and to correct her faults. Thus led by little Dame Gertrude began to amend her life not only interiorly, but also exteriorly, and in the sight of others. Indeed, no marked and sudden was the change for the better that, with the concurrence of a few others who were in the same way, a great improvement was to be seen in the course, not only exteriorly, but interiorly too, in the case of many of the community. For though they were not all fit for these interior ways, yet the new men made them look about them, and few better both interiorly and exteriorly.



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In truth, experience shows that three or four souls out of a community of thirty or forty religious women, fit for an interior life, and actually leading it, will be able by their sufferings and carriage to bring the whole community to at least a reasonable external observance and piety, especially if there be any good disposition or moral uprightness in them, as is generally to be found in professed religious. For this result is not produced by anything these interior souls do or intend, but is in virtue of the Divine Spirit working in them and sending His light out of them. And, on the other hand, when one of such natural talent, judgment, high spirit, and hardness of heart as was Dame Gertrude gets into a community, she will be a most pernicious influence there, and do much harm to others. And as in such cases the decay is natural, virtue and goodness and the growth of evil habits increase, there can be no doubt but that in a short time Dame Gertrude would have become a kind of pestilence to the house rather than a kind of fortress. And as what is lost, when corrupted, becomes worse, so Dame Gertrude, having received from God a nature and supernatural call to the best, though not corresponding with the call, was likely to decline to the worst. And had she not attended her life, had continued in her former state, it is highly probable, all things considered, that in time she would have broken her heart, and thus needed ten days her body not being strong enough to endure so great affliction, and God only know what would have become of her soul!

¹ I write with admiration on this point, having ground
² Complete opus per penam



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for which I say by frequent allusion to the matter in conversation with Dame Gertrude after her conversion to God. And I think well to record her state as affecting matter of edification, for in this we see the great mercy and goodness of God towards her; the mischief of not being in a true spiritual course to the religious state; the happiness of being in the right way; both on her own account and for the sake of others; and, finally, the assurance will be to the honor of her own soul, which now, through grace, is enjoying celestial happiness.

If souls with the formal propensity to seek God inwardly would adhere to their prayer, and perform it in the best manner they can, they would undoubtedly make great progress. Especially should they observe the attractions or impulses of the Holy Spirit, when they can best do, what does them most good, or what they relish most. Moreover, perhaps at first they should begin with meditation or immediate acts, or let them, like Dame Gertrude, take affective exercises.

But for those whose propensity is to seek God exteriorly, I think they should use images by way of meditation, or intercession acts, or vocal prayer. For they will not be able to make a recollection by the use of affections, after the manner of Dame Gertrude. They may, indeed, be able to make ejaculations; but these, being brief and transitory, will never afford the interior light of a recollection. And if these souls cannot help themselves by such images, I know not how they can make any true mental prayer at all.

The frequent recurrence of interior darkness was the

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reason why Dame Gertrude so often speaks in her "Confessions" of serving and loving God without complaint and of being content with the light of faith only, as being most secure and certain. This doctrine was her own practice.

Added by her propensity and Divine grace, Dame Gertrude labored diligently at her prayer. At first, by accident, she made use of such gathered-out-of-books; but in a short time she came to use those only which suggested themselves to her mind, or were suggested by the Holy Spirit. These she often set down on paper to help her with in time of solitude. And some of her letters, happening to light upon them, were so pleased with them that they copied them out. Thus, quite a store of these affective acts were scattered about the house in various books and papers. The greater portion of the second and third parts of the "Liberation Devotionals" consists of her copies, the author merely having set them in order and arranged them in method.

Indeed, Dame Gertrude's love for the practice of recollection was such that through her it was better observed in the house than formerly, and a reputation was introduced into the Conventuals making mental prayer obligatory even on recreation days—an observance which is in force to this day.

The propensity which Dame Gertrude had to seek God interiorly is the way so much recommended by our Lord in the Gospel—"seek God—His spirit and His truth." But the propensity to seek and serve God by

¹ The book was so obtained by Father Helen. Its principal title was "Holy Prayers and Divine Letters."



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the imagination and the use of images of creatures is the way referred to by St. Paul when he says: "The creature things of God come to be seen and understood by the things that have been created by Him" (Rom. 1: 20). But this way of seeking, feeling, and adoring God is not so much in spirit and in truth, as the way referred to by our Saviour when God who is a Spirit is sought, found, and enjoyed by the spirit of man abstracted from the images of creatures.

The interior light which Dame Gertrude had in prayer, and by which she walked in the other world as in her writings, was, I believe, largely the result of clearing her natural reason from the clouds of passion, and thereby she was able to discern her defects and evil inclinations, and to know how to behave towards God and others. Such light probably is not of a superior natural character, but where the light of created natural reason is insufficient, as is often the case, then Almighty God adds in His own wonderful way a supernatural light. And this was the case, at least sometimes, with Dame Gertrude. For instance, she declares that her faith was strengthened and confirmed by certain lights which she received in prayer. Moreover, it would seem that she had very frequently a kind of perception or contemplation of the abscissness of God and His being, and the total dependence of herself and all creatures on Him and His name will. Indeed, these contemplations were the very ground of her humility and the refinement of her life. For in this knowledge and in living according to it consists true humility and obedience to God—humility and obedience, as she tells us, that would make her subject herself to a worm, if



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God should be certain. Often she would say that without this experience through converse with God and internal prayer, it is impossible to form a true conception of humility. Indeed, neither Dame Gertrude nor anyone else could acquire true humility, in which a real subordination of life consists, except by such spiritual knowledge and grace from God. Dame Gertrude too, stood in particular need of such aid on account of her exceptional ability and judgment, of which she was perfectly conscious, though her carriage towards others was always beyond reproach. It was, moreover, remarkable, and observed by those acquainted with her, how much her natural reason improved, especially in matters that concerned herself, after she became interiorly enlightened by the spiritual course into which she had entered.

The true ground of humility is a knowledge of one's own nothingness and the reality and stability of God. And no amount of study, nor conversation, nor instruction from others, however humble, would suffice to make Dame Gertrude humble, or enable her to know what true humility is. At first, through want of this knowledge, her natural gifts only increased her pride, willfulness, and disaffection. But after she attained and daily enjoyed this contemplation in her recollection, and sought to live in accordance with that knowledge at other times, it was wonderful to see how humble she grew in her interior, though perhaps externally there was not much to show for it in the absence of fitting occasions. The light and perception of God's infinity, and her total dependence upon Him, remained habitually in her, to the increase of grace in her soul, even to the

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hour of her death. So that all she did and all that happened to her contributed to her good and the increase of humility, as, for instance, dissimulation, or trials internal or external, whereas in her imperfect state these occurrences increased her pride, impatience, self-love, and other disorders of her soul.

To give a particular example: The Abbess, noting Dame Gertrude's spirit, thought it would be for her good to humble her by not taking much notice of her, as she seemed to expect. In consequence, Dame Gertrude contracted a dislike for the Abbess, and was most disaffected and, in fact, headed a faction which was opposed to the Abbess. On the other hand, the Novice-Mistress, to whom Dame Gertrude was subject for about two years, being to benefit her, made much of her. But this also did harm, and increased Dame Gertrude's willfulness and pride so that her heart, as she says, became as hard as a stone as to God and spiritual things, whereas before she entered religion, though not perhaps devout, she was at least unimpaired and facile, both interiorly towards God and exteriorly in her dealing with others. But it was wonderful to see how her understanding cleared and her will softened when she came to know God, himself, and others, according to the order of justice and truth. She then saw what had not been of death, and what it should be by right reason, and henceforth she turned to the contrary to the latter. Her attachments and that of others associated with her brought peace to the house, and relieved the Abbess of much vexation and difficulty.

The following relates, a few months after Dame

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Gertrude had entered on her interior life, Mr. More arrived at Canterbury to spend a few days with his daughter on his way from Acreway to Paris. Being a man of intelligence, he soon discovered the change for the better in his daughter and in some others, and left well satisfied this time, which was not the case on his former visit. A similar favourable impression was made on his return from Paris the following Michaelmas. He then proceeded to Acreway, where he passed the winter, and in the spring he returned to England, where he remained.

The propensity, or thirst of the soul for God, called by grace, is, as we have seen, the root of the soul's interior seeking after God. But the propensity in itself is but a natural gift, and is often to be found in heathens, infidels, and heretics. But those persons, wanting the light of faith, grace of God, and those external instructions which are only to be had in the Catholic Church, are unable to make good use of their propensity, so that it serves not to render them happy and to satisfy their souls. But those Catholics who have in aided by grace and external helps, may much more easily work with it and attain to interior happiness. Not will their propensity ever forsake them, unless under the weight of sin, till their last breath. Thus, through the action of grace, this propensity becomes, as it were, the root and source of their spiritual rise, progress, and consummation, as was the case with Dame Gertrude.

Nevertheless, to do well by this way the person's temperament and internal senses must be naturally adapted for it. For instance, a person of a melancholy

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temperament or subject to violent passions will be very safe for this way, even though he should be endowed with the above-mentioned propensity. But on the other hand, persons of a sanguine temperament, or of a merry and hearty disposition, or whose passions are quiet, are much better for this way, provided they have this propensity in sufficient force—a quality possessed by comparatively few, even of the best disposition. But those souls not so equipped by nature will have greater difficulty in treading this way. They will stand in need of more external help, and will be more liable to fall into error than the others. They must, therefore, proceed with great care.

The impulse of the will to elevate itself to God—a matter often referred to by spiritual writers—is nothing else than a natural propensity. And when the person is in a state of grace, and voluntarily exercises this propensity, the Divine Spirit descends, adds greater vigor to the elevation of the will towards God. Dame Gertrude was endowed with all the requisite conditions for success: she inherited from her father a sanguine temperament, and a merry, bright nature. She had a propensity to an interior life to a high degree. Her internal senses also were well adapted for the work, and she was well provided with instructions how to discover and exercise herself interiorly. By these means she came to receive the internal graces of the Holy Ghost, which she carefully observed and corresponded with in the light of faith, and an abundance of grace which alone renders the soul pleasing to God. Besides, she was in a religious Order and an enclosed convent, where she found every external help.

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Superior having arranged the house and all other matters in the manner best calculated to assist souls in the acquisition and exercise of contemplation, as the nature of the Order required. She had also the encouragement of example and the communication of other souls in the house who were walking in the same way of the spirit—a help of considerable moment. Moreover, she had ability and sufficient health to enable her to work God interiorly, till she entered on her last sickness; and even then God is wont to supply such well-disposed souls when their strength almost leaves, till the moment of death. It is not surprising, then, that she need not even pretend to be Dame Gertrude should stand in no need of external help. Indeed, the beneficence of this in the absence of her soul would only have caused her trouble and confusion, since it is so far as she could administer grace to the backsliders, for which she ever entertained an ardent desire. Her mind retirement desired to help one and all other creatures, and attend to the one thing which she justly deemed to be all in all, and in which she communicated her spiritual course, passing immediately into another of greater humility, anxiety, and propensity, in which she enjoyed an essential and real communion and union of what before she had seen only as in a looking-glass, and by a parable, and in hope. But I am digressing. To return.

As the above-mentioned perception and knowledge of God was the cause of humility in Dame Gertrude, so humility was the cause of her obedience to God and to others, where it was due for his sake. This is the obedience of which she often speaks in her writings.

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If she had not attained to this kind of obedience, which is the root of all true obedience, she would never have been able to obey either God or man in a way that would have brought peace and contentment to her soul, but, on the contrary, she would have increased in pride and disobedience. It was this that made Dame Gertrude cry out in her "Confessions," and lament that all other poor souls in religion are not fully instructed in this kind of obedience, and taught to grove in it: for if they were, says she, they would be as docile as lambs towards their Superiors, and all others according to reason; whereas, for want of this knowledge, many are untractable and rebellious, or else continue harmful to have been, till she attained to this knowledge. The divine obedience of these Gertrude consisted in this—that for God and out of love and obedience to Him, she willingly and readily did those things to which she was bound in any way, refrained from those things she was forbidden, and patiently and with resignation, and even cheerfully, endured all difficulties and sufferings which laid her, whether in internal matters, as contradictions of will or dissensions, or in external things, as weaknesses or neglect of others, or bodily infirmities, which were often considerable. In a word, her steadfast towards God made her regard all the things of this life, and all that could be done or suffered in it, as mere nothing, even so far as they could help or hinder the love and service of God and the attainment of eternal happiness, so which was concentrated all her ambition and desire. It was only during her recollections that she enjoyed that perception of God which is possible in our imperfect state; and then she

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would, as it were, establish herself before Him, in which act, strictly speaking, humility consists. But at other times she tried to live, as far as her frailty would permit, in accordance with that perception of God's reality and her nothingness.

Oh, what a happy gift have they who are endowed with this noble, natural propensity, if they will but daily work upon it, for it helps or even impels them to seek God interiorly! But they must be animated by supernatural grace, and those other necessary qualifications which I have already mentioned. How easily may such souls work, and continue to work, even till the very last breath of their life. For even their very nature, created as it is, concurs almost imperceptibly with Divine grace, and carries them along as in the current of a stream towards God. But those who are without this propensity must laboriously toil against the stream of nature. Hence it may be easily understood that such souls have more difficulty in following this way, and still more in preserving therein to the end. But the former happy souls have a propensity to seek God inherent in their very nature—a propensity which will never leave them as long as life shall remain in their bodies.

CHAPTER VII
DAME GERTRUDE'S TENACITY TO HER INTERIOR
COURSE JUSTIFIED

By what has been said, it may be seen how insufficient were all human instructions for Dame Gertrude, except in so far as they helped in leading her to that perception of God of which I have spoken, and to lead her to attend to the Divine inspirations and admonitions by which a reformation was brought about in her soul and life. What students, then, would I not be for superiors to withdraw her from this way of life, and to put her into another followed by human rigidity and austerities? A way such as this might be suitable for one incapable of anything better, but not for Dame Gertrude, who, only to one or two superiors of distinction, would withdraw her unless in ignorance of the course she was pursuing.

Though the property in soul took was but a natural gift in Dame Gertrude, it does not usually attain its full perfection at once, but ripens with years. In some souls it ripens quicker than in others. In Dame Gertrude it probably did not attain to any great maturity or perfection while she was in England; or if it was so, the property was conventional and smothered by the warm affections she entertained for

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her friends and kindred. Moreover, children are usually more taken up with passions and amusements than with the things of the life to come. As St. Paul says of himself, "When I was a child, I reasoned as a child, I thought as a child," etc. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the property was in Dame Gertrude, but it could not assert itself or attain to any perfection till she came to years of greater maturity, and the natural impediments of the society of kindred and friends were removed by her departure to France.

When we remember the timid disposition of Dame Gertrude, the delicacy of women, and the nature she had received from God—a nature so well affected towards Him and His service, and still more, when we consider her contemplation or perception of the infinity, omnipotence, and justice of God, and her total dependence on Him Who could in an instant annihilate her, and cast her headling both body and soul into hell (and this in time He would indeed have done if she had persisted in her pride and disobedience); and still more, when we bear in mind how her perception and knowledge of God ever became fuller and clearer in her frequent recollections—were not these things sufficient to render her humble and obedient to God in all things, and to others for His sake, according to His will? They were indeed such, through the grace of God, I repeat to be so. By natural disposition, it is true, Dame Gertrude was little inclined to subject herself to any severe austerities, perhaps, to her parents, according to the bidding of nature. In consequence, her life in religion was anything but pleasant, and so will probably

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she would have come to a miserable end, had she not been brought by these means to reform her life, and to persevere in the face of opposition, or the persecution of others. It is not surprising, then, that having once found this way, which remains principally in observing and following the Divine inspirations, she should be most averse to relinquishing it for any other, preferring all other ways to be insufficient for her soul.

Indeed, it appears to me to be a great pity that novices and young religious are not sufficiently instructed—as far as human instruction will avail—in the properties and attributes of the Majesty of God. That their principal end in entering religion is to subject themselves to His Divine Majesty, according to reason and justice; and that God as any time is able, for their disobedience and ingratitude to Him, to annihilate them, and cast them into the depths of hell, there is evidence for all eternity torments so horrible that the wit of man cannot so much as conceive them, much less express them in words or in writing. And this lesson should often be inculcated in beginners in simple terms, and with much insistence, so that they may be inspired with a reverential fear of God and a due submission to His abidance on earth. I am sure such instruction would be most profitable to capable souls, and would help them, till they arrive at an experiential knowledge and perception of God, that of Dame Gertrude. And this infused knowledge will be found to surpass, beyond all comparison, that which is obtained by the reading or preaching of men. Such, this latter will be of great use to the soul, till she attains to that other more potent and efficacious knowledge.

Chapter VII: Dame Gertrude's Tenacity to her Interior Course Justified

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In the following verses Dame Gertrude sings her conversion to God in a period when she entered the convent:

"And that my wicked heart did prove,
Hath found such favor in Thy eyes,
Whence descending,
Oh, blessed ever be my God,
For His pardoning grace,
Which I, unworthy, have received
In this most happy place!"

Could anyone, then, blame Dame Gertrude if she adhered to a way which she found so profitable to her soul, and declined to abandon it at the suggestion or threat of any grave individual? Undoubtedly she was prepared to submit herself wholly to authority, after due examination of her case by competent persons appointed by the Congregation. Of this she points to many places in her writings. It is without such help, and had no reason to alter her course, and religious practices which were evidently so fruitful of good. Upon these even the strict and arduous work, with a conscience undisturbed during life or at the hour of death.

When God calls a soul to the religious life, especially in a Contemplative Order, His intention is to guide her by the Divine guidance and inspiration, to which she should attend and be obedient. For this purpose the religious life is very suitable and even necessary. For several disciplines are ordained by St. Benedict and Superior, partly to enable souls the better to observe the interior Divine inspirations, which should be the principle and foundation of their interior

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and external acts; partly that souls may have the help of Superior to dispense themselves by general instructions how to observe and distinguish the Divine inspirations; and finally that Superior may decide in case of doubt the source of the inspiration, and distinguish and list inspirations of the Holy Ghost from natural and diabolical inspirations. For this end the Church instituted Superior, and the soul in making vows should have a similar intention. A Superior, therefore, who should simply neglect good and inspire inspirations, and regard them as rubbish, will act contrary to the Divine will, the intention of Holy Church, and the religious state. His principal care should be rather to promote and facilitate such inspirations than to hinder them. Hence St. Benedict in his Rule will not allow the Abbot to dispose of his Rule over external things over which he is a measure Lord and master; but he must in all things follow the Rule as his guide.¹ But the Rule, though good and holy, is but the institution of man. If, then, it is unlawful for the Superior to deviate from the Rule, how much more unlawful must it be to exercise authority or command over the inspirations and impulses of the Divine Spirit in the soul! If, then, my Superior should be so rash which God forbid should ever be the case in our Congregation) as not to give heed to Divine inspirations, but should manifestly disregard them, and impose upon a soul his own ideas instead, surely the soul in such a case will not be bound to obey—at least, in the case where the command is given without examination or inquiry as to the nature and source of the inspirations. In such a

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case the soul may well observe that command of Holy Scripture, that it behooveth to obey God rather than man. And let the soul continue to observe and follow the Divine light and impulses, making use of such means as may be lawful, and as God shall provide for the peaceful pursuit of her way.

That such a situation in this world is certainly quite possible. For the Superior might be a man, whose spiritual course lay in the exercise of the imagination, as is the case with the majority of souls in these days, and not in the exercises which, strictly speaking, are truly spiritual, and which are founded upon the light and impulses of the intellect and not of the sensitive soul, which operates principally through the imagination. And the latter is different from the exercises that are truly spiritual. St. John of the Cross, in his treatise "The Living Flame," reproaches at great length and very vehemently Superiors who hinder or discourage souls from observing and following the

¹ This passage, to be rightly understood, should be read in conjunction with what Father Basso says in his work, which I have already quoted, on the same point. It is not the Rule fully intended to read by the judgment and decision of the Superior or require both strict and severe execution. It is not a rule which might feel great relaxation, etc. With the obedience due to God and His ministers . . . (the above is not . . . to mean absolute obedience. Cf. also "The Holy Spirit," the First Treatise, the 16th section, p. 17) "Whosoever intend to observe the Rule, he must know that that which is most profitable to him, and external all in obedience and regularity . . . we ought to observe and execute, and that there be no other than obedientia. And, Yes, this is to hold, although the said external law, command, or observance, be such as to be very grave, rigorous, severe, and to be very proper or convenient to be in practice," etc.

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Divine impulses, and allow them to work by human ways and methods. If a Superior distrusts or suspects the impulses of a soul, it is his duty to inquire into her ways and interior course, and not to condemn her or drive her from her course without any knowledge of her interior life.

It is not reasonable that a soul pursuing such an interior course should set down in writing what she can find for her defence, in case her way be impugned? This, at least, is what Dame Gertrude did. She had suffered enough from human methods, and from want of knowledge of true spirituality, and hence in her writings she often gives expression to her fears, and the danger of being diverted from her course, will knowing that as she was in a way that suited her spiritual needs—a way that had been hard to find and hard to enter, and that was not trod by the many—she was likely to meet with more opponents than supporters. Hence Dame Gertrude was wary in exposing to others her interior life unnecessarily, lest through indiscretion she should tempt or lose so precious a gift, by which she satisfied both God and her own soul, and was clearly, as she could see, under God's special guidance. But let this suffice for the present. I shall have to return to this subject later.

CHAPTER VIII
VOCAL PRAYER

It is now time to express more clearly and fully the nature of Dame Gertrude's prayer after what she termed her conversion, when she began to lead an interior life.

To do this it will be necessary to explain at some length the different kinds of prayer that spiritual disciplines usually begin with for the attainment of contemplation, the perfection of prayer. There are four ways by which souls may begin, according to their aptitude, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, or the advice of their directors. Usually souls begin with an inferior degree, and afterwards ascend to a higher, till they are ripe for contemplation.

The first way is vocal prayer. This prayer is suitable for simple, uneducated persons, who are not apt for discursive prayer, or have not learnt how to exercise it. This is often the case with women, by brothers, and others in a secular state of life.

The second way of praying is suitable for those who are unable to raise affection towards God by discourse, but are drawn wholly to the immediate exercise of the will. This arises often from the propensity which God

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Vocal Prayer

has given to their will naturally, and causes a certain impregnance for reasoning or consideration in prayer. They are already too well disposed towards God to stand in need of arguments and reasoning to raise affection towards Him.

Vocal prayer may be profitable also for the learned, who are able to make use of discourses, and thereby to produce affection towards God. Still, they should not rest content with vocal prayer, but should often, according to their need or profit, have recourse to discursive prayer, in which the understanding is exercised by means of the imagination, in order to raise affection towards God. It is true, in ancient times all souls began their spiritual course with vocal prayer, whether they were capable of discursive prayer or not. This is evident from the fact that vocal prayer alone is spoken of by the ancients, till the real arrival at contemplation. The prayer of the ancients was principally the *habitus*, which they repeated daily, and sometimes often. This prayer served them till they attained to contemplation, which consisted of a pure interior prayer divinely inspired, or a capability which in time formed a habit of contemplation. When actually

unable to contemplate, they resumed their vocal prayer. But their vocal prayer was now performed in a more spiritual manner, with spiritual attention, and with little or no use of the imagination, which was not the case before they attained to contemplation. When they were beginners they repeated the use of gross sensible images, which are now gone or transcended, and God is apprehended much more spiritually. But the ancients had other great helps, which

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remained their vocal prayer very efficacious. They enjoyed perfect solitude, silence, and abstinence. They withdrew from the world and all worldly amusements. They thrust themselves from the solitudes of the world, and applied themselves to painful mortifications, or fasting, abstinence from food, meat, drink, and broken sleep, heat and humble lodgings, coarse and many other mortifications undertaken by Divine inspiration, or imposed by Superiors, or according to the suggestions or guidance of the Holy Spirit, to become more and more spiritual. Now it is matter for surprise that the ancients attained readily to contemplation and perfection. And if we in these days could not would not to do this, we should also attain to the same degree of perfection.

By these means the ancient—of whom such as had an aptitude for the—passed straight from vocal prayer to contemplation. But in these days even souls that have a strong propensity and call from God, through want

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Vocal Prayer

of correspondence with grace, or intimacy, or other cause, are unable to accompany their vocal prayer with all those helps that were used by the ascetics, so that the effect of their prayer is proportionately weaker. We require for more intelligence in most and slight, recreation, interruptions in our attention to God, so that vocal prayer alone will not suffice for us, as it did for the ascetics. We must, therefore, make good the deficiency in another way—by exercises that are purely mental, by which the soul may become recollected, and exercise herself towards God, at least at fixed times. Thus we make amends for the distractions in which we live during the rest of the day, till we attain to that perfection which will enable us at all times, even when engaged with external employments, to uplift ourselves to God.

Such, at least, was the case with Dame Gertrude. No number of vocal prayers that she could make were able to produce recollection in her, or afford her a true knowledge of God and herself. For though she had, on the one hand, a strong propensity to God in the depth or fond of her soul, on the other hand her natural activity drew her strongly to outward things, so that all day long—at least till she made considerable progress in the habit of recollection—she was harassed in business, conversation, and other external employments, and they really did her no harm, but rather good, for her nature required an outlet. But when she broke herself to her recollection—she was most careful never to miss it—her strong propensity or call to God asserted itself, and she would presently become wholly recollected, and converse with God, all sensible



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images and the others that had corrupted her situation being wholly and easily banished.

However, it cannot be denied that for those whom vocal prayer, accompanied by some exercise of virtue (for without the latter no kind of prayer will be efficacious), is sufficient to bring to contemplation, no way is easier or more secret; none less injurious to health and health, or less exposed to delusions. And in time, in the case of a capable soul, the prayer becomes aspirative, mystic, and contemplative. So was it with Dame Gertrude. In time she came to recite the Divine Office with great recollection, interior light and sweetness as she recited in her "Confessions." These are her words: "The Divine Office is such a heavenly thing, that in it we find whatsoever we can desire. For sometimes we address ourselves to Thee for help and pardon for our sins, and sometimes Thee speakest to us, so that it pierceth and woundeth with desire of Thee the very bottom of our souls. And sometimes Thou teachest a soul to understand more in it of the knowledge of Thee and of herself than ever could by any teaching in the world have been shown to a soul in five hundred years, and Thy words are words of life."¹

Certain, however, it is that few souls attain to contemplation, or spiritual prayer, without the help of some other purely mental prayer, seriously and industriously pursued. But let this suffice for vocal prayer.

¹ Dame Gertrude had some knowledge of Latin—at least, enough to follow the history, or the subsequent exercises, though in her modesty she ascribes her knowledge to a good nursery.

CHAPTER IX
MEDITATION

ANOTHER kind of prayer for beginners is discursive prayer, or meditation. This method of prayer is very good for those that need it and can perform it. Some souls need it not, because they are able to converse the will immediately without discursive prayer, especially after they have used meditation for some time. These are souls that have the propensity of the will, to which I have referred. They are rather seldom souls, as in the case of Dame Gertrude, to make affections by discursive prayer, and are apt for the immediate exercise of the will—an exercise consisting of immediate acts or ejaculations, natural or forced, as was the case with Dame Gertrude at first. These souls do not employ much force of labour on the reasoning portion of their exercises, nor do they dwell long on it; but generally, on the apprehensions of the point by the imagination, they fall to the use of the will, to which the greater part of the exercise is directed. Thus, these souls are able to do immediately by the will, aided by their propensity (and even more efficiently), what others without the

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aid propensity can accomplish only by discursive. These latter souls, I believe, find it very difficult to persevere in the exercise of discursive prayer, nor can they become truly spiritual. For the exercise itself is painful and laborious; the more, too, are often indiged, and other impediments occur, which render the exercise more difficult, and at times almost impossible. Moreover, however diligent these souls may be, they will never get beyond the use and limitation of the imagination; nor will they ever exercise an internal prayer, because they lack the natural propensity. And the reason the propensity makes so great difference is because it proceeds from within, and tends towards the interior. Consequently, those souls who are without this gift cannot become truly spiritual, either in their lives or in their exercises. These must always be active, and consist in the use of the internal and external senses, and not in the spirit which is abstracted from the use of the senses.
For this kind of prayer (discursive prayer) Dame Gertrude found herself wholly satisfied—probably because her strong propensity towards God gave her a kind of delight for reasoning and consideration, as necessary and wholesome. Indeed, the inherent power of the propensity is so great that almost of itself, or with very little help, it can easily and readily exercise itself towards God.
Speaking generally, women, whether they have this propensity or not, are less able to meditate than men, partly because women's wills are more powerful by nature than their understandings, and partly through want of education and training, by which the ability to

Meditation

meditation is acquired. As to those who lack the propensity, I scarcely know how they can hold themselves in the daily pursuit of mental prayer, especially in discursive prayer, which is time is apt to become dry and painful; and yet I do not see what other form of mental prayer can be recommended, or is likely to prove more satisfactory.



CHAPTER X
THE PRAYER OF IMMEDIATE ACTS

This third kind of prayer suitable for beginners is the exercise of immediate acts—immediate, because the soul occupies itself directly with God, without the assistance of discourse or reasoning. The exercise is performed chiefly by the superior will, but not without some use of the imagination and understanding: for in making the act, the understanding must see the sensible image of the thing in which the act consists. Still, there is no formal discourse or reasoning; there is merely the apprehension of the matter by the understanding, and the main part of the work is done by the will, which produces an efficacious act towards God. Indeed, owing to her propensity towards the interior, such a soul can make a more efficacious act towards God than another with ever so much reasoning, if she be without the propensity. And not only is the act more efficacious, but it is profected with much less labor and industry, so that the exercise is less likely to prove injurious to mind or body.

It is this propensity to the interior that enables such souls to progress so well without meditation, the genuineness, wholly or in part, replacing discourse, and



The Prayer of Immediate Acts

causing a repugnance for seeking motives to love God, when the soul is already so well disposed to love Him. Still, I will not say that those who have the propensity never use meditation, for some do and some do not; but they that use it will not tarry long in it, but after a few years, or even days sometimes, will pass on to immediate acts. Occasionally, however, these souls may be drawn temporarily to assume meditations, still, the use of the understanding even then will be slight, as the working of the will will predominate.

The acts may consist of any good matter which can be referred to God or His love and service, such as matter for resignation, patience, obedience, humility, service for sin and purpose of amendment, and so forth. Such matter the soul forms into an act, intending to do the thing, or suffer it for God. There are other acts which refer to God immediately, without reference to the soul herself, as when she congratulates God on being what He is, and wishes or wills that all should love Him and serve Him, and other such acts of goodwill and benevolence towards God. These acts are called immediate acts, and differ from true contemplation, because some pressure is applied to the will to produce them, and there is required some choice in the matter, some industry, besides a considerable use of the imagination. But true contemplation, or the habit of contemplation, consists of the suspension, or elevation, of the spirit abstracted from the imagination and senses, the elevation deriving its force and vigor partly from the propensity of the soul and partly from the action of the Holy Ghost, who dwells more intimately and



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perfectly in the propensity; so that the Holy Ghost may be said to be the managing or principal worker in the elevation of the soul to God.

As to Dame Gertrude, she was quite incapable, as we have seen, of meditation; nor was she better disposed for immediate acts—either the one nor the other was the best use to her. Nor was she more capable of using the acts which have immediate reference to God. The reason of this, I believe, was that all these exercises involve a considerable use of the imagination and the revolving of images; whereas her spirit, disposition, and call from God wholly tended towards an immediate affection to God, so that she had a kind of disgust for the use of all sensible images and of the imagination, as I shall show presently when speaking of the fourth kind of prayer suitable for beginners.

CHAPTER XI
THE PRAYER OF SENSIBLE AFFECTIONS

The fourth kind of prayer, which aims to begeth some-
times, is the prayer of sensible affections—namely, because
the prayer is exercised chiefly in the emotions and
senses; affections, as distinguished from the understand-
ing, working by the imagination and sensible images.

Now, there are some dispositions that are naturally
more affectionate than others towards God and rational
creatures; and if they have either of the two propensities
to seek God, interiorly or exteriorly, they can readily
exercise their sensible affections towards Him, and
without seeking reasons for it. Indeed, they feel a
kind of longing for seeking reasons, as they are already
well disposed to love God. Nevertheless, as few they
naturally know how to exercise or employ their sensible
affection on God, through the very abundance of it.

Many of these are incapable of meditation or immen-
dation acts, as these require the use of reason, and at
least some discourse. And the souls that have such an
abundance of affection must exercise it in some way or
other. And though they have the habit of affection,
they often do not know how to use it, either through
want of experience or because they are not just at the

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...in the morning for it. For such afflictions
dispositions are very subject to sudden changes of
feeling—sometimes through labour by an external cause,
as some slight indisposition, or by an external cause, as
change in the weather, or a falling discomfiture or disap-
pointment. At such times these souls fall into great anxiety,
dejection, and distress, and they are unable to help
themselves with meditation.

This was often the case with Dame Gertrude, and
for the above-mentioned reason. And her remedy,
which was a good one and may be recommended to
others, was this: She gathered out of books examples
for the exercise of sensible affections, and she made
other acts of the same kind, as suggested themselves to
her; for example, "O my God, when shall I love
Thee as Thou deservest to be loved?" "O that I
were from myself, that I might love Thee!"
"When shall I be united to Thee?" "When shall I
love Thee with all my heart and soul?" The acts
which suggested themselves to her were the most
profitable, in that in doing of these she knew of what
she could get out of books, which seemed suitable to
her spirit and inclination. This exercise, however, was
still in her sensitive nature; the acts were affective
acts, and not the aspirations of the spirit. But the
exercise of the sensible affections was the preparation
she made, and was an absolutely necessary preparation
before she could attain to the exercises that are truly
and properly spiritual.

* The point of each discourse that I think a full man should
have in opposition. The property of the hearing, to which
reference has often been made, is furnished by itself to seize the

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During the periods of activity and depression, when
nature refuses to help or concur in the exercise, the
soul should adhere to her exercise of affections, even
and to God, but it must be exercised and worked upon. The reason
that causes the soul nearly to fall off in the exercise of these
affections of the senses of reason, is not, as is commonly
affection of the heart. And when by certain causes these affec-
tions and their objects are expelled from the soul, the propensities,
aided by grace, inspire to make itself felt, and ready and pre-
paratory to direct the soul to God, as may be seen in contemplation.
The way to work upon and strengthen the interior propensity by
regarding the sensible objects of natural objects in their great
images, and exercises. In this the beginning of an interior dis-
position of life is brought about by sensible exercises, which are
engaging access to make the soul to attain to the exercises of the
spirit in which are contemplation.

When the soul might be troubled and over-whelmed by great
sorrow, or when she will not be able to think of God, but will
naturally and of her own accord, in reflection on the soul, but will
not be able to work. For the spirit, in order to work, must have all
sensible images both good and bad, removed. Hence, the
beginner in a spiritual course commences with the use of good
sensible images, and it is necessary to keep a continual regard
with an attention of the spirit. Thus, in the words of our dear
word which is spiritual, "For the sake of the heart,"
"Attention of the contemplation which is not the whole of the
sensible meditation." And by meditation to secure the good
images in which sensible images are used. Hence the first part
of praying suitable for beginners takes place in all branches upon
the contemplation of sensible images. These souls who have not a
propensity in the interior must attend always in the exercises in
which sensible images are used, and first, and last, that
exercise may gradually be directed and refined, and proceed
to God. And this is the way of the active life. But others who
have the propensity to the interior do not always remain in the

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though they are produced without pleasure or light, unless she can see how to do better. And God will accept her goodwill, and will promote her spiritual welfare in the way He sees best.

This was precisely Dame Gertrude's case. Here was one of those affectionate dispositions which suffer from frequent activity, cheeriness, and indisposition for prayer. But she never desisted from doing what she could, and she strove to be patient and resigned in what she could not do. She was careful, also, to observe her times of meditation, and to do as well as nature and grace would enable her. By acting thus, she gained as much (if not more) in times of darkness and indisposition as in the time of light and sensible devotion; for she never failed to obtain light and knowledge how to act, and the will and grace to do the right

exercise of the senses, but after a time there will give place to the exercises of the spirit, which are indispensable to the act of imagination, and cannot spring to the exercise of the will of the intellective soul in God. These are sometimes called sensible affections, because they are far removed from the sensitive faculties, and are sensible meaning. These exercises are not from a habit of good affections, but from the operations of the will by the aid of the preceding sensible exercises, and the habit is a sensitive exercise in the property that passes and belongs towards God which is presented in the state of ignorance, when no intellective images, history or created the soul in her operations towards God. And though the elevation of the will is an active the movement from sense and sensible things to the Divine things. The soul operates in all sensible things, apprehended by the understanding as a spirit, and not as an imagination; thus, the human spirit in this way saying to a sense with the Divine Spirit—FATHER BAKER 68

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thing—and what more could be desired? Other souls, too, in similar difficulties would prosper equally well if they would be as diligent and persevering as was Dame Gertrude, and would be as attentive to God's guidance and call as she was, holding this to be "all in all."

The exercise of sensible affections differs much, according to the soul's propensity. Those souls whose propensity is to the interior enjoy a very clear light, and are able to produce very efficacious acts; and though their exercise is still in their sensible nature, it is at least in the higher part of it, and tending towards the spirit. In consequence, they enjoy much internal light, and can see their exercise and its issue with much clearness. The same may be said when they practice meditation and immediate acts.

But those souls, on the other hand, who have a propensity into their sensible nature when they deeply penetrate into their sensible nature when they exercise sensible affections, and they enjoy less internal light; not do they as frequently in the latter experience the Divine impulses and guidance. The reason the former souls themselves come about from their sensible nature in an account of their interior propensity which now draws them more and more towards the spirit, in the manner of which is the communication of the interior life. Moreover, as in the spiritual and propensity towards the spirit that lead these souls to rapid external sensible, imaginary things as momentary in a spiritual life. Now are they as prone to indolence in the exercise of their sensible affections, by excess of tears, or other emotions, to the



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injury of head and health. Now will they allow any other impediments to cross up in the way of the spirit, their interior light ever serving them as a guide to teach them discretion in the interest of the spirit. But those whose propensity is to the interior have less internal or spiritual light, and must needs help themselves the more by natural reason. And when God favors them with sensible devotion in any measure, they must be careful not to indulge in it to excess, though forgetfulness in this matter will be less harmful to them than it would be to souls of an interior propensity.

In the prayer of sensible affections Dame Gertrude persisted, till her intellective soul became ripe and capable of producing habitually spiritual aspirations, which constitute true contemplation. In these she continued with an ever-increasing spirituality till the hour of her death. The increase of spirituality consists in a greater abstraction and elevation of the soul out of her sensible nature and its desires. I will not here speak of the passive visions which followed after Dame Gertrude, situated in a habit of abstraction from her sensible nature, but I shall have something to say about them later, derived from her writings, and from other sources of information.

Thus, then, were the means by which Dame Gertrude attained to contemplation. But still, the other three ways of prayer are as good for those souls for whom they are suitable. The souls that persevere in prayer must at first make great use of the senses and sensible images, and in course of time the prayer, if accompanied by mortification, will become aspirative, spiritual, and



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contemplation. The same must be said if the soul approaches contemplation by way of immediate acts or meditations. In it the latter case the soul advances step straight into contemplation (especially if she proceeds by the best way), but usually she passes through a course of immediate acts as an intermediate step, and continues to them till she is ripe for contemplation. When the soul has attained to contemplation, it makes not the least difference as to which of the four paths she has travelled by—all ways meet in contemplation, and contemplation is alike for all, the only difference being that some souls rise higher out of their sensible nature than others, according to their measure of grace, their diligence in prayer, and the perfection with which they have borne the purification which came to them directly from God or from creatures. The facility with which the soul attains to contemplation also depends largely on the strength of her natural propensity.

In Dame Gertrude's case the natural propensity was exceedingly strong, and she not only enabled her to pray diligently and affectionately, but also to bear the more heavy crosses and mortifications which held her, and of which she makes mention in her "Confessions."

Besides, Dame Gertrude was of a quiet nature, and her passions were not so strong but that she could keep them well in hand, and prevent them from breaking forth into external inordinate behaviour. But souls with less quiet passions will take longer to attain to contemplation.

Now, it may be asked, How did Dame Gertrude perform her exercise of sensible affections? Did she



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use the affectionate vocally or only mentally? I cannot determine with absolute certainty how she made them, but I am inclined to think that vocally the affections were made mentally, without pronouncing the words vocally. This at least we may be certain of—that she observed and followed the Divine impulse and guidance in this matter, as in all other things. It is also practically certain that she followed no precise order in the exercise, but just took what seemed to be most in accordance with her immediate disposition, or to what she felt drawn, and seemed likely to promote her affection towards God. In conclusion, she performed the exercise as well as she could, and hoped that it would be acceptable to God, for that was all she desired; and there she left it, without attempting any kind of examination to see how she had performed her recollection.

Though I have said that only the fourth sort of prayer for beginners suited Dame Gertrude, yet it frequently happens that souls make use of two or three, or even all four ways, according to their needs. No rule can be laid down to limit a soul to one or other particular way of prayer. But the soul must watch closely herself, and her call from God, what suits her best, and to what she is most drawn; she must also seriously pursue prayer one way or another, and then she will not fail to see how she should behave therein. Such is the way that Dame Gertrude proceeded, and with most happy results, for all the spiritual men in the world could never have taught her the special method of prayer that would suit her. All that I did was to advise her, urge her, to perform her mental



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prayer one way or another, and never to doubt either for simplicity, or obscurity, or any difficulty whatsoever; and that as one of the three former methods of prayer appeared to suit her, she should try the fourth in the manner that experience would show to be best for her. And I truly believe that the reason why so many intelligent souls in religion, or in God's Church, fail to advance in spirit is because they do not take that course; but, either through the fault of the director or of the souls themselves, they pursue one particular method which they have read in a book, or which has been pressed upon them by their director, without regard to its suitability to the individual soul. And this was the miserable plight of Dame Gertrude till she lighted upon the way that was proper for her, and this she found by observing herself, and noting what profited her most, and what were the attractions God gave her by nature and by grace.

Indeed, the office of director is not to teach a particular method to the disciple, but to give general instructions by which the soul may get into her director, and when she has done so, to observe the Divine admonitions and guidance, instead of following the methods of books, or systems of orders, custom, or what at other times had proved profitable. The point is of such moment for God's honour and the good of souls that I think a better deed could not be done than to procure this director all through God's Church by the pen of some spiritual man who can express himself clearly and fully. And this fault lies not only in the soul adhering too pertinaciously to one of these four methods of prayer, but also



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It has not hitherto, at least since the first time written for her to enter upon contemplation.

These observations, however, apply only to souls that have a propensity to the interior, perfect internal sense, and sufficient judgment, by which they may distinguish the Divine impulse, and what is good and what better for their souls. And many such souls are to be found—both men and women. When once they have been equipped with general instructions, there will be little occasion for the Director to busy himself about them, except in the case of some special need, and at the request of the souls themselves. This will be a great relief to the Director, and is especially best for the souls themselves; for they will then yield themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who is the proper Master of the spiritual life.

CHAPTER XII
DAME GERTRUDE'S EXERCISE OF MORTIFICATION:
PRAYER AND MORTIFICATION COMPARED

PRAYER, however, is not the only matter of importance in the spiritual life. There is another thing of almost equal consequence, and this is mortification. The spiritual life consists of these two things—prayer and mortification, the one being insufficient without the other. The director, therefore, and the soul herself must be attentive to the matter of mortification as to prayer, for mistakes in this will often be the cause of many impediments in the way of contemplation. A common fault, for example, is this: that the soul neglects to follow God's call and guidance in matters that are indifferent, in which she is not bound one way or the other, but follows instead the common practice, or what she has seen recommended in books, or was advised by others, or what she has hitherto done. None of these courses should be followed by a contemplative soul, but she should consider whether the thing done her good or harm, and what God would have her to do in the matter.

This was the principle Dame Gertrude embraced and carefully followed as regards mortification. She

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could not how strange or different her practice was from the common teaching of men and books, provided, of course, that her conduct was not unlawful or likely to cause scandal. By following this course and the manner of prayer that has been described, Dame Gertrude attained to happiness of soul, though her life exteriorly showed little indication of mortification. Nevertheless, taking together her internal and external practice, her life was really one of considerable mortification. Yet who could have guessed it from her exterior, since she was to all appearance wholly taken up with external things, as will be seen later? Well, there was nothing unlawful or likely to cause scandal in her carriage, unless perhaps on some rare occasion through fault or ignorance. And what mortal creature is not liable to such occasional lapses?

My instructions to Dame Gertrude on the subject of mortification may be embraced under three heads. First, that she should do all that belonged to her to do by any law human or Divine. In this was comprised obedience to Divine inspirations not only in matters of obligation, but also in things that were indifferent; for Divine inspirations are to be observed by spiritual persons as a law of prime importance. Secondly, that she was to refrain from those things that were forbidden her by human or Divine law, or by Divine inspirations. Thirdly, that she should bear with as much patience and resignation as possible all crosses and contractions to her natural will, which were inflicted by the hand of God. Such, for instance, were afflictions, temptations, afflictions or bodily pain, sickness, and infirmity; or, again, loss of honour or esteem, unkind

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ness, neglect; or, again, the loss of friends or want of necessities or comforts. All this was to be endured patiently, whether the crosses came directly from God or by means of His creatures. These, indeed, were mortification enough for Dame Gertrude, or for any other soul, and there was no need for anyone to advise or impose others. Being thus left free to follow the Divine call in matters that were not obligatory, Dame Gertrude had ease and liberty enough for soul and body, and yet not one jot more, all things considered, than she needed for the good of her soul. Indeed, had not the course been sanctified into her and faithfully observed, she would never have made progress in a spiritual life, however well instructed she might be as regards her manner of prayer. And this truth applies with equal force to all other souls, for not only do they go astray by pursuing unchristian methods of prayer, but they are only too often hindered by mistaken notions as to mortification.

This, then, was all I recommended to Dame Gertrude with respect to mortification—that she was to do, or forbear, or suffer, according to her obligations or inclination. And as to indifferent things, matters in which she was left free by Superior, she should act according to her call or immediate inspiration from God, or (which is all one) what she found most suitable and profitable to her spirit. Into fuller details I did not enter, but I left Dame Gertrude to apply these principles to her needs, advising her only to observe the Divine guidance, and to act as the new world promoter her progress in spirit. If this method of dealing with her had not answered, I believe nothing would,

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when we consider her good and bad qualities. However, as she had a good natural judgment and a strong propensity to an internal life—most necessary qualities—the prayers mentioned would lead her in this way. If superior and Discerners would lead them in this way. But through not being directed thus in the different matters leaving which the manner of prayer holds a foremost place, many souls become oppressed in spirit by the unprofitable things they have taken upon themselves, or which they do in an improper manner. Hence their spirits get clouded, obscured, and blinded, so that they cannot find or tread the way of the spirit. Indeed, the way of the spirit is a secret, mystic way, and is not to be discovered save by a Divine internal light, obtained by means of prayer, and pursued with a corresponding degree of mortification; and this light is blindered and obscured by the rash assumption of things that should not have been undertaken, or should have been performed in a different manner. The cause of all this trouble is that the soul neglected to pay due attention to the Divine will, and was led by passion or by natural judgment and will. And thus what otherwise might have been a high turn out to be a hindrance to spiritual progress.

Through the spiritual life consists of prayer and mortification, and neither is sufficient without the other, still prayer is the nobler and more necessary of the two, because it is the end of mortification, and is sought for itself. Mortification is required that we may pray well, and in prayer consists our happiness in this life, just as the happiness of the life to come consists



Prayer and Mortification Compared

in the prayer proper to that life. Mortification enables us to pray well by combating and destroying will,¹ the only impediment to perfect prayer and actual union with God. And it is just by doing, or abstaining, or suffering according to God's will and for His sake, that we overcome and kill self-will. For we do or suffer things that are either repugnant to our will and natural inclination, and so directly destroy self-will, or we do things that are agreeable, but not because they are agreeable, but in order to conform our will to the will of God. Thus by observing the three heads of mortification given above, we shall remove the impediment of self-will. Mortification, however, is not prayer, but prayer is union of the soul with God; but mortification is often an act of union, and is a disposition for its attainment.

Prayer, however, has further merits and superiority over mortification:

The first and principal merit is that in prayer the soul attains to the essential happiness of this life, which is union with God in her three powers.

The second is that by prayer, or conversation with God, Who is Light and the Fountain of light, the soul is illumined by a supernatural light or discernment, by which she discovers how to discharge faithfully and in

¹ We have expressed in English the exact sense what is here meant. To kill the will means to mortify it, to subvert its aims, to direct it to God. It means the purpose of doing one with the aim of being the center, namely, resignation of it with the power and light of depending on it, and then, "To kill the will is to subvert and destroy, and God to make the Overcomer, Disposer of the will and life of the soul is mortification."



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the best manner her obligations, and how to hold herself with regard to matters of indifference. In the latter, the light teaches her whether to do them or abstain from them, how far to pursue them, in what manner and to what end, and all in relation to God, His honor, and His will.

A third merit of prayer is that it gives grace and strength of will to perform those mortifications which correct our corrupt inclinations; for without grace and strength the soul remains weak, unwilling, and unable to perform these necessary mortifications.

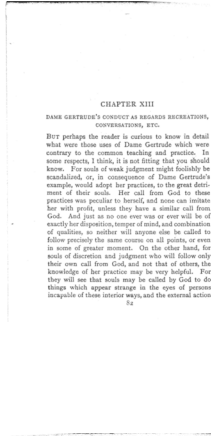
A fourth merit is that the mere exercise of prayer is one of the greatest mortifications, and is a most destructive of self-will. For by prayer the soul is lifted to a great extent out of herself, and out of the ordinary condition of her nature. She exercises resignation, aspirations, spilling of the will towards God, and other spiritual acts; and, finally, she enters into a supernatural condition, which is a measure of her will and makes it totally and perfectly one with God.

These considerations will enable us to understand better why Dame Gertrude entreats so loudly the merits and economy of prayer, and presses it so earnestly upon others, having experienced in herself its wonderful efficacy. Nor should we wonder at her frequently dwelling on the value and necessity of Divine light and guidance, and the obligation of observing and obeying it, if the soul is to be led in the supernatural way of the spirit. By means of prayer, Dame Gertrude received a great measure of light, by which she learnt all that was necessary to enable her to distinguish what was of obligation from what was not. And as to indifferent



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matters, the light taught her how to use them as helps, or avoid them as impediments to her way. These she discerned that many things to which she yielded were not impediments at all, but were rather to her temperance and necessary for her. And she indulged in these things, not out of natural delight in them, but in obedience to God and His will as manifested to her by the divine light in time of prayer. Nor was she deterred by the fact that these things seemed contrary to the ordinary teaching of spiritual books, or the example of holy souls, or apparently contrary even to reason and the spirit of religion. But rather did she follow her interior light and Divine guidance in these indifferent matters, although it might happen that occasionally, through frailty, she would incur some blameless and imperfections. These, however, would speedily be wiped away by God in her next recollection, because the faults were not committed with reflection or deliberation, but out of frailty and inadvertence. Nor was she loath to avoid the occasions of them, but, on the contrary, they were, as we may say, enjoined on her by the Divine light and will.



CHAPTER XIII
DAME GERTRUDE'S CONDUCT AS REGARDS RECREATIONS,
CONVERSATIONS, ETC.

But perhaps the reader is curious to know in detail what were those uses of Dame Gertrude which were contrary to the common teaching and practice. In some respects, I think, it is not fitting that you should know. For each of such judgments might possibly be scandalous, or, in consequence of Dame Gertrude's example, would adopt her practices to the great detriment of their souls. Her call from God to these practices was peculiar to herself, and none can imitate her with profit, unless they have a similar call from God, and just as no one ever saw or ever will be of exactly her disposition, temper of mind, and combination of qualities, no reader will suppose she be called to follow precisely the same course on all points, or even in some of greater moment. On the other hand, for each of discretion and judgment who will follow only their own call from God, and not that of others, the knowledge of her practice may be very helpful. For they will see that souls may be called by God to do things which appear strange in the eyes of persons unacquainted with these interior ways, and the eternal actions

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corresponding with them. In such cases, therefore, each should obey their call from God, though it should appear strange to others, even to Dame Gertrude did.

With this preliminary warning, and for the sake of the latter, I will venture to state some of Dame Gertrude's practices that I can recall. Dame Gertrude was naturally of an active turn of mind. She loved to occupy her thoughts with various, anything that was strange and curious, or with clever and striking sayings. Such a disposition made her impatient or incapable of much solitude, silence, or abstraction. In fact, it drew her in a contrary direction, so that when she attempted in her early days to practice silence and abstraction, she was at once assailed by a thousand distracting thoughts, tending to dissipate her with fear. Hence, all solitude was detestable to her, and she delighted to be in company with others, talking and listening to news or any strange thing that might happen. The topics of conversation were not evil in themselves, nor were they injurious to her, because they prevented her from committing any other sins, though doubtless she incurred many temptations, and her spiritual habits were strengthened. Still, being a religious and having a good will towards God, she spent much of the appointed hours of solitude in spiritual reading, or on the works of philosophers, or on secular writers of good name. She was particularly delighted with historical works, and was more attracted to verse than prose. Indeed, when her father or one of the monks used to make rhymes in conversation with her father, to his great amusement, for he was delighted to see her so merry. Silvester's translation of the French writer Du Barthe

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particularly pleased her, the manner and matter of the work being good. The translator or author, subsequently, was not as orthodox as he might be; still, Dame Gertrude was so sound in this respect that she was able to see what was good in the work without taking harm. But novelty and such charms for her that she could find no pleasure in reading a book a second time. In this way she read all through the writings of St. Gertrude, and whatever she could lay her hands on, and she was very quick to lose of anything that was worth reading. But trivial, silly books, which hold nothing solid, and of "no good quality," pleased her not. Reading was her chief consolation in the early days of her religious life, especially during those seasons set apart by the regulations of the house for solitude and silence. At other times she would always be in company, either at the grate or in the house, then for the time banishing from her mind discontent and other pernicious thoughts. In a word, her whole tendency seemed to be to outward things, and no kind of disposition for an interior life was apparent. For there is no greater enemy to such a life than a disposition and turn of mind such as I have described.

To bring such a disposition as this into an interior life was possible only to a strong interior propensity in the will and perfect internal senses, by which the understanding is able to distinguish the light and impulses of the Holy Spirit. No other method of direction was possible for Dame Gertrude, but to give her the general instructions already enumerated, by which she might get into her interior, and there observe and obey the Divine light and administrations. By these means she

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divertment what did her good and what harm, what her obligations were, what she should refrain from, what she should do, and when she should do it. The use of indifferent things. God gave her the light of discretion for all these things. Her Director was really her Master and Reformers, giving grace to her propensity and light to her understanding for her guidance in the right way.

If therefore a Director of Dame Gertrude had followed his own experience or the methods of books, he would have hindered the action of the Holy Ghost, and she would never have come to any good. But the Holy Spirit, as it appeared to both Dame Gertrude and myself, proceeded with her, as with all others, not violently, or in a way that would oppress and crush both body and soul, but sweetly, graciously, leading the soul on little by little, and so it were, entering from her the abandonment of deliberate indifference desires. And as for the reform of evil habits, the Holy Spirit is content to wait, hoping to amend them little by little, provided the faults are committed without affection for them or their occasions. In like manner does the Holy Spirit act with regard to indifferent matters. He does not at first demand perfection, but is content if the soul performs such acts with the least degree of perfection, provided only that she does them at the set and bidding. For He has regard to the weakness of her propensity: the small measure of grace He imparts to it; and He fears, perhaps, to hurt her by a too sudden or violent reformation of her sensible nature. Examples of indifferent matters are external pursuits and occupations, conversations in the

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house or at the gate, correspondence, the spreading or hearing of news—things neither meritorious nor sinful in themselves, but often the occasion of imperfection, like most things a man can do. Of a similar character are secular books which are not written for spiritual profit, though the matter is itself may be perfectly harmless. To abstain from the use of such things is in itself more perfect, but they may be, and actually were in the case of Dame Gertrude, a necessary diversion and relaxation of mind, which enable the soul to perform her recollections with greater freedom and intensity. Still, these things must not be done out of deliberate affection, but only as necessary and in obedience to God.

Thus did the Holy Spirit seek to amend her by little what was defective or unskillful in Dame Gertrude; and He permitted her to continue the use of indifferent things which were natural to her temperament, or which had become habitual by custom, but still with some dominion in their use, or at least of affection for them.

These remarks find support in various passages in the writings of Dame Gertrude. Thus in her "Confessions" she says: "I desire no consolation but that I may in solitude and silence all the days of my life, be able to live without all consolation, human or Divine; no recreation by conversation, or other business or employment, but so far as is necessary to keep up my spirit to attend unto These more seriously at convenient times. Rather let all necessary distractions, by help of The grace, serve as a mere emanation, rather than by the least affection to them, or

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confid in them, they should become an impediment to my retiring after Thee." Again, a little farther, she says of herself: "Who can be still, without much and often diverting my mind to indifferent things, to attend to Thee in my soul at other times; times, and still by reason of my great weakness of body and soul. Let all this imperfection in me vanish, and let it be no impediment to my truly loving, serving, praising Thee, and adhering only to Thee, which is my only duty by all I do or omit."

From these and similar passages it may be seen that, if Dame Gertrude did not merit herself in indifferent things, it was not out of affection for them, but out of discretion; because she judged that by such recreations she would be able to perform her recollections more satisfactorily. Moreover, she perceived that the Holy Ghost not only did not reprobate her, but, on the contrary, encouraged her in the practice, until His grace and guidance enabled her to use indifferent things with greater perfection. And it was impossible that God would have a soul of such excellent dispositions, and pursuing such profound and clear recollections for years, without correcting what was amiss. I fully concurred in her course, and believed that she acted in accordance with God's will.

Indeed, so true, however spiritual, one of himself guide the soul aright in indifferent matters. Not so God went to illuminate him fully for this purpose. The light is more commonly given to the soul herself, though sometimes the light direct her in a particular choice to turn to an external guide, and then afflicts a special light is bestowed upon him that he may give

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her proper conduct. But as the soul made application to him by a Divine illumination, so she takes the advice and uses it by the same light. The chief aim of the director he yet illuminated, the light and disposition of the disciple will enable him to turn the advice to his good, as well as if the director had revealed a special light from God for the solution of the difficulty. Thus, the Divine Spirit is over the immediate and principal guide to the soul. Nor could any external guide, by his experience and natural reason, have directed Dame Gertrude, or any other contemplative, in the right use of external indifferent things—still less such as are internal; and there can be no force of the latter than the former.

The reason of the superiority of the Internal Guide—the Holy Ghost—over the external guide is that the Holy Ghost is omniscient. He fully experiences and understands all that is in body and soul, both natural and acquired. He also knows how much experimental grace He means to impart, without which there is no spiritual progress. He therefore knows what is most proper for the soul in all things. But the external guide can scarcely be certain on any point of importance. He can only conjecture, and may easily be deceived. The ability of the one and the insufficiency of the other are expressed by three words of Sacred Scripture: "Here seek only those things that appear, but the Lord knoweth the heart and the interior." A man sees what is external in another, as his countenance, colour, stature, and other visible qualities; but those

¹ "Homo videt ea quae sunt, dominus autem intuetur cor" (1 Kings vii. 7).

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are not to the purpose. Of the internal qualities and states the external master can have no certain or sufficient knowledge. Nor can he obtain it from the disciple, as his knowledge, too, is utterly insufficient for the purpose; so that the disciple guides himself. Nor is anyone else sufficient. The Holy Ghost alone, by virtue of His omniscience and omnipotence, has the requisite knowledge of the disciple's qualities of body and soul. Besides, the internal Master not only sees and does more the intention and immediately to contemplation without the aid of discourse, but He also illustrates the understanding by supernatural light which is necessary to enable the soul to distinguish purely spiritual ways. And neither of these things can be done by any external master, or, indeed, by any other mortal creature.

From what has been said, it will be easily understood how well for Dame Gertrude were the usual instructions found in books for the guidance of souls about indifferent matters yet the right use of them belongs to the very essence of the spiritual life. Suppose, for instance, her director had told her to make meditation, or use immediate acts or vocal prayer; none of these would have suited her. Or if she had been able to use them for a time, she would have to be taught when she ought to abandon them for contemplation. But no creature could teach her this in particular, she must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit and observe His light and attraction. Or, again, if a director had told her to keep her mind actually attentive to God while engaged in external employment, as far as they would permit, and sever to suffer any thoughts to enter her

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mind or aside those which had not reference to God, but always to keep her mind intent on Him, or on the humanity of our Saviour, it would only have hindered her progress. Then for her exterior, if he had told her that she should ever be in solitude, save when occasions required otherwise; that she should always observe silence, except when spoken to, or when most necessary business required her to speak, and not use words further; that she should always keep her eyes modestly cast down, and observe modesty; but what obedience required; that she should refuse from conversing at the gates of the house except at the call of obedience; and from converse on spiritual subjects as far as possible; that she should fast three times a week, and abstain from eating meat, for fear of distractions; that she should withdraw as much as possible from offices and engagements that might cause solicitude, but they might distract and distract her mind; that from the very beginning, if her spiritual course she should apply to total abstraction and recollection of life—in a word, if he had told her that she should lead the life of an angel on earth and make violent efforts for a speedy refinement of her senses, without making any use of her natural inclinations, it would certainly have been destructive to both her mind and body. The same and similar instructions are to be found in books and in the writings of even the latest ones. But in the case of Dame Gertrude, how impossible would have been such instructions! They would in any way have hindered her spiritual progress. Indeed, she would not, and could not, have met them in practice. If she had attempted it, she most certainly would have gone out of her wits

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of every kind her health, and commended and absented her and by it. And though no director perhaps, would have been so imprudent as to have given her any instructions precisely as I have specified there, still, no man was capable of showing her how far, or to what extent, she should strive there to promote her spiritual progress, and as the same (not without entirely taking mind or body. The Divine Spirit alone could impart that knowledge immediately to her and himself in her meditations; and He will refer the soul to an eternal director in the case only of some particular doubt, for which He has not bestowed sufficient light.

The only person I think looked, which Dame Gertrude had to find with her former directors was that they had prescribed none or all of these habits, unless instructions concerning mortification and prayer to which they refer all the individuals, without ordering her for their particular application to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER XIV
 DAME GERTRUDE'S CONDUCT IN MATTERS, WHETHER
 OBLIGATORY OR INDIFFERENT

LET us now turn to the details, as far as we can, of the Divine conduct in the life of Dame Gertrude. These may be grouped under two heads: (i) Matters that were purely internal; and (ii) matters that were internal and also external. By purely internal matters I mean thoughts and other merely internal occupations of the soul, exclusive of prayer; for of this I speak elsewhere. Internal occupations may be either obligatory or indifferent—obligatory, as when the soul is obliged to exercise a virtue internally, by resisting a temptation or conquering her will and judgment in an external thing and the like; indifferent, when we employ our mind upon a matter that a soul could not venture to think—ill thoughts, for example, about creatures or created things that are good or evil—without her consent. In the first case nothing material or meritorious. Such thoughts are indifferent in themselves, but the intention of the person may make them meritorious or demeritorious. If he entertains them as a necessary recreation for his spirit, or for the honour of God, or the good of his soul, they are not only not

Conduct in indifferent things

vain thoughts, but are actually meritorious. But, on the other hand, if he entertains them for a bad purpose or end, they become sinful and defective, the bad intention turning them to evil.

As to external matters, these also may be obligatory or indifferent. Obligatory matters have been sufficiently explained. Examples of indifferent matters are the occupation of time, keeping company with others, talking, writing letters, or anything else, conversation at the grate or in the house, any kind of exercise or employment, with all the minutiae connected with it, and the like. All these external things are in themselves indifferent; but the intention, actual or habitual, of the person performing them may make them meritorious or the reverse, praiseworthy or reprehensible, to be spite.

And now what was the manner in which the Holy Spirit guided Dame Gertrude in all these things, whether indifferent or obligatory? As for things of obligation, we must know that the Holy Spirit would never inspire the disciples to do or omit anything contrary to them. Whatever Dame Gertrude did that was opposed to her obligations must be understood wholly as her natural will and judgment, to ignorance and frailty; and who in this life is not subject to such faults? But after her conversion her faults were never committed out of affection or a perverse will, for her desire to please God in all things was very strong and firm:

*—Cassia speaks much about indifferent things which he calls
 —vains. He speaks of things that are, vains, and vains, vains,
 —ing as they are said, vains for indifferent things themselves
 —vains if used ill, and bene (good) if used well.*

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Then, as to indifferent things, both internal and external. Thus the Holy Spirit permitted, and even encouraged, Dame Gertrude to sin, though opposed to true intention, on account of her temperament and her strong inclination to them; but whilst He ever taught her to purify her intention about them. For had the Holy Spirit desired her such external pursuits, He would naturally have destroyed her health, which was already none too strong. A person of more robust constitution could have borne more violent mortifications; but Dame Gertrude must be taken as God made her. As time went on, the Holy Spirit gave her the grace not only to perform indifferent actions with a purer intention, but also to contract fewer blamableness, and as the time of mortification all faults were assuaged by virtue of her strong propensity and Divine grace. The Holy Spirit also taught her how to use indifferent things, so as not to impede, but rather to promote, her future recollection. In that, while attending most of the day to external things, she was able to come to her recollection, and perform it so easily and so clearly that scarcely a distracting image would trouble her or hinder an immediate converse with God. Hence these external occupations proved to be a necessary food for her soul. The Holy Spirit, indeed, dealt with Dame Gertrude as with all souls. He accommodates His grace to their natural disposition, in so far as it is not evil, but ever seeks to reform little by little what is in a hindrance to profound interiority and perfection. He does not change the natural character, but restrains, within the licititude movements of nature, passions and desires.

Conduct in indifferent things

These results of God's action were apparent in Dame Gertrude. Her by virtue of her recollections and profound interventions, her passion, and internal sense in course of time, and, indeed, a good space before her last illness, became much quieter, if not wholly deprived of all excessive excitement. Thus she became capable of solitude, both internal and external, and could endure to be without external comforts and cares beyond what were imposed by necessity. Conversation after meals was all that she found requisite for her health and spirit. Accordingly, out of discretion rather than affection, she kept up such visitations; for now (I am speaking of her latter years) she was become wholly God's, and fasted and sought Him only, as an ascetic from her "Confessions" made to God and in His sight. The excessive activity of her internal sense died away, and because, as it were, numbed by her profound interventions. By this means, I think, was accomplished what some writers describe as the drawing of the external sense into the internal, and the internal into the first or depth of the soul, though I am not quite sure that I understand what these writers meant to convey.

In course of time Dame Gertrude was also able to perform her external occupations with less attention and without putting herself out so much as formerly. This, as appears from her "Confessions," was the result of certain contemplations during her recollections by which she perceived the vanity, the nothingness, of all creatures in themselves, and her affections at the same time were strongly drawn into God, and were left, as we may say, firmly fixed upon Him.

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But that Dame Gertrude's natural attitude towards external things may be better understood, I must remind you that before she entered on her life of recollection, her hand and senses were often more busily employed than they should have been; and even after she had entered upon her spiritual course, outside the set times of recollection she was scarcely less active. All the business that the house could afford for all its members was hardly enough to satisfy the activity of her mind, though happily her bodily strength was not of the same proportion. But as far as the "multiplicity of all things" on her shoulders. There was nothing concerning the house of any importance, great or little, but she had her hand or hand or both in it, but more the former. None covered more at the great than she did, for her own or others' recreation. None was more given to talking or hearing news about things outside, but for things within there was no need to ask, for none knew more than she. None wrote more letters, and with greater ease. She willingly took upon herself the duties of Cellarer and the charge of the Sisters, the latter affording her more solatium than the Abbess, whom also Dame Gertrude assisted daily and almost hourly, at occasions scarce. All this she did with a good intention, though directed thereby for the most. Thus, all her actions about worldly things were done for God and referred to Him—if not actually, at least virtually, through her previous resolution and obedience to the Divine will.

* The minutes of all the Chapters (a Co. in. 116).

Conduct in indifferent things

Indeed, Dame Gertrude saw that these occasions of distraction were necessary for her bodily health and spirit as was her daily meat and drink; though in time, as I have said, the activity of her internal sense and passions quieted down so that she occupied herself less with external things, save when necessary; and she became more capable of solitude, both internal and external. When, however, she entered on this stage she did not venture, as heretofore, to read spiritual books in the chambers immediately before the hour of recollection—partly because she did not now read or retain in memory, as she had shewn light within for her guidance; and partly because such reading put too much stress upon her for that time, and might have seriously hindered the efficacy of her recollection. In consequence, she usually read at that time, as the weakness of her hand would allow her, some world, though not spiritual, book, as Tacitus, De Historiis and the like. Still, she was able to draw some lessons or make extracts even from those that were of profit for the advancement of her soul. And in her recollections she clearly saw that the Holy Spirit approved of her conduct; so she continued her practice as being in accordance with the Divine will and call, and necessary for her health of mind and body. Thus she applied her reading to the honour of God, and would as far as she could all sin in it.

But, shall who, if not well acquainted with her interior, and experienced in the ways of God, could have supposed from Dame Gertrude's writings that she was pursuing a spiritual course, or in any way apt for an internal life? Or who but the Holy Spirit himself?

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could have guided her and brought her through these external pursuits into an interior life? And how strange and widely diverse are the ways and the guidance of the Holy Ghost to souls! Hence, in the case of indifferent things, no soul should be judged or condemned by others—above all, not a soul that in any way seeks after God. Because, for aught we know, that soul may be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Who may be directing her in all these things to her final goal.

Our Holy Father St. Benedict gives some wise admonitions to the Abbot which are very applicable in the case of Dame Gertrude. Our Holy Father warns the Abbot to take heed not to break the vessel through excessive and indolent attempts to remove the rust. St. Benedict, therefore, condemns too much violence and haste, but would have the rust removed by gentle rubbing, little by little, lest the vessel be injured. Such was the case taken by the Divine Spirit with regard to Dame Gertrude, and which the external director had to perceive; yet could the latter form a different judgment grounded upon appearances and her external conduct.

Moreover, our Holy Father goes on to say that the Abbot is readily to correct and cut off the vices to which souls may be subject, as he may be impatient for such ones.¹ And this the Abbot does by listening and noting the internal call from God of each one, accommodating his commands thereto. St. Benedict also holds out the example of Jacob: "If I cause my flesh to be sensible, they will all perish as one."

¹ Rule of St. Benedict, chap. lxx.

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Any (from chap. 12). Taking these such instances as are born by them, and the like words, to discretion—their will of them—in the Abbot to temper all things that the strong may have occasion to use alone, and the weak holding of with in their hands.

This great discretion was also necessary on the part of the external director for the guidance of Dame Gertrude, or, indeed, for the guidance of any other spiritual soul—a direction which consists chiefly in directing and accommodating himself and his instructions to the guidance of the eternal and true Master of contemplation, the Divine Spirit. And though I know Dame Gertrude attributed to her writings very much to me, yet my share in the matter was really slight. All that I did was to give general instructions on prayer and mortification, which was quickly and easily done. The difficulty and labor lay with Dame Gertrude, who with diligence strengthened her propensity by corresponding with Divine grace, and following the light and attractions of the Divine Spirit.

Indeed, every director should have as little to do as I had in dealing with souls capable of contemplation. He should have small difficulty and much comfort in them, leaving them principally to their own industry; and their labor should be much lightened, if not sweetened, by their propensity. I know a person of a stronger constitution than Dame Gertrude would have been capable of more violent and speedy reformations; but then, her delicate frame had to be considered, which was as weak as could be, without being actually in corruption or ill, though sometimes she did fall ill. Besides, that she was a woman had to be taken into

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account. Women are less capable of violence than men. But the Divine Spirit alone in that wisdom which "strongly rebuketh the soul and disposeth all things aright" (Wis. viii). All others, no soul herself, however wise and learned, and all external directors, are powerless to find or reach the way to contemplation. The path can be found and trod only by the aid of an internal light, which is inspired by the Divine Spirit, and His chief direction consists in teaching the soul how to use indifferent things in the manner that will for her be most conducive to contemplation. As for matters of obligation, the Holy Spirit requires their exact observance, but as they are palpable the soul can need no instruction about them, unless in the case of some special difficulty.

Indeed, the only reason Dame Gertrude adhered to me more than to some others was, as she says in her "Confessions," because I directed her to observe and follow the Divine call as her principal or only means of perfection. And this she was to be the only proper way for her, for she had tried all others, and found them unstable and insufficient. Some other directors also discovered to be either ignorant of this method of direction or not very well disposed towards it; in fact, more inclined to decide than counsel it. This was a source of great mortification to her—a mortification which caused her to make more progress in spirit than almost anything else that could have happened to her in the world. I shall have to return to this later. Meanwhile, we may note and praise the gracious providence of God in providing her with a mortification which proved to be the very cause of her soul and

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served as an excellent preparation for a resigned and happy end. Indeed, no creature, neither man nor angel, could have desired such a suitable, salutary, and purifying mortification for her soul. Now was this a treasury of afflictions; it was constantly with her, and lasted nearly the whole of the last two years of her life. She had also another very profitable interior cross, which was also habitual and very profitable, but was not so weighty as the other. This was a temptation to repeat her former confessions, contrary to the advice of her Superior. She makes mention of this in her "Confessions." But the other being far greater, I shall speak of it more fully hereafter.

Dame Gertrude often complains in her writings of the indolence of Superiors and directors. They are apt to rest too much upon themselves, and impatiently require in their charges, temperance, quiet, and labor, natural and supernatural. They should have more in the Holy Spirit. Who alone can fill us with all these things. Thus they may and hinder all perfection in the soul by demanding it unreasonably, or more of it than she has yet attained. Of this Dame Gertrude speaks fully, having had experience in her own case, as well as in that of some of her Sisters, with whom she was on familiar and intimate terms.

CHAPTER XV
CERTAIN PRACTICES WHICH TOOK THE PLACE OF
FREQUENT EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

To turn now to another matter, in which the practice of Dame Gertrude differed from that taught in many books, and pursued by many modern Congregations whose aim is active rather than contemplative. I refer to the subject of examination of conscience. It may well happen that active Orders pursue a different course here from those who cherish contemplation. Active orders usually include the necessity of express, direct examination of conscience at certain fixed times during the day. But this teaching was not accepted or followed by Dame Gertrude and her Sisters. Their examination was made indirectly, virtually, in a way more in keeping with their state, and much more beneficial for their souls. This was brought about by a combination of four of the general practices.

The first was to have a continual care of themselves, both interiorly and exteriorly, and scrupulously or anxiously, but patiently and sweetly, observing the counsel of our holy Father—"to keep guard at all times over the actions of one's life."¹ This can be done with comparative ease in a Contemplative Order, where

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the occupations are not very distracting; and more especially in our convents for women, where every facility is given for such continual vigilance over themselves, and where very distracting business, which in the usual course of active houses, is excluded.

This, then, is one thing that renders an express examination less necessary, as it tends to take away the cause and matter of examination. For we all see that it is better by watchfulness to avoid falling into a fault than to give occasion for search by the neglect of such care. Moreover, the faults into which spiritual souls fall are commonly too spiritual and subtle to be discovered by the senses and imagination; for it is by these that the examination is made. But spiritual defects are best cured by spiritual means; the revelation of the spirit to God. By such means the soul is cleansed from all spiritual defects inwardly, and which, on account of their secrecy and subtlety, the senses could have discovered or corrected by her senses. Thus such faults are avoided, so far as they can be avoided, even before they are known. Further, our holy Rule and Order tend towards solitude, both interior and exterior, discouraging external activity as much as may be, so that one may not only avoid the occasions of sin, but also be able the better to *see* *Dei* or *Divini*—to be better to attend to God and Divine things.

For these reasons our holy Father prescribes no express examination of conscience in his Rule, but his teaching tends to one of the occasions of sin by means of solitude, and the custody of the soul herself over her actions. Hence our Holy Father in the first degree of

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humility says that the disciple should "always keep the face of God before his eyes, avoiding all forgetfulness. . . . And keepeth himself at all times from sin and vice, whether of the thoughts, the tongue, the hands, the feet, or his own will. . . . Let him also consider that he is always [before of our Lord] beheld from Heaven by God, and that his actions are every where seen by the eyes of the Divine Majesty, and are every hour [ever now] reported to Him by the angels." Also, in the twelfth degree, St. Benedict requires that a religious should in all places and at all times "think of the guilt of his sins, and imagine himself already present before the terrible judgment-seat of God," that by this means he may avoid further sin.

From these and other passages in the Rule it is clear our Holy Father relies for the progress of his disciples on his internal custody of himself, and his watchfulness, which necessarily fits in with, and thus fits in the way Dame Gertrude proceeded, and the way all other souls advance that pursue a similar interior course. To such souls these words of the classic may be applied: "I sleep"—that is, I cease for the time to attend my will to God—"for no man is watchful" of Him, and keeps itself in good dispositions, to be ready when the time comes to walk hand in hand.

The first substitute, then, for examination of conscience consists partly of solitude and a limitation of distracting occupations, by which means the occasions of sin are diminished, and, consequently, the need of examination; and partly of watchfulness over our

¹ "Epistola, et omnia scripta" (Ca. 1, v. 1).

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thoughts, words, and deeds, by which we may avoid sins) and these are last practiced in Contemplative Orders.

The second substitute for examination of conscience is an interior propensity, provided the soul is in a state of life in which the can work on her propensity. Such souls do not easily fall into great sins, and if they appear to fall, there may be sin, or only a slight one in their case, because their affection is turned rather to God than to the sinful object, and this prevents them from a serious fall or injury. This grace proceeds from their profound recollections, which number merely the affection for all that is not God, and cause their external indifference and poverty to be performed with little solicitude, and often with little or no sin. Such was the case with Dame Gertrude. Her recollections were so profound and her love of God so firm and constant that her external occupations were discharged with but little attachment, and consequently with less fault than appeared to be the case.

The third substitute is the practice of a recollection, or mental prayer, which the sisters perform twice daily. The morning recollection practically covers the whole of the forenoon, as it is a measure passed in interior solitude and recollection, and the other time of prayer is in the evening. Although the Sisters do not make the same concentration of conscience and of personality which is brought to their mind in sins and recollections of moment (because since the last recollection, just as surely as if they had made a careful examination. But we all, however spiritual, daily fall into various sins and imperfections, which we neither do nor can ob-

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serve, they being so secret and subtle. Concerning these the prophet says: "Close ye, O Lord, from my eyes sin." And in another place the Scripture says: "Seven times I saw, seventy-seven times I did fulfill thy just laws." Such sins may be removed from the soul by other means as well, if not better than, by calling the sin to mind. For the ordinary of a kind that cannot be attended to by taking them up by the root by breaking the habit from which they spring; and this can be done only by rising out of the state of sin and of weakness, and by getting more into the spirit. And we get into the spirit in course of time by frequent profound attention of the spirit during our recollections, and for this purpose a propensity to the interior and Divine grace are of great help. Such who are without this propensity can only lay off the branches which daily spring up again, but the former in time take the time up by the roots.

It is of the nature of these recollections to draw to the soul the impediments between herself and God, and these are so much the natural sin we commit as the deliberate and habitual affection we have for them. The correction, therefore, of the fault is not sufficient, for the soul may, and usually does, continue in the same affection and habit of sin as before, and so she makes no progress. But in her recollections the soul is able to correct any want of resignation, any inclination to self-will, and all inordinate affections. For these are presented to her mind by a certain presence of God. Who is all light, and Who enlightens the soul to see these imperfections, which are of them-

Ps. xcvi. 12. Ps. xcvi. 24.

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where but darkness and so nothing. Indeed, the soul is ordinarily in darkness concerning these things, but in her recollections she is enlightened concerning them by the Divine presence and light; and therefore she profoundly reviews herself to God, and confides herself to the Divine will, and by this means weakens the habit of investigation and inordinate affection. Without such recollections the soul is in darkness, and cannot see the impediments which stand between herself and God. It is for this reason that souls who are in the immediate exercise of the will towards God can discover and correct their faults better than those whose exercise is in the imagination and discursive. For there are more occupied with the images of the things about which they discourse than they are with God; so that they are less able to see the impediments than the former, who in a manner regard God immediately, and thus see and remove any impediments that stand between God and themselves. Thus that one that investigates and discourses do not perceive the hidden impediments between themselves and God, for it is the impelling God and His presence, and not the consideration of creatures and their images, that enlightens the soul and enables her to see her hidden inordinate affections. More palpable are the soul can perceive by her internal senses and natural reason, and these she can amend. But the root or affection remains unamended, and will again break out into act when the soul least expects it. The root of such failings is distant beyond the scope of the senses and natural reason, or, if the root is perceived, the soul cannot remove it for want of the proper means.

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But the contemplative soul does not examine herself or her want of resignation or other dispositions, but immediately regards God, and God enlightens her as to her progress in perfection, in so far as He sees fit, and to amend them. Thus the soul acts, according to a certain writer, as one that looks at a wall in front of him. He not only sees the wall, but all that lies between him and it. Even so does the soul, regarding God, perceive all the impediments between herself and Him. And though there may be many secret and spiritual impediments which God does not discover to her, still, in spite of her ignorance, she in time gets rid of them. And this she accomplishes by transposing all her natural desires and inclinations in her recollection—a method which is so effectual as if her faults were visible to her sight. Not is a reformation of soul or perfection obtained otherwise than by getting out of the natural man and his ordinary desires; nor does it matter whether we discover the defects or not, for they may be amended without being known; nor is there any need to know them. Indeed, there are some faults so secret and spiritual that they cannot be perceived by sense; hence this is the only way to remove them, unless God bestow on the soul an extraordinary, unusual, supernatural light. Thus God conceals in, or causes, the reformation of the soul by helping her to transcend her inferior nature, and it matters not, as I have said, whether the soul perceives her defects or not.

A fourth reason why an examination of conscience is unnecessary in the case of a soul that works upon her property is that a sin or imperfection which would seem small to another will appear great to her, and

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will adhere to her soul till her conditions are that there will be no need to seek for her fault if it be worth remembering; and if it be not, why trouble about it? or why seek for what cannot be found, or when found, was not worth the seeking? Such minute and secret sins and imperfections are best removed (as spiritual writers tell us) by acts of love, or a general act of contrition, or by turning one's regard upon God rather than upon the sins themselves. There is, indeed, no other way that will remove them so effectually; and such searching for them and minute examination of them will only obscure the mind and confound the soul without any corresponding gain. If contemplatives seek as otherwise, they will find that they labour in vain, that they learn nothing by their searching which they did not know before; and what is worse, they will enter here and there, and imagine sins and defects where there was none. The reason of this is that such examinations are made chiefly by the help of the imagination and the light of nature, and this light is very fallacious. Besides, at such times the soul is not, and cannot be, in a state of recollection. The suitable light for such examinations is obtained only in a state of recollection, when the soul for the time is free from the images of its own creature; and this can be only at the beginning of the recollection, and not in the perfection of it, for then no thoughts are admitted but of God Himself. Indeed, women especially are naturally inclined to these examinations, and such examinations would only increase their inordinate fears. Experience shows that the practice of examinations is unnecessary for them, and surely they can judge better

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of their own case than others in quite different circumstances. In truth, there are few women, even of those who profess to follow the practice of examinations, who really continue long in them, except for more serious sins, in which contemplatives such are not much subject. Besides, such examinations imply a strong resolution of amendment of the soul and discernment, and for a contemplative soul to promise herself or God an amendment of such small defects would be impossible. She can only hope to amend them in course of time with the aid of grace and exercises. No industry or violence of her own will be of any avail.

This was clearly the experience of Dame Gertrude, as may be seen by her words cited on a former occasion. She says that she was to amend her life as she could, and not as she would; that it was God's will that she should spend a longer time for a final amendment; that in the meantime she should exercise patience with herself, amending little by little, and as she could, and that if she had proceeded otherwise she would never have arrived at anything at all.

In truth, the defects of such souls are usually certain inordinate inclinations of nature which are reformed rather by grace and spiritual working than by promises, resolutions, or a violent haste for the continuance of these souls is not in their own working, but in the Divine operation. Such was Dame Gertrude's method, and she found it successful.

Of course, I need not be understood, by what I have said, to deny in any way the best frequent examination required for the Sacrament of Penance. For this the soul will be able to call to mind some things or thing

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does since the previous confession, by which she will provide suitable matter for confession and absolution, though it may happen that the soul will sometimes have enough, and more than enough, to do to find the requisite matter.

There was a fifth substitute for examination of conscience in the case of Dame Gertrude and some of her Sisters, though not of all. It was this, that, owing to excessive timidity and scrupulosity when they had occasion to examine their conscience, their directors secretly advised them to esteem nothing to be a mortal sin, or a sin at all, unless they were certain; nor were they to consider that the act had been committed unless they were perfectly certain of it. Their timidity and scrupulosity rendered it impossible for them to examine their conscience without having this principle before their eyes, for they would be apt to think everything a mortal sin, and this would have worked nothing but confusion in their souls. Hence this principle was absolutely necessary for them, and without it they could not possibly have proceeded in the way of contemplation, but would have felt a life of agonies, fit of souls and despair. Moreover, to hold to this advice and principle was an excellent mortification for their souls, for their natures impelled them to yield to their fears, but they were kept in check and restrained by the salutary principle. And if the principle had not been given to them, and had they not held to it they would have been in danger of falling into a still greater sin, the sin of despair. Nor would such conscientious souls be emboldened to commit sin under pretext of this principle. Thus their minds were much relieved as

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regards their examination of conscience, for they could not be certain that anything was a sin, or at least a mortal sin, and on this principle became their substitute for an examination of conscience.

Though this principle was given to help these particular souls, as there are many others, especially women, with a like tendency to scrupulosity, the principle may well be extended to them also, and it will be found to work on them the same beneficial effects, and preserve them from harm. Nothing else can secure their peace of mind, as Dame Gertrude and her Sisters found. Indeed, I know not how otherwise they could have held on in their course. And though a greater liberty could not have been given them than this principle, it is not so low that they could have got on with less. This principle also helped them in their examination for sacramental confession. And though on occasion it might happen that someone would pass over a sin through error, this was a less serious evil than the consequences following the neglect of the principle: for then the soul would have fallen into habitual despondency, rigidity, and servile fear—a most miserable and distressing state. This principle, moreover, applies not only to souls that are in a strict sense scrupulous, but to those also who, through overmuch fear, stand in need of this help to keep them out of harm. But the exercise of this principle, appropriate properly to souls who have obtained a certain amount of control over themselves and their erroneous conscience, have acquired a more perfect love, and have abandoned servile fear. And this state is attained only after long exercise in contemplation, whereby that

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stability and clearness of conscience is acquired which will enable souls to judge aright concerning it, and to put away their insolent fears, until they reach at length a condition which may be called normal. But until they come to such a condition, they have no remedy but the exercise of the said principle. When they have attained to a thoroughly settled state of conscience, and abandoned all inordinate fears, their own consciences and the Divine Spirit will then lead them to relinquish the former principle as no longer needful or suitable for them.

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CHAPTER XVI
THE PRAYER OF ARIDITY

You will remember that it was about All-Hallowtide, towards the end of the first year of her profession, that Dame Gertrude and I had a serious talk, and with some success, about the good of her soul. A long time passed before we met again, except by way of salutation. Indeed, at that time I had no great opinion of her, nor much hope that she was the better for the instructions; but, in fact, as it appeared afterwards, she was very busily and seriously pursuing them. Much strengthen them certainly was at that time, between the Holy Spirit and her nature, for it was a good while before she could get wholly into the way. Not did I know what she did, till she came to me about the beginning of the following Lent, either on purpose or by chance. On talking with her, I at once saw that she was either in the way already, or so well disposed for it that she would shortly be in it. After that we met and conferred more frequently, and she grew more and more settled in the way, and I, for my part, animated and encouraged her. Indeed, this was the principal thing I had to do, and to bear her up against temptations that arose, either from her own nature or from the

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words and practices of others. I also often gave her general instructions; but as for particular, I always referred her to her proper internal Guide, the Holy Spirit. Still, now and then she would come with some particular question, wherein she was much satisfied. She was so well on the way, and walked in it with courage, quietness, and satisfaction. She sought no more instructions, but followed her prayer of living times and in a fitting manner. The rest of her time was spent in the discharge of her other obligations, and her office of Cellarer, into which she was placed at the charge of Abbot and President. There, as regards indifferent things, she acted, as I pointed out, for the good of her spirit, and according to what she found or believed to be the Divine will or will therein. Living thus she had no great suffering, or nothing so great as she had afterwards during the last two years of her life, when a doubt arose about the lawfulness of her way. During that time she was almost continually and profusely afflicted by this temptation, which proceeded not from within, but was caused by others. From time to time, indeed, she was satisfied intensely of the truth of her spiritual course; still, she was not without some feeling of fear on account of the natural reason, not many answers, which were alleged against it, and the authority of the persons who urged the objection. In her constitution, however, she saw the truth of her way, and she was confirmed in it by the Holy Spirit. Even so natural reason objected, for she remembered her experiences, and how useful and sufficient were her former ways to accomplish her desires. She was also fully satisfied that she did not

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go counter to the obedience she owed to man. Still, during the six years which preceded that great cross she was not without some daily afflictions, little or great, in soul or body, such as express a subject to in this life, especially when living in community, and engaged in much external employment and conversation. Such circumstances are apt to breed many little annoyances and sufferings.

But perhaps Dame Gertrude's greatest affliction at this time was her temptation to repeat her former conversations. When she could get clear reflections the temptation was not felt; but during her frequent obscurities and desolations the feeling, and fear, and peril were strong upon her. Another affliction, almost as great, was the temptation of the obscurities and desolations themselves—a great prostration and trial for her soul. Besides, there was the burden of sadness, to which she was subject constitutionally, or on occasions. These afforded abundant matter for acts of resignation, and consequently were of great profit to her soul. They also made her prayer more efficacious. Dame Gertrude, however, never omitted her prayer through these temptations or afflictions, but was all the more careful on their account to persevere, because she had no remedy or comfort but to have recourse to God by means of prayer. Thus some of these temptations—, not even her obscurities or desolations—prevailed over her or distressed her, but she obtained in prayer internal light of one kind or another for her needs, and with it grace and strength for her will. What kind of light and help Dame Gertrude received at such times it is impossible to state, but let it suffice to say that they

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was according to her needs. The nature of the light and help was known only to the author of them, the Divine Spirit; but Dame Gertrude herself could see their good effect within her, though she could not well see how it was brought about.

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Prayed as well as she could, and sought benefit for what she could not do. Aridity often afflicted her, and the same thing happens to others who possess sensible affections, for they depend much upon the immediate disposition of the body. And this is owing to attention, on account of a change in the weather, or for some internal cause, so that the body is often indisposed for sensible affections. And as Dame Gertrude could not feel but upon diverse prayer or meditation, because she was unable to meditate, there was nothing left but the state of aridity. These souls who are meditative, or in other words, can produce good acts after revealing images in their mind, are not much subject to aridity, because their exercise lies more in the intellectual soul, which does not vary with the disposition of the body, as the affections are apt to do, but is commonly in one and the same disposition. If, however, the soul that usually exercises affections does what she can, notwithstanding her aridity, she will be enlighten'd in her intellectual soul; for the latter is as capable of illumination in the time of aridity as when sensible affections flow easily. And not only is the understanding capable of light, but also the other power of the soul, the will, receives grace and strength from God no less in the time of aridity than in the time of sensible affections; for the essential profit of the soul consists in the light and love of the intellectual or spiritual soul, and not in the sensible feelings. Thus, by these means Dame Gertrude made no less progress in her prayer in time of aridity than she did when better disposed.

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But I am inclin'd to think that no one can adhere to his prayer through a long spell of aridity but such as have an interior propensity, like Dame Gertrude, for it is this that holds the soul to her prayer and helps her bear her up in all kinds of temptations and difficulties. Those who have not the support of the former propensity may find it hard to have recourse to discursive prayer, or, failing this, to vocal prayer.

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I should not be surpris'd that in account of all sorts of spirits and in all cases, and they proceed to contemplation. Vocal prayer supplies the place of meditation, sensible acts, sensible affections, and also serves in the case of aridity. So that, whether the person could discourse or not, or produce such clear reflection, or were in a state of aridity, they succeeded with vocal prayer, and were carried by it through all kinds of difficulties, temptations, and thorns. Indeed, an exercise short of contemplation is less liable to these dangers than vocal prayer, or is less harmful to health. Moreover, continued in itself, vocal prayer is undoubtedly the most proper instrument to bring souls to contemplation. This, I think, is one reason why Holy Church obliges religious and priests to the recitation of the Breviary. As, however, we cannot endure in these days the requisite amount of abstraction and mortification, we must supplement vocal prayer with mental prayer.

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so that at such times she gave up prayer; but after All-Hallows she did not do so any more. There was also another thing. It was some time before Dame Gertrude found the means of helping herself in the prayer of affection; and I could not prescribe the kind of prayer to suit her, but told her that she must find out by her own experience and observation. There were two things only that I hinted at. First, that she must use some sort of mental prayer, and that it was her business to find what kind would suit her; and secondly, that she, like all others, was capable of mental prayer of one kind or another. This opinion was grounded upon the authority of a learned and experienced Jesuit, Father Alvarez, who in the third volume of his "Spiritual Perfection" states that there is no soul who is not capable of mental prayer of one kind or other.

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DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS DURING THE FIRST
TWO YEARS OF HER RELIGIOUS LIFE

In an earlier chapter I divided the mortification Dame Gertrude underwent under the three categories of Doing, Abstaining, and Suffering. There are a few things I should now like to add under each of these heads. Although Dame Gertrude spent most of her time in doing, it cannot be said to have constituted much to her immediate advancement, or the increase of perfection in her soul. It was rather a recreation, or a cessation from serious mental exertion. This was partly because such acts were but external actions, and partly because they were according to her natural inclination and the activity of her imagination. Nor did such external actions tend to give much satisfaction to others, especially to spiritual persons. For though such actions are good and necessary, yet to themselves they are not the best, for they may be, and often are, performed out of natural inclination or custom, without any exercise of abnegation of will in which the main profit of the soul consists. Consequently, though Dame Gertrude did much active work, she did not make much progress thereby; not could others easily

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perceive much spiritual progress in her in this particular.

Thus with regard to abstaining—that is, abstinence from sin, immortification, and imperfection. Speaking generally, the soul can derive more profit from that she can by action or doing. But the profit consists in the greatness of the difficulty which she must find in abstaining; the greater the difficulty, the greater the good. But in abstaining, namely, principally in not doing, it is not so apparent to others as external action; so that others do not so very well the progress made by the soul, though perhaps internally she is making wonderful progress. As, however, abstaining tends to certain innocence and purity of life, it cannot but yield some external fruits by which others may be at least to some extent edified. Such, in fact, was the case with Dame Gertrude. For after her conversion she was, I know very well, in the matter of abstinence, and always extremely observing, her external carriage would not fail to give in her a testimony to a more perfect manner of life.

Lastly, with regard to suffering. This, in its own nature, usually procures the greatest advancement for the soul, though none but God and the soul can well discern the degree of suffering. It may be almost infinitely great internally, and yet so one be aware of it. In these secret sufferings and the grace of prayer consisted Dame Gertrude's principal progress. For as regards abstaining, even our nature, if we are well disposed, will sustain us from doing exteriorly what will appear in the eyes of others to be well. And as regards doing, Dame Gertrude's delicate health prevented her

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from undertaking much external employment, though it was good enough to enable her to retain the control of some things she could she perform much external mortification. Hence she was compelled to yield to disposition from fasting, and to some extent from abstinence, and night choir, and even sometimes from a portion of the day hours. And as she had a good will, it must have been to small mortification to submit to these exemptions. Besides, Dame Gertrude was obliged, as much as anyone else in the house, to indulge in recreations and conversations.

But now to return to Dame Gertrude's sufferings—a matter of the utmost importance and hence for a word. For the sake of clearness, I will divide them into four periods. The first extends from the beginning of Dame Gertrude's religious life to the end of her second year. During this time she led a somewhat disordered or extraverted life, not yet knowing how to live an interior one. The second period will be the succeeding six years; and the third, the following two years, during which time an extraordinary great health gave, which lasted, we may say, the whole of that time. The fourth period covers the last sixteen days of her life.

As Dame Gertrude was not in the right interior spiritual course during the first period, she had little to help her to see her reason probably beyond what her nature afforded her, and this surely is little enough. For either the soul will not suffer at all, but yields to imperfection of its exteriority, or, if not internally, it will suffer very imperceptibly and with little purity of disposition. Her case will be carried, much as Simon of Cyrene carried his, under a kind of compulsion. Of

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course, Dame Gertrude had her crosses, like everybody else. Some came directly from God, but as she was of a good disposition and had a sensitive conscience, she never wanted to rebel against them. Still, wanting light and grace, she knew not how to turn them to good account. One cross particularly afflicted her at this time—i. e. the temptation to reject her former confessor, contrary to the advice of her spiritual director. She refers to it in her writings as particularly grievous, and much trouble she had on account of it. Her inquiry was whether she was bound to her search out difficulties about her former life and confessor which neither she nor anyone else could have solved for her by natural reason or learning. And if they could have answered her, the matter would not have ended there, but she would have found fresh difficulties, to her own misery and the annoyance of others. Indeed, there was no remedy but to desert from the confessor of her former sins, and to abide by the reasonable advice of her spiritual guide. First to do this was most difficult, as the advice seemed to be quite contrary to the light of reason, which indicated to her through the necessity of repetition. For though in some respects she had plenty of courage, in other ways she was easily daunted and perplexed. She certainly was not very successful in combating this temptation, for she had not at this time attained to the light and grace of a good practice of prayer, nor consequently to good obedience to God or confidence in Him. Indeed, Dame Gertrude was in a great dilemma. On the one hand, her spiritual director had expressed in the strongest terms in writing that she

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must not repeat former matter of confession, but must not satisfied with what she had done, and she found not thereby for fear of action etc. On the other hand, her natural reason seemed to demonstrate to her the necessity of repetition. She then long suspended between two courses in agony of perplexity, for she still regarded Superior as mere creature, and there was no true submission of other understanding or will to them, nor had she a proper conception of their position all she obtained more immediate converse with God, and this wrought a more complete submission of herself to Him, and to others for Him, as she often tells us in her writings.

As to the crosses which came to Dame Gertrude by means of Superior or others, these she bore well courageously as far as her good sense or credit seemed to require, but inwardly, as appears from her writings, they did her much harm, often resulting in murmurs, rebellions, impatience, immobility, and hardness of heart. The reason she took these crosses from others as badly was that she had a very capable head and was self-willed, so that it was no easy matter to yield to the judgment and will of others. Thus her suffering did Dame Gertrude more harm than good, outweighing her from God even more than when she lived in the world, and not all mankind, including the Pope and the rest of the Church, with all their power, wisdom, and authority, could have brought about a reformation in her, though no one by nature could have been more afraid of eternal damnation than she was. It was His only when first formed her could reform her, and only by means of a contemplation of

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regard of God Himself, and in this practice she attained when once she passed into the right spiritual course. Indeed, so she can become perfectly righteous and attain to true religious humility and obedience but by an immediate converse with God, through which the soul comes to know Him, and in Him to know herself, and thereby to obtain grace to live in accordance with that knowledge.

This precious confirmation is a passage to be found in Dame Gertrude's "Confession." She says: "Nothing hath my Lord God left undone that might win me wholly to Himself, and make me despise myself and all creature things for His love. For when I found He recalled me, and forsook me not in my misery at offending such omnipotent Godhead, as I am unworthy, and that also after my entry into religion, the happiness and worth thereof I did not yet know. By these means I grew weary of bearing therein His sweet yoke and light burden, which she heavy only through our own fault and ignorance His yoke grew so insupportable to me that I wished often that it might have been shaken off lawfully by me, protesting that it was so incompatible with my good that I could scarcely work out my salvation in the religious state and profession. This, my God, Thou art witness of, in truth, and so it did continue with me about two years after I had my appearance forsaken the world, and the world, indeed, forsaken me. But did my Lord in this bitter affliction forsake me? No, no; but He provided such help for me by means of a lawful means of His that quickly

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was my sorrow turned into joy—yes, into such unexpressed joy that I felt ashamed all the sorrow which since that time have befallen me. For as soon as my soul was set in a way fitting to my God by prayer and abnegation, I found all my sorrows presently dispense themselves, and cease to sting. Yes, even in two weeks my soul became so enraptured with the joys of this my dear Lord that I need have made not nearly four, but four thousand, vows to have become wholly dedicated to Him; I should have embraced His soul with more joy and contentment than ever I did find in obtaining that which ever I most wished or desired. Yes, as Thou knowest, my God, by my soul being put into a course of prayer, I intended to have some found a true reason whereby I might love without end or remission.”

But to return to Dame Gertrude's temptation to repeat her confessions. The temptation was the most grievous affliction that could have befallen her, because it penetrated precisely into her soul, habitually adhered to it, and daily, hourly vexed it. The temptations, indeed, would have been of the greatest pain if she had been disposed for it. For crosses which come from without, however great and troublesome, are transitory and superficial, and so are light compared to the former cross, which appeared to Dame Gertrude as daily to engulf her in eternal damnation, the mere thought of which filled her with the utmost dismay. In the hope of obtaining relief, Dame Gertrude sought about this time to make another general confession, though she had done quite enough in this respect at the time of her profession. With this in her mind one day, as I

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was going to the altar to say Mass, she came to the church-yard, and told me that she was about to make a general confession, and begged of my prayers to that end. I promised to pray for her. But I could not help but pity her and smile at her proceeding, for I well knew that this was not the way to obtain the peace of soul that she sought. It was to be secured only by entering on a good spiritual-course, about which she had treated with me once or twice, but so far without success. When she had made her general confession, she found herself not one whit the better—if anything, she was worse than before, in spite of all her new prayers and austerities. And such is the usual proceeding, and, I may add, result, of an infinite number of good souls of both sexes, especially in religion, who put their greatest security and satisfaction in making and repeating confessions, both in their lifetime and at the hour of death. Yet for all that they have no security or true satisfaction; nor do they see the true state of their souls, for want of an interior light, which cannot be obtained in sufficient fulness except by the serious pursuit of recollection, solitude, and abnegation of life. And for this many of these souls have the requisite propensity, if they would only discover it. But as for confessions made without obligation or real necessity, they not only do not secure the soul nor afford security, but rather tend to obscure the light, and diminish true confidence in God.

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CHAPTER XVIII
DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS FROM THE SECOND TO
THE SIXTH YEAR OF HER SELENDICE LIFE

As an introduction to the second of the periods into
which I divided Dame Gertrude's sufferings, I will
explain a little more fully the value and merit of
suffering.

There are three things to be regarded in suffering.
There is first the difficulty which we experience in
bearing it; secondly, there is the measure of the
intention with which it is received, and, in other words,
the willingness or unwillingness with which we accept
it; and thirdly, there is the purity of the intention
with which we undergo the suffering. These three
points, indeed, apply equally to matters of doing,
abstaining, and suffering; and all good deeds may be
compared under these three heads.

Now, as the first point—the difficulty, the willing-
ness, and the purity of intention—are purely internal
conditions, even if God can judge advantage of the
perfection or otherwise of the soul therein. Of all
matters, the soul herself should know some conditions
best, and those to whom she manifests them, though
even the soul herself is usually an insufficient judge on

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account of the natural Misadison which proceeds from
suffering. But others, who judge by external signs,
are particularly liable to mistake about these three
points; for the soul may be quite satisfactory in her
interior carriage, but internally she may be very
defective. Or, on the other hand, the soul may be
quite well disposed internally, and yet exhibit some
defects in her external deportment. Nevertheless, most
men do not hesitate to judge others by their exterior.

Then, again, there are many internal sufferings which
give no external indication of their presence, yet they
may be far heavier and of greater merit than those that
appear on the surface. Such, in fact, was the case with
Dame Gertrude. Her sufferings of the greatest moment
and worth were purely internal. And as for external
sufferings, their merit entirely depends on the dis-
position of the insensitive soul, and these are fully
visible to God alone.

Purity of intention consists in doing, suffering, or
abstaining for God alone, and for His sake, all ends of
our own being excluded. The nearer our intention
approaches to this, the purer it is, and the more
valuable. Of all these points, this is the one which manifests itself
least exteriorly, and is most difficult for others to
discern. For a person may suffer great things, and yet
they may be worth nothing, for want of purity of
intention; and on the other hand, a flexible heart
with purity of intention is more meritorious of grace
and glory than the most painful suffering borne with
less purity of intention.

But in a contemplative soul the profit and perfection
of the suffering will depend wholly upon prayer, and

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without prayer the soul will reap little good from it.
At the same time, suffering helps prayer by making the
prayer efficacious and profound, and by drawing the
soul out of herself into God. Moreover, the greater
difficulty our nature finds in the suffering, the greater
usually will be the grace afforded, and the more excellent
will be the resignation of the soul to prayer. But
although prayer is good and profitable by itself, yet
when it is accompanied by suffering, the soul makes
much greater progress. Also, more perfect endurance
of suffering is an effect of prayer; for in prayer we make
acts of resignation and resolutions to abide in patience,
and this obtains for us grace and strength to be patient
and resigned afterwards out of the time of prayer.
Hence there are three ways in which prayer helps us to
suffer more perfectly. First, it gives grace to overcome
the difficulties that our nature finds in suffering;
secondly, it inclines the will to submit suffering more
willingly; and thirdly, it purifies the intention in
suffering. From this it may be seen how much prayer
helps us in suffering, and how indispensable it is without
prayer. For without it we have nothing but our nature
to fall back upon, and this does not willingly suffer, or,
if it accepts suffering, it will have little purity of intention.
Nor do the Sacraments need to enable us to suffer
profitably without internal prayer. Almighty God,
therefore, never fails to provide by one means or
another sufficient occasion of suffering for the soul.
He is drawing to contemplation, or who have already
attained to it; but He so tempers the sufferings that
they may be proportionate to the degree of prayer and
spiritual strength that the souls have obtained, or the

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grace that He intends to bestow for such sufferings. This was so with Dame Gertrude, as we shall see in the second period of her life, in which I shall now turn. During this period, which extends from the second to the sixth year of Dame Gertrude's religious life, there were no very notable or extraordinary sufferings. Still, there were daily occasions of suffering such as fall to the lot of all mortals, especially in community life. These consist principally of contradictions to one's natural will or inclination in soul, body, good name, external goods, or friends. In all these respects Dame Gertrude, as all others, found some matter for suffering during those years, as to accompaniment or incitement to prayer; and though in themselves these sufferings were small, yet they were such as almighty God esteemed to be sufficient for her present needs, or He would have laid upon her heavier burdens. But such is God's ordinary course with contemplative souls. He does not at the beginning of their spiritual life impose heavy crosses, but rather defends them, granting them health and strength and other requisites, but their spirit is oppressed or hindered. The spirit of such souls is still green, tender, weak, assented, as regards both prayer and the habits of virtue; so that if a heavy cross fell on them, it would hinder them in their course. For this reason God protected Dame Gertrude from heavy afflictions during this time. However, besides the daily little sufferings incidental to her life, God exercised Dame Gertrude by two special sufferings, which were, we may say, habitual to her. They were of some moment and difficulty, and consequently were of great profit, as God gave her grace to bear them well. They

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were moreover internal afflictions, and therefore touched her deeply, penetrating into her very soul. The one was the temptation already alluded to in the former period—the temptation to repeat her former confessions, contrary to the advice of her spiritual guide. Though the temptation had affected her ever since she took the habit, she was not till she had entered into a good spiritual condition that she obtained grace and strength to make a good profit out of it. In the former period, her scruples not only increased her defects, they promoted her spiritual welfare; but now that she had entered into a right spiritual course, the way of Divine love, the temptation and all other crosses cooperated in the good of her soul and spiritual advancement. For by manfully resisting the pressure of the temptation, she continually increased in grace and spiritual strength, till at length she acquired the habit of constance. By this means, great resignation to God was wrought in her soul, and this increased confidence in God and love of Him, and proportionately diminished digestion, pusillanimity, scrupulousity, and spiteful fear, which formerly darkened her soul, kept her from familiar intercourse with God, and rendered her life miserable. Her now that through her spiritual course she obtained strength to resist her temptations, she grew to be more light-hearted, mistress of herself, and contented; and she gave greater satisfaction to others by her happy, merry ways. Only once during this period did she yield somewhat to this temptation, and this was occasioned by some serious she heard or writings that she read, and which frightened her, so that she prevailed on one to allow her to repeat one or two former matters which she should not or

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need not have done, had she adhered to the advice given to her. But she herself soon felt and acknowledged her error, for in consequence of having yielded to temptation on this occasion, she experienced greater difficulty in resisting afterwards. She plucked up courage, however, and turned to good account her mistake; for she learnt by experience the necessity of resisting her temptations more watchfully for the future. Hereafter she adhered firmly to her course, though the temptation not infrequently presented itself to her mind, and continued to do so till her last sickness and death; for the temptation was inherent in her very bones, she having inherited it from her mother, who was a good devout lady, but gave overmuch to scrupulousity and sadness. Such temptations, arising from our temperament and bodily constitution, usually cling through life, though in time, by the aid of spiritual exercises, their force diminishes and may ultimately be almost extinguished.

The other considerable temptation—viz., a tendency to desolation and obscurity of soul—was also natural to Dame Gertrude, and constitutional, and clung to her from her birth. This consisted of a boldness or dullness of the will in the exercise of affections towards God, and a want of light in the understanding for discerning God and the Divine things appertaining to herself. But this temptation never prevailed over her—at least, after she entered her spiritual course—so far as to prevent her from turning to God by prayer, and from the proper care over herself; for, even in her desolations, God defended her from the evil consequences of the obscurity by imparting to much internal

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light as was necessary, though not that degree of clearness which her nature craved and enjoyed at other times. This afforded her abundant opportunity for the exercise of resignation, and procured for her much more grace for her will and more light for her understanding. For true resignation obtaineth great grace or spiritual strength and light from God, whether the grace and light be perceived by the soul or not. As this temptation was also internal, it procured more grace than many external sufferings for those do not pierce so deeply into the soul as the former. Of this temptation Dame Gertrude often makes mention in her writings. Her strong propensity towards God and His continual grace were the means whereby she kept herself up during these periods of obscurity; or otherwise she, like many others, would have abandoned her spiritual course. Though these temptations were a great trial to Dame Gertrude, they were the outcome of the defects, as we have seen, of her own nature, rather than any special intervention of the hand of God. This is the way God usually deals with His young and tender spiritual children. He is content if they can bear up against these or natural defects, or rather the want of habits contracted by their former negligence, or the natural blindness produced by them. To these defects I think, St. Paul referred when he wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. x. 12), saying that their temptations were such as were common; or to the Ephesians (chap. vi.), that their wrestling was against flesh and blood. But the temptations sent by God I may term Divine, although a man may be the instrument of the suggestion, or rather probation. This is all the more apparent when the

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instrument is a good man; for God often imparts good men to persecute other good men who are moved by God to exercise patience and magnanimity. Thus both for the first and end of both sides. Hence we read of saints who persecuted one another, and without detriment to their sanctity, the difference between them arising from ignorance of some circumstance which they were not bound to know, and which God did not reveal to them. Thus they proceeded according to their light and knowledge, the Holy Spirit, perhaps, so operating with them and urging them on. These might, therefore, be justice and truth, and consequently merit, on both sides, without bitterness or breach of charity, notwithstanding the contention, and each might be rewarded by God for his part in the dispute. Of this Dame Gertrude had a somewhat sharp and bitter experience, as may be seen in the following lines which she penned.

And in this way do not think much,
That the more each endure;
No, though I be less holy seem,
For God doth the process;
That thou mayest seek Himself alone,
And put thy trust in Him,
And set in my creature living,
I am glad to see thee serve;
Fornication by the same doth all
Will kiss the absence;
But to be covered by the past
Come near to them, perchance.

Dame Gertrude's meaning is that to be persecuted by evil persons is a kind of honour, for it will be sup-

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posed that justice is on the side of the one attacked, and this makes account for the bitterness of the persecution. But if the aggressor be good, or intended to be good, then, in addition to the bitterness of the persecution, there will be a certain degree of discordance, for people generally will believe that justice lies on the other side. Besides, the worth and authority of the aggressor may shake the other's confidence in the justice of his cause, especially if he be of a good conscience. Such was precisely the case with Dame Gertrude, as we shall see presently. In such contentions, however, there is a great difference when the aggressor is guided by the Holy Spirit, and when he is led by his own natural spirit and will. In the former case, or discovering himself to be in the wrong, he will, with humility, acknowledge his mistake, and desire, however great the shame and humiliation. For God often leads good men into a course of action, and by some means He turns it to their eternal increase and internal mortification, by which they reap much profit. But when the aggressor is led by his own spirit and inclination, he is apt to defend one error by another, a lesser by a greater, seeking to make good what he had severely and under the influence of passion began, and thereby he engages only greater confusion in the end. But commonly when the work is undertaken under the impulse of the Divine Spirit, it attains the end intended by the will thereof and by God from the very first, and usually with some matter for humiliation arising in the course of it.

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CHAPTER XIX
DAME GERTRUDE'S SUFFERINGS FROM THE SIXTH YEAR
OF HER RELIGIOUS LIFE TILL HER LAST SICKNESS

We come now to the third period into which the sufferings of Dame Gertrude were divided. This period covers the last two years of her life, down to the sickness which carried her off. In addition to the two temptations already described, and the daily solicitude and crosses which fell to her through her office of Cellarer, there came to Dame Gertrude and her Sisters at this time a most grievous temptation and persecution not by God. Indeed, it was the most grievous that that man, the devil, or, if I may say so, God Himself could devise, when we consider the nature of the trial, the source whence it came, and the conditions of time upon which it fell. The trial was nothing less than a serious dispute as to whether Dame Gertrude and her Sisters were praying a manner of prayer that was safe and sound, and it resulted in a full and careful inquiry into their practices. The doubt and inquiry arose from the appointment by our Congregation of certain persons to visit them. I have written in my heart, as written in the Book of Life to watch over the spiritualities of the convent. They had nothing but

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the good of the convent at heart, and was prompted by the best of motives, but this did not make the trial less heavy.

It is said by the Wise Man that there is nothing new under the sun. And this saying is not without its application in the present instance for Dame Gertrude was not the first to suffer in this way. About sixty years before the Joseph Father Rubiacus Alvarez had to undergo a similar inquisition. This holy servant of God had been called by God from the exercise peculiar to his Society, to practise interior prayer of the will. For some years he pursued this manner of prayer with much spiritual profit, and began to recommend it to others whom he thought capable of it. As he was Rector of a college, and esteemed for his learning and holiness of life, his manner of prayer was taken up by others, and was commended by them in conversation and in their correspondence. The novelty of the kind of prayer exercised and commended by Father Alvarez soon began to attract attention, and some Fathers, zealous for the honor and good of the Society, not only questioned the prudence of his course, but censured his manner of prayer as unwholesome and even opposed to the spirit of the Society. These doubts at length reached the ears of the General, who himself took steps to ascertain the truth of the charges against Father Alvarez. Accordingly, some Fathers and other dignified examination Rubiacus Alvarez's prayer, and after a diligent examination Rubiacus Alvarez's prayer was confirmed and approved, not only for himself, but for any others whom God might call to exercise it.

The application of this account to Dame Gertrude

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will be readily seen. No one would think the honor of the Society was in any way injured by the inquiry, for, on the contrary, it is much to the credit of an Order that some at least of its members should exercise pure spiritual prayer, and this after a full examination and the formal approbation of Superiors. Nor could those who promoted and urged the inquiry be blamed, as they showed great zeal for the good of their Society and of souls. So in the same way it could not be thought harmful to our Congregation that such an inquiry should be held concerning the manner of prayer of some of its members, however unpleasant it might be to the individual concerned. Nor could those who promoted and carried out the inquiry in a humble and charitable manner, with the authority of the Congregation, be in any way blamed. Indeed, I may go further and say that the Congregation never had a greater honor conferred on it, because the examination showed that true spirituality, through Divine operations, flourished in the Congregation, and received after examination the seal of approval of the Congregation. For of what value are earthly riches or anything else in the Congregation, were in so far as they may help to promote spirituality? Or what is the Congregation worth, however well the choir be attended and the Office chanted, and regular discipline observed, if it be without true spirituality? It will be no more than a dead body—a body without a soul, that if it have spirituality—soul, true spirituality—then how full of life and noble will it be! And the more intensive and extensive is the spirituality—that is, the more arduous the degree of spirituality, and the more widely diffused

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among the members of the Congregation, in the same soul that dispose themselves and tend towards it—the more full of vitality and the nearer with the Congregation be!

I am not, however, so much interested with the doctrine of the Congregation, for it stands in little need of confirmation, but rather I am concerned to trace the effect of the doubts and inquiry on the spiritual life of Dame Gertrude. And, certainly, of all Dame Gertrude's trials, none pierced her so deeply to the quick or was so painful to her soul as this. It increased her resignation, and made her recourse to God more efficacious and profound than anything the wit of man could have devised. It was a probation, as I may say, of God's own making, specially designed for the good of her soul, to hasten her perfection, to purify her soul, and to secure a happier death.

Thus writes a correspondent who was intimate with her:—"The great goal which Dame Gertrude had for the common good of the house, her labours to promote peace and quiet therein, and her sufferings for the same, were such as I am not able to express. If one should go to particulars, there would be no end—God only knows it. For God's sake she did suffer and undergo all with so much internal peace and external patience that those who knew her to part the occasion of her suffering do wonder at it. And in all the time since these difficulties have been, I could never observe by her words or behaviour, or in any other way, that they touched her interior in such wise as to hinder the peace and quiet of her soul or tendance towards God. You, on the contrary, they did much,

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and very much, to forward and advance her in the way of love, resignation, and confidence towards God, and drew her more and more towards Him, as she hath often upon occasion in this time affirmed to me. She said this was an exercise provided by God Himself, Who only knows and sees what is convenient and best for us. Therefore, it deserves to be worthily received and accepted as the greatest sign of His love that could happen to us. And how surprised of us towards God it were, if we should esteem these afflictions otherwise than to proceed from His fatherly love and goodness for trial and exercise of our fidelity towards Him. And so far as others had been cause thereof, or in any way contributed thereto, they were to be esteemed as God Almighty's instruments in the work, and therefore not to be loved or respected the less, but rather more, if so. Much more to this effect hath she often said to me upon occasion, which plainly showed how firm she was from all services, towards those that were the cause of these difficulties.

Dame Gertrude often observed to her intimate friends that corporal affliction and crosses from without, which do not cleave and perplex the mind, were as nothing to her. These she could digest with facility, if not with pleasure, by an immediate recourse to God, her soul being clear and free; and thus she despised these crosses, with their attendant images. That the crosses that tended to breed doubt or confusion in the soul itself were crosses indeed of unspeakable affliction and peril—not only in themselves, but also in their effects, by obscuring the mind and rendering it less capable of enduring external afflictions in a proper manner. But

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when Dame Gertrude was clear and quiet internally, she made small account of such accidents. Of the former kind of crosses there were habitually with her during this period—namely, the inclination to repeat her former confessions, obsequy or dissolutions, and the doubt raised about her spiritual course.

Let me speak a little more fully about the latter. A spiritual life consists in following the Divine light and impulses, in humbling and subjecting the soul to God and to all creatures according to His will, in loving God above all things, in serving, obeying, and performing it according to Divine guidance—all qualities proceeding from the Divine operation, a state into which none but the Holy Spirit could bring the soul. Now, would we were taught that the Divine Spirit would stop or permit Dame Gertrude to relinquish such a course? or could she have done so without leave of the Holy Spirit, or without knowledge of a better course? The Divine Spirit never works a change in a soul except for the better, and He makes the way clear to her that she may embrace it. But if Dame Gertrude had relinquished her course, what would have become of her? She would only have returned to the natural state in which she had been till, by aid of the instructions already described, she entered the school of the Divine Spirit. There she found the interior satisfaction which she had so long sought, and attained with so much difficulty. And should she now abandon all for—the same old scheme—and bring herself into her former blindness and misery? What discipline and deprivation to the Divine Spirit, and how would it benefit? No man living was able to put her into a course that was better or as good. For

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he must bring her into the course of the Divine Spirit, or she would not be in the right way for her soul. And clearly, as we have seen, she was already in the hands of the Divine Spirit, and of this her conscience was fully persuaded. What, then, remained for her to do but to abide in her course, and to die in it, as in truth she did?

Dame Gertrude tells us in her writings why she so much relished the instructions she received from me. It was because they differed in capital such as the permanent, unchangeable Master and Teacher, Who ever taught contemplative souls the same kind of doctrine, and was never in contradiction with Himself; whereas directors who do not refer the soul to the Divine Master are as changeable and repugnant to one another in their instructions as they are changeable in their office. They are here today and gone to-morrow, each differing from the other in the manner of teaching, and in his solution of doubts. For this reason, souls that see their souls can never come to perfection of knowledge or of life, as Dame Gertrude, through much experience, tells in her writings.

I have frequently noted that the spiritual scholar should not try his director with questions except at the impulse or with leave of his internal spiritual guide. This doctrine Dame Gertrude was careful to observe. Thus she writes: "When I have asked a question, though it seemed so reasonable that any man would have judged I had done it out of necessity and right judgment—yet, would have warranted me that I had done very well in it, and the best that could be, yet, coming afterwards to my recollection, I had plainly seen that my questioning was out of immoderation,

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and have been checked by God for it in my conscience, and so good hath come to me by it, not much obscurity and dejection. This is, for the most part, the reward of such a proceeding in such who are offered by God to be relieved of their difficulties for the most part by Himself. This I have somewhat doubtly learnt by experience. Also I have found that when I have done a thing which I thought necessary, and yet it hath not been so, but rather it had been better to have let it alone, as afterwards I find, yet having proceeded in it with indifference and resignation, as I will hope I did, and not able to discern which was best, God in such cases hath always turned to my good or some mortification or other that happened to it or by it, which yet never obscured me, as in the former case, but rather much enlightened."

There exists sometimes between the Superior and subject a natural love and friendship, which causes a certain openness and liberty between them. As this is a natural love, it is not of a hindrance that of itself is an eternal life, so that the inferior soul will not incline to it. If the Superior expects souls of love and friendship, and cannot have them, he will be dissatisfied and apt to conceive a dislike towards the subject and his spiritual course. For this unwillingness will be more profitable to an interior soul than to seek the Superior's favour and friendship, for this cannot but be a great distraction and hindrance to his spirit. Indeed, a certain disunion and reserve will be the better, except when the good of the subject requires otherwise for some particular occasion. God, knowing this well, generally finds a way of breaking

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this inordinate affection and friendship between the soul whose life is intimately guided and the Superior, and brings about a kind of separation or detachment of mind, whereby the soul perhaps may suffer some difficulties and crosses at the hands of her Superior. This will be best for the soul, and will check her inordinate attachment towards her Superior, and thereby enable her to be more reconciled and familiar with the Divine Spirit, which is the best of all. For how can the Superior or his representative testify to the satisfactory state of the soul's conscience if he is not fully acquainted with it, or the director thereof? Alas, how can any man of himself, however much he may try to direct the soul, give her an assurance that she is in a good state? Who can give such an assurance and internal satisfaction but the Divine Spirit Himself, who is the Author of those lights and inspirations, obedience to which alone can afford security of conscience in life and at the hour of death? As no man can give this security and satisfaction, no matter in the soul capable of it unless she lead an interior life. For interior souls alone receive or perceive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, from which they proceed the security and satisfaction obtainable in this life.

Hence exterior souls are incapable of this interior security and satisfaction. The only security that they can have and it is a very feeble one is from without, from some marks to whom they have manifested their interior as best they could. Yet even he, through insufficient knowledge, may promise peace where there is no peace. For though he should hear his penitent's confessions all his life, he cannot by all the absolutions

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In the world give that satisfaction which interior souls who are familiar with the administrations and impulses of the Holy Spirit enjoy. Hence St. Paul says: "The Spirit himself dwells within us, we enjoy His love and favour. Let, then, interior souls make content in this that they have the assurance that God continually gives to such souls, and which no Superior or confessor, for all he may know of the soul, could ever bestow. All that Superior can do is to dispose capable souls for an interior life, whereas alone this assurance can be obtained. By this means Dame Gertrude enjoyed a security and satisfaction which rested not on the testimony of men, but on the mercy and goodness of God. She made, however, such use of men as God willed, by receiving from him the means of grace, the holy Sacraments and rites of the Church, through who neither trusted in them, nor in her use of them, nor in the administrations of them, but only in the goodness of God, to Whom she wholly surrendered herself!

¹ Rom. viii. 16.

² This passage might seem to suggest a deprivation of the Sacraments as a series of grace, but doctrine Father Baker means that they can be intended in advance for prayer and the interior life, and are not thereby impeded thereof. On page 44 we see that Dame Gertrude "was accustomed to receive often" for the Sacraments. Cf. the Father Lovelock's "Memento" (pp. 103, 111 "Societas Sacerdotum") "Whom the Spirit Himself dwells within us, we enjoy His love and favour. Let, then, interior souls make content in this that they have the assurance that God continually gives to such souls, and which no Superior or confessor, for all he may know of the soul, could ever bestow. All that Superior can do is to dispose capable souls for an interior life, whereas alone this assurance can be obtained. By this means Dame Gertrude enjoyed a security and satisfaction which rested not on the testimony of men, but on the mercy and goodness of God, to Whom she wholly surrendered herself!"



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We see, then, how little cause has a soul that has discharged her conscience according to command, and has found light and satisfaction in her confessions, to make general confessions out of her own head without guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order to obtain from men a warrant for doing so. No, the only satisfying warrant is derived from the Holy Spirit, and the testimony of our own conscience witnessing to us that we have already done that which the Divine Spirit in our confessions had in other ways required of us as regards confession. God is witness of his righteousness in an interior soul—and a true witness of his heart?

The reason of this difference between interior souls and others is not that the former have a clearer and more certain testimony from God that they are in a state of grace for this would require a special revelation, but that they have a clearer sight of their interior, by which they see that they have corresponded with their light and impulses, and are prepared to follow the Divine Will in all that appears to be such, and see no impediment between their soul and God—that is, they do not conscientiously strain objections to confessions, but see that they are immediately united to God in will and affection according to the measure of this life. This gives that satisfaction and security of conscience which is the best warrant that ordinarily can be had in this world of the genuine basis of the spiritual life. So that the words that are so common even to the most experienced, the common sense of ordinary mortals have been in the frequency of confessions and the matter to be confessed?"

¹ Hence, thus well we know, we could thus witness our virtue" (Apoc. i. 10).



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His, and affords the greatest hope and confidence in God. Other souls are without this, and have such assurance only as can be given by the senses, or by man by means of the Sacraments he administers, or by comforting words, the soul remaining still in her natural interior darkness and ignorance, so that they cannot be without much fear and doubt about their state. That remedy is hope grounded on faith, which every Christian who does the best he can is required by God to hold fast by, and this will, by God's goodness, bring him to Heaven, notwithstanding his interior darkness. Ignorance, trembling and fear, however, in so far as they are evils, are not wanting in interior souls according to their measure of grace and progress in spirit. Thus St. Paul, though he did say for his and our comfort that the Spirit testified to his spirit that he was the child of God, still, he was not certain that he was in a state of grace, for he said: "Though my conscience does not accuse me of anything, I am not thereby justified." God reserves His own perfect assurance to keep us humble and to provide matter for resignation. Still, in interior soul, the best assurance that can be ordinarily obtained, and this from within herself, and not from without. The latter way does not afford a satisfactory assurance, nor do the corporal senses within us. It is to be had only by means more spiritual, above the senses—namely, by the Holy Spirit testifying to our spirit, as St. Paul has pointed out. Another objection that is made on behalf of the Superior (or director) is the accident that he sees

¹ 1 Cor. x. 4.



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render of the soul under his charge. Now, the kind of success which he must give is made known to us, not only by reason, but expressly by our holy Rule, which commends to the pastor, as to one who himself observes the internal admonitions of the Holy Spirit, our Saviour's words—*that the weak, or those that live well, send not the physician nor his solicitation care.* In short, the pastor must not yield to timidity, anxiety, and neediness, whereby he would trouble the internal peace of his flock, and render them unable to attend to the Divine voice in their interior. The same thing is intimated in the passage of the Rule where it says that the Superior must know that he has taken upon himself the care of inferior souls, but not to tyrannize over the sound or good-living ones. This St. Benedict exemplifies by the example of the Shepherd, who leaves the ninety-nine in the desert that need not his solicitude to seek the sheep that was weak and needed his care. Much more to the same effect will be found in this chapter. The same thing is also expressed in the first chapter of the Rule, when St. Benedict, speaking of the Abbot's office, says that the Abbot's solicitude should be for the negligent, unquiet, or vicious. Hence the account the pastor must render is to correct those that do amiss, and to let alone those who conduct themselves well, but by keeping himself about them overmuch, he should rather hinder than promote their spiritual good. He should presume that his sleep do well both interiorly and exteriorly, unless it appear otherwise by exterior signs. For it is impossible for a soul to be in a bad way interiorly without manifesting it necessarily. For the



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Superior, without such indications, to keep himself and trouble his subjects about the interior workings of the Holy Spirit would be to expose himself and them to great confusion and peril. For these internal matters are not easily explained, so that some might easily arise as the part of one or the other. Besides, the disciples and best learned soul knows how to correspond with the Divine Spirit and His impulses, but they find it most difficult to give an account thereof. Nay, she may even be ignorant of the nature of her internal motions, yet at the same time know in practice how to correspond with the Divine guidance, however secret and subtle. Indeed, though the soul be even very learned, she may have much difficulty in stating her sense and internal exercises in a way to be intelligible to another, unless he be experimentally more experienced than herself in such matters. Hence the best course for the pastor to pursue in the discharge of his office is to keep himself about his flock only when by external signs he judges it to be expedient; otherwise he has been quick and let his flock enjoy peace, especially if he sees that they are under the conduct of the Holy Spirit. To a word, the pastor must see that he does not dispute and trouble souls that would do better left alone, as well as that he correct those whom he finds doing amiss.

Having stated various objections alleged against a true spiritual course, Dame Gertrude, in one of her "Confessions," continues as follows: "Thus and in an infinite number of other ways, as is known to Thee, have I experienced, and come from them, when I would have expected, by the place they hold, to have



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humblest me in my desire of making in Thee to the utmost ability of my soul. And well might they do it, seeing they were also in places where they were bound to refer to me what was said in vision to my life, which I must confess is very much; not yet I humble in Thy help. They, therefore, I thank with souls that in these days would lead a spiritual life. But those who close all their lips in Thee, my God, shall remain as silent as a rock, and in Thee, Who art their strength and Refuge, they may persevere and content, having the testimony of their conscience to be their comfort amidst all oppositions and contradictions. But the greatest objection which I have heard—and it is one that goes nearest to my heart—is when I read or hear that it is perilous to walk the way of love, and that (as some would seem to grieve to soul in any other course or state in such peril as a soul who grows harmful to the church. But let them allow that who will, for my part, I will shut my eyes from hankering to such men, because walking in my place, even my, more secure, even pleasant, than the way of love. For did the way of love it cannot be called if the soul seek in it anything but Thee alone, which those men would make it impossible for one to do. But Thou knowest, my God, that in this Thou art wronged. . . . And let not souls, therefore, I beseech Thee, by any such fight be brought into fear of walking this most noble and middle way, but let us sing in hope: "Domine illuminatio mea, et vita mea quae est vita?" "O Domine, quae contra nos?" Let us proceed humbly, till we be permitted to enjoy Thee, the God of Gods, in Him, where Thy praise shall be perfected in us. These



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thing, therefore, remembering and assuming before
Thee, do strengthen my soul, that it fall not from the
meditation which is provided upon Thee. To beseech
and encourage my soul by speaking and writing them to
Thee was the cause why these things have been written
by me, which I read when I cannot find some indis-
position in body or mind otherwise think upon Thee.
And when I am overwhelmed with any misery, it be-
cometh most valuable by having this conference with
Thee, Who never didst leave me, for which all glory be
given to Thee. Who art my Lord and my God, blessed
for all eternity. Amen. *Altitudo* 1^o
Although all suffering consists in a contraction of
the natural will, still, there are degrees of suffering.
The lowest degree, speaking generally, is about external
things, as loss of worldly goods, of kindred and friends.
Suffering in these matters is of the least moment,
especially in religious persons. Next in importance
come bodily suffering, wants, and inconveniences (these
a man feels more than external losses, as Socrates well
understands). For when he had lost his wife and
children on Job, he said to God: "But for fear
The Lord and I will not be separated, and I will
not be separated from Thee, and I will not be separated
from Thee, and I will not be separated from Thee."
The third degree of suffering
is in the matter of fame, honour, and esteem.
Generally speaking, a man values these more than
the former, and would sooner suffer loss of worldly
goods or endure bodily pain than be touched in his
honour or in the esteem of others. The fourth degree
obtains when the matter is solely internal, and is referred,
not to the three causes of suffering already alluded to,
but to God—as to whether God is pleased or displeased



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About a particular matter. This suffering is more in-
tense than the other three kinds of suffering by how
much the more pressing and returns the soul for
this suffering does not fall upon any but such as have a
desire to please God, and fear to offend Him or lose
His grace. As this is a purely internal and spiritual
matter, the soul is not so sure that she is acting rightly
as she is, or may be, about her sufferings in the other
three degrees which relate to sensible things. For
instance, when one is in a state of bodily pain, one
knows at once there can be no sin in it, because it is
sent by God; but internal matters not being so sensible,
the soul has not the same assurance that she is right,
though she has ground enough for hope, and that
suffice. This want of perfect assurance, though the
providence of God, for the soul's good, for it causes a
far greater and more violent resistance, and an amount
of the matter itself being so spiritual, she suffering
penitence deeper to the quick in the soul.
This is exemplified by the three great internal suffer-
ings by which Dame Gertrude was afflicted, and to
which allusion has already been made. They were the
temptation to repeat certain matters of her former
confessions, desolation and obscurity of soul, and the
temptation to abandon her spiritual course. In all
three there remained a natural fear and want of assur-
ance, which rendered her resignation very great and
reverent. This is apparent in the first of these
sufferings. For how could there but be much fear in
her soul when her natural reason seemed to demonstrate
or dictate contrary to her reason, directed by grace?
Then in the second temptation, arising from desolation



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and obscurity, the soul draws out of them a fear that
she is not in the grace of God, or that she offends God
in many actions, whereas she does not. Thus the soul
has no assurance that she is pleasing God, but rather
much fear to the contrary, so that her only remedy is
resignation, and hope against hope (upon some grace).
So also in Dame Gertrude's third temptation, the
temptation to abandon her spiritual course. Dame
Gertrude could not but have much fear as to how she
stood with God, on account of the familiarity of her sin
and disposition, the delinquency of her conscience, her lack
of hearing, and want of the alms of assurance. Now,
suppose the Superior were to command her to pay no re-
gard to Divine inspirations (a thing no Superior would do
expressly), but to regard his own orders only, she would
rightly disobey him, but at the same time she would
experience some sense of fear in disobedience? For her
view of obedience, made at her profession, being an ex-
ternal, sensible act, would naturally press upon her the
obligation to obey, whereas the Divine inspirations were
purely spiritual and insensible. But such was Dame
Gertrude turned to her own good, for they afforded
abundant matter for resignation.
Thus it may be seen how God provided Dame
Gertrude with most precious and profitable trials, be-
yond anything that could be imagined by others, who
commonly know nothing of their neighbours beyond
what comes under their external senses.
It was to these three temptations, I think, that Dame
Gertrude referred in the words cited above, where she
says: "I find that God, in and by the exercise of prayer



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vehement temptations are presented to the soul and overcome, such find much reason to humble my soul that all the creatures in the world could never have found them out for me, and also words in each internal cross," etc. ("Apostasy.")¹ Oho, too, did Dame Gertrude tell me that eternal crosses, even though of some weight, were as nothing to her internal afflictions. Indeed, so heavy were they that, as she tells us in one of her "Confessions," they almost consumed her strength. "What shall I resolve," she says—"for this Thy infinite benefits bestowed on me? Verily, if I should be deprived by all the world, as I justly deserve to be, and should have and feel the pains of all that ever have suffered for Thee, and should be shut up in a place which were only big enough to contain me, and were debased of the Sacraments (if which I believe and acknowledge myself to be unworthy), by which grace is usually abundantly imparted by Thee, and were held for a reprobate by all that are most esteemed and respected by me, yet this were little to endure in requital of this benefit, which I here have recounted before Thee. This I find with so much joy that it is a shame in those difficulties which are known only to Thee, and which would, if I were not exceedingly helped by Thee, quite overwhelm me. For, as it is well known to Thee, thy do oftentimes make my strength to decay, so that I seem to be left without so much as is sufficient to go even about the house. But when I have been thus dealt with by Thee, I have been wretched

¹ Confession in Volume II.
² The benefit here referred to is that of having been brought into the eyes spiritual cross.



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established more frequently to praise Thee." This did kindly and provide a suitable for voluntary mortifications of which Dame Gertrude was incapable, her body having barely enough strength to serve her spirit. Moreover, internal mortifications have the advantage of being less subject to vanity and pride, because less visible to the eyes of others. Besides, these mortifications are sweeter, being sent by God, and not assumed, and being internal, they partake of that purity of which St. Paul says it is profitable in all things. In one of Dame Gertrude's "Confessions," written probably at the very time when she was seized with her last illness, these are words which clearly indicate how well she was inwardly disposed for death, and fully resigned and confident in God. These are her words: "I will therefore sing unto Thee every day and judgment all the days of my life, wishing always that Thy will, which is justice itself, may be wholly and perfectly accomplished in me. Thy will should prevail. Let me live as long as it pleases Thee, or die in the very beginning of those my desires to love; need sickness or health make or impeding death prevent or obstruct good here, or that by all the world I be despised; in fine, in all do with me as it is most to Thy honour. For in this I place all my comfort and happiness, faithfully to serve Thee, and to be little or great in Thy eyes, as seemeth best to Thee. For I count it a

¹ Fellowship in the work in the present edition of this.
² This is the last of Dame Gertrude's "Confessions." The previous one was written as laid in the Feast of St. Mary Magdalen, and it was on the sixth or sixth that Dame Gertrude was taken ill.



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sufficient reward for all that I shall ever be able to do or suffer that Thee hast admitted me, unworthy wretch, into a place of living where I may know and see with my eyes how to serve and please Thee. This, I say, is more than can be desired by me. For to serve Thee is an honour above all that can be imagined by me. Yet without any regard of recompense it is due to Thee that I serve and love Thee with all the forces of my body and soul, which great I may now begin to do and persevere therein till my end, that I may for Thy own sake obtain the happiness eternally to praise Thee."

This Dame Gertrude wrote thus, not out of vanity, but in humility, for the comfort of her soul, may be gathered not only from the manner in which she expresses herself, but also from this: that no one was aware of what she had written—another regard, not the correspondent to whom I have often alluded, nor anyone else. Her "Confessions" become known only after her death, when they were discovered among her papers. From these writings we may gather what were Dame Gertrude's spirit, virtues, and spiritual knowledge in the following private points:

First, Dame Gertrude had an habitual, immediate regard of God, which is contemplation. This was the root of all the good that was or could be in her. Her contemplation was a life in spirit created above the troublesome distractions of corporeal, particular images, so that she could at all times with facility and immobility trust with God, and was capable of recognizing, observing, and pressing the Divine inspirations.

¹ By *meditation* is meant the direct operation of the will without the cooperation of sensible objects.



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Secondly, by this means Dame Gertrude perceived or much increased the three theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity.

Thirdly, she grew in humility.

Fourthly, she improved the purity of her intention in all that she did, or abstained from, or suffered.

Fifthly, she increased in the virtue of obedience to God, a virtue which implies a total subjection and resignation to Him in all that concerns soul and body; obedience to human authority, and to all creatures according to Divine ordinance; and conformity of her will in all things to the Divine will, wherein consists the consummation of all virtues.

Sixthly, from this resignation proceeded confidence in God, a confidence which can be derived or obtained only by such total resignation.

These virtues, which are general and contain all particular virtues, such as patience, and for the common good, etc., were much improved by Dame Gertrude's contemplation and communion with God, as I shall show presently from her writings, especially from her "Confessions," which may properly be called prayer, prayer being taken in the general sense of a converse with God by love or other manner of worship. This kind of prayer disposes us to her virtues better than any external deeds or conducts, for true virtue consists only in the interior, or in external conduct in so far as it proceeds from interior virtue. For if the intention be truly virtuous, then likewise are the external deeds and sufferings proceeding from it truly virtuous and meritorious. How, then, can we know the inward disposition and state of Dame Gertrude's soul better

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that by perusing her interior life, which she says have in her "Confessions," as in the very sight of God? Men in their external carriage frequently pretend to be different from what God sees them to be; but the soul that speaks to God believes that in the things it simply saith it saith truly and fully. Hence these "Confessions" of Dame Gertrude not only manifest the condition of her interior, but they also show the actual interior exercise of her virtues in prayer. For, as I have intimated, the "Confessions" were, for the most part, actual prayer and an exercise of her interior virtues. I will therefore make some observations founded on Dame Gertrude's writings, by which we may quickly and exactly know her virtues and her state. And as all true virtues have their principal relation towards God, so of all knowledge none is so necessary, especially in the spiritual life, as the knowledge of that God to be. I will therefore first show what Dame Gertrude's knowledge of God was, what she understood God to be, and then I will speak of her virtues as disclosed in her writings, for her interior health and exercise of virtue best show the worth of her external actions and sufferings, as these external things take all their goodness from the quality of the interior acts.

The knowledge which Dame Gertrude had of God was of that kind which spiritual writers declare to be the truest knowledge of which we are capable in this life, and that is by way of negation—that God is none of those things which we can imagine or conceive with our understanding. That such was her knowledge and apprehension of God is evident from a favorite passage of hers from "The Following of Christ," in which she

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author declares that God is above all that can be imagined or denied by men, etc. (Book III, chap. xvi). These words are well worth reading, and may give us, as they give to Dame Gertrude, a better knowledge than we might otherwise obtain of what God is, in Whom our happiness consists, and towards Whom we ought ever to aspire in this life. As this passage was constantly in Dame Gertrude's mind, so also was it most profitable to her, for it taught her to tend infinitely towards God, and prevented her from halting in any created thing. By this means she avoided illusions and perils which are incurred only by resting in created things, or in things inferior to God Himself, Who is infinitely above all. Hence there can never be said in this life, but a constant further tendency toward God. This Dame Gertrude well understood. Moreover, Dame Gertrude acquired knowledge of herself, which is much to the credit of so young a maiden, though discipline she was also aided from above.

Though both nature and faith teach us self-knowledge, yet right as so obscure that unless further illumination is given us from above, we abide in a mist. Dame Gertrude's knowledge was not merely speculative; it was also experiential—a knowledge which is much clearer than the former. It was non-habitual, and not merely transitory, as is the knowledge derived from meditation.

Knowing God thus, Dame Gertrude must also have known herself and all creatures, that they were nothing of themselves, but were wholly dependent on the one absolute Being—that is, on God. Such knowledge is the only ground and cause of true humility and of all

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Divine virtues. Anyone intimate with Dame Gertrude, or attentively perusing her writings, would at once see that she had a knowledge of God beyond what she could have acquired by natural abilities or education. As to Dame Gertrude's other virtues, I will refer the reader to her writings, especially her "Confessions," wherein her virtues shine forth so remarkably that no explanation or commentary is needed. Indeed, even if no attempt had been made to write her life, her virtue, spirit, and the quality of her exercises would have been sufficiently disclosed in her "Confessions" to give abundant satisfaction to others, and honor for herself and to God by means of her.

CHAPTER XX
 DAME GERTRUDE'S MANNER OF PRAYER AT THIS TIME

The noble propensity of which I have spoken at such length, urges the soul to seek after God intimately, and consequently to strive to be simple. First, it moves her to seek simplicity of soul, a demolition of all created images, which alone render her capable of immediate union with the Divine simplicity. Secondly, the propensity urges her to seek after the simplicity of the pure Divinity, abstracted from all bodies or created images. Hence the soul will admit of any devotion, for this must consist of sensible images or of the due adoration of the essence in a stepping stone way, and will not tarry there, but pass by means of it to the Divinity, which is void of image. Indeed, the propensity will not allow the soul to rest in even the noblest image that has ever been created, the image of the humanity of our Blessed Saviour. For the soul (in some cases) through her strong propensity, is unable to use the image of the humanity of our Saviour as all as a way to the Divine simplicity. This was the case with Dame Gertrude. In other cases we find the image used only in time of necessity to attain to the Divine sim-

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plidity. This is why souls with a strong propensity do not always relish or abide in meditation on the humanity of our Saviour, or pursue prayer to the Saints, or the actual remembrance of the dead, or other specific exercises which necessarily involve the use of corporeal images. A soul, therefore, that has reached a spiritual state by the exercise of simplicity, even though she should require the aid of one of the aforementioned exercises at the beginning of her prayer, will not tarry in the exercise, but will speedily renounce the image evoked, and enter into the simple Divinity. This the soul accomplishes by virtue of her propensity, which ever urges her to seek the Divine simplicity as the object of her repose and happiness. Though in our Saviour the Divinity was united to a body, it is in truth a distinct thing; the Divinity of our Lord is what the soul desires to, and to which the propensity ever urges her. Our Blessed Saviour intimated as much in these words: "If I do not go the Father will not come to you" (John xvi. 7). The "I" was His corporeal humanity; the "Father" was the simple Divinity, which could not be perfectly possessed and enjoyed till the corporeal image was removed. "Like covers like," says the philosopher, and so the spiritual soul of man, the seat of the propensity, differs from the noblest and most perfect of its kind, the Divine Spirit. He being infinite, the finite spirit of man may unite and fill itself with Him and in Him, in a way it cannot with other things, because the latter are limited and finite, so that the soul is soon wearied of them. Besides, things of another kind or nature are not the proper food and pasture of a spirit. Thus the Divinity is the infinite, profound centre or resting-place

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of man's soul, to whom all other things, especially sensible things, are narrow and unsuitable.

The Divinity, moreover, is the proper, vast element, wherein the soul should find life, and an infinite life, but when out of this element, the soul is like a whale that has been stranded in a brook: the great creature has not space enough to swim or plunge in its waters. Hence it ever desires the ocean, which, for its depth and wideness, is capable of containing it and millions of others. Here these huge creatures find no bottom, but can swim in all directions, and enjoy security from all danger; for here they are in their element, and in all danger, in their own kingdom. Thus does the contemplative soul, in virtue of her propensity, ever aspire to her centre and proper element, the simple, light Divinity. She rests not in creatures, nor in their images, for they are not her element nor her proper centre. She thirsts after the spaciousness and infinity of God, whom alone she can have her fill and be secure from all perils. Nothing can touch or harm a soul while she is immersed in the Divinity. Thus one may observe in Dame Gertrude's writings, both prose and verse, that when she was occupied immediately with the Divinity, she showed herself to be in her proper element, happily, peacefully walking, swimming, and, as it were, gliding herself in its bosom. This is hinted at in some of her verses, of which the following is an example:

I desire no temple nor pen
 For to dwell in thy grace
 In which ocean I dwell away
 In thousand ways

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If we would do unto ourselves,
And do things as they were,
It would be without our souls,
For we cannot act by
Usages in our Centre here,
To which we must needs be,
Ready as proper thus to us
As for us ourselves.
Oh! let us therefore love our God,
For we perceive how we love Him;
And let us our souls seek nothing else
But in this love to serve.
Till we, absorbed by His sweet love,
Surrender from Whom we serve,
Where we shall meet into that love
Which breathes on us same.
Further on she says:
Oh! let us, as the other means
That would be our life,
Be aware not to lose at all
Which into This dark side.
When Dame Gertrude treats of created things, however noble, as the humanity of our Lord, apart from His Divinity, or any of the Saints, you will at once feel how she is restrained and cold in comparison with her language when speaking of the pure Divinity, towards which the propensity ever impels the soul as to her proper centre and resting-place. Nevertheless, at first, till God calls the soul to travel immediately with the Divinity, she must be content to abide, as a necessary preparation, in some kind of use of corporeal images; otherwise she will spoil everything, and never attain it.

rightly to the exercises of the pure Divinity in which contemplation consists. Dame Gertrude's exercises, therefore, were necessarily at first accompanied with the use of corporeal images, though not quite in the way they are used by those who discourse liberally on our immediate acts, but in another manner. For how could she think of love, or of God, or of anything else but by means of sensible images? But once come to contemplation, there is no use for images, because the exercise consists only of a blood motion of the will, without remembrance of images, or sense of an habitual impulse from the propensity, aided by grace.
The prayer which I called sensible exercises must not be confounded with what is termed sensible devotion. The difference is implied by Dame Gertrude, who writes in her "Confessions": "Although I found little of that which is called sensible devotion," etc. And more than once she told me she was little acquainted experimentally with sensible devotion. The difference between sensible affection and sensible devotion lies in this—that the latter is wholly confined to the sensible nature, and the insensitive soul is, as it were, drowned in it, so that she is little, if at all, spiritually enlightened as regards herself, but is rather wholly darkened. But Dame Gertrude made her a great deal in her sensible nature, which having produced a little devotion towards God after the fashion, the propensity was carried up into the insensitive soul, in which the rest of her meditation was exercised without further use of her sensible nature. The letter provided her with a very merely whereby to ascend into the spirit in which she was drawn by her propensity; for the propensity which is in the in-

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to its effect—the mortification of the inordinate natural affections. But those who have an interior propensity and make use of it in time subdue their inordinate affections, and their sensible nature is subjected to the guidance of the spirit. Vocal prayer and other corporeal exercises need being actual contemplation than body to elevate the soul higher in contemplation than would be possible without them. Hence, in such cases the spirit impels the body to exercise its devotion by tongue or other exercise, and thus increases the facility, brightness, and pleasure with which it prays.

It would be well, perhaps, to remind here a little more fully Dame Gertrude's first steps in prayer.

First, it will be remembered that she could not discourse or otherwise raise her affections by resolving images or considerations in her mind, on account of her propensity or some other secret cause.

And, secondly, as she was of an affectionate disposition, she was easily moved to love when any suitable matter was set before her. This she expresses in the following lines:

And when we see the word is writ,
It smelt a sweet smell,
But that word I love in,
Hark! I was my prayer,
Nothing so sweet to be heard
If it be not of love,
But that I cannot it more see
My nature to move.

The transference of her affections, which before had been largely centred on herself and creatures, wholly to God is thus expressed in the following verse:

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And shall my soul by resolution bow,
Which is a never rest,
Before men here where it is lost
That where I only rest?

No, no, my God! but rather let
Each word be to me
A means to raise my soul and
To love more devotedly.

I will just now that Dame Gertrude was easily moved to love. Let me illustrate this by an example. Let us suppose that she wished to reflect upon those words addressed to God: "O most amiable being, and only desired Good!" Such words would usually reflect and excite to more her affection. Indeed, the more mention of love was often enough, like the sound of the word itself, to a man peculiar with slight increase has done to drink. Thus when reflecting on such words as these, which I quote from Dame Gertrude's own writings, "O Love, Love, Love! when shall my soul be resolved up as thou, that I may deliver me, from, and thus enlighten but my God Himself! Who is my Hope and Mercy?" she was fit to be moved with love. Therefore supposing it to be the time of recollection she would break into acts of internal love, meditation, and devotion, and her will towards God. But this attitude must be understood to be only at such times when her being was not interrupted for it, and with the help of those affections she had cultivated from various authors or had learned for herself.

Thus, chiefly the manner in which Dame Gertrude used these affections was this: She read over and reflected upon the affections, and presently and easily

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her sensible affections were moved. But the motion did not stop there, but was instantly carried up into the superior soul, in virtue of her propensity, which by heretics, and ever leaves towards itself and God. The affection having arrived there, the superior soul, at it were, led itself inwardly towards God, and remained in God, and in the finding and enjoyment as long as the virtue of the motion lasted, which was only for a very short time. This ended, she would again turn to her book and take another affection, or she might present itself to her mind, and act as before. Thus she continued, having new affections as often as required, till the time of her resolution was all spent. Such was Dame Gertrude's practice of prayer, and it produced a recollection of soul and a capacity for internal light, which served her for all that concerned her good. It was an exercise that neither Dame Gertrude nor I could sensible devotion, as generally understood, because she never remained plunged in sensible devotion, but was carried into devotion of the intellective soul, and this exercise is spiritual, and not sensible or corporeal. After long practice in this exercise, and in virtue of it, her superior soul came to be habitually well affected towards God, so that she needed no longer her collection of sensible affections. She was able to exercise her superior soul with the affection proper to it and immediately, without any sensible affections. This state is true contemplation, for it is a prompt, easy, clear, immediate converse of the intellective soul with the Divine, apprehended fully according to the nature of faith. Here the propensity held the sensory and dominion over all corporeal images.

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whereas before its demission was imperfect through the excess of inordinate affections, which cause troublesome corporal images or distractions, so that it was, as it were, kept under fetters in a kind of restraint, and could not work with that liberty, facility, and scope it enjoyed now that the said impediments were removed. It was ever pure and the same propensity, but has now acquired more strength than formerly. Her propensity, of its own strength and vitality, she thus signifies in the following lines:

Oh, say to those as misery is,
Oh, guide of mine spirit,
As to your God,
Whom I love I adore.

Dame Gertrude in her writings, speaking perhaps from experience, shows what courage a soul who would persevere in a contemplative course must have on account of the difficulties and opposition she is likely to find within herself and from without. You have heard what difficulties Dame Gertrude encountered in finding a way and longing to "I found temptations that sought to draw her into the state of nature. Similar difficulties are met by all who would persevere this way.

What chiefly supports them in this propensity, aided by the grace of God. They may get more encouragement from within by the consciousness of eternal bliss pursuing the same course—a help which Dame Gertrude obtained. Then, united in one Divine Spirit, and being, as the Scriptures say, of one heart and one mind, these souls help the others one another, the weaker by propensity strengthened and comforted by the stronger. "If it is better," says Ecclesiasticus (chap. vi.), "that two

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should be together than one, for they have the advantage of their society: if one fall, he shall be supported by the other. Who is able that is alone? For when he falleth, he hath none to lift him up. And if two lie together they shall warm one another: how shall one be warmed? And if a man prevail against one, two shall withstand him: a threefold cord is not easily broken" (Eccles. iv. 9-12). Though some persons may regard such conduct as foolish or fanatical, it was not so, but was founded in the "bond of charity." Scarcely ever is such a bond to be found among the relations of other ways. Their senses and notions are as diverse as their persons. Indeed, had not Dame Gertrude had the company and encouragement of her director, it would have been much harder for her and her Sisters to have held on firm fast to last in the face of all the opposition that there has been. But God, Who begins, has also consummated His work. Indeed, Dame Gertrude herself was a great encouragement to the others. In this case was verified what is said in the Acts of the Apostles, that the work which was of God shall not be destroyed by man. All the malice and envy of death cannot prevail against a course sustained by God and blessed towards Him. The supplicating, praying, and communication, therefore, is to be attended only to the Divine disposition and working, and not to any human creature.

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DAME GERTRUDE ATTAINS TO CONTEMPLATION BY
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We have seen from Dame Gertrude's own writings that she did her remarkable spiritual Superior did not understand her aright. There was one point particularly to which this observation applies, and upon which Dame Gertrude remained more than once to me, and that was concerning prayer. Her Superior, perceiving how much she was engaged in external affairs and conversations, advised her to give a longer time to mental prayer. But Dame Gertrude saw plainly that she could not do more than she did already; nor could she foretell the hour, especially in the afternoon. She was able to pray best, as it were, by spirit, with a pause between—partly because she could not digest much at a time, and still more on account of the weakness of her head, which would have suffered if she had acted otherwise than she did.

Proceeding in this manner, Dame Gertrude obtained clear, easy, efficacious resolutions, which fully satisfied her soul. Moreover, she saw that it was God's will that she should act in this manner. To have forced herself to longer prayer out of her own head, or at

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the indignation of another, would have frustrated the Divine working in her soul by her, and have destroyed her head and health and ruined her spirit. She therefore did not enter her conduct in this and in some other matters upon the advice of her Superior—an advice which proceeded only from his own imagination, and was not warranted by any legitimate mode of life. Long and daily experience had taught Dame Gertrude what, like all true long-time spiritual prays; and that she meant chiefly or only to preserve the Divine light, will, or soul, which in time grew to be an immense light, more than once in conversation with me she expressed approval of the saying of Trinité: "It is as easy for an inferior soul to discover Divine calls as it is to distinguish the right hand from the left." So, as Dame Gertrude herself expressed it, "the son from the moon." The truth of these sayings, and the manner in which they should be taken, will be unfolded hereafter.

The prayer with which Dame Gertrude began her course, as we have seen, was the prayer of sensible affection. In this she continued until she attained to prayer in spirit, which is contemplation. In substance there is no difference between the prayer of one soul and another, when they have arrived at contemplation; for the working of all contemplatives is spiritual, ascending from the same cause or ground, the above-mentioned property (called by grace), which works to and by the will, desiring and directing it towards God. This work is common to all contemplative souls. The difference lies in the intensity or greatness of the impulse, and partly in the temple of the sensation.

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and retirement from noise and corporeal matters. These qualities will depend on the progress the soul has made in spirit, the time and industry she has given to the matter, the greatness of the propensity, and the measure of grace received for it. All these circumstances considered, it is very probable that Dame Gertrude arrived soon at contemplation, though I am not certain how soon; for her director was not curious on the point, nor had she any doubt or reason to speak to him about it. Still, she would say sometimes that her prayer was such that she could not well express it, especially to those who were inexperienced, and that was a sign that her prayer was contemplation. For contemplative prayer, being spiritual, is not easily explainable; but inferior forms of prayer, being sensible in some, are easier expressed by sense and language.

That Dame Gertrude arrived at contemplation, and arrived soon, seems to be demonstrated also by her writings. But whether she was subjected to the discipline to which she so often alludes in her writings, I cannot tell. It may be that she was, for she may have been unable at first to get fully out of the natural quality of her disposition, which is the root and cause of such obscurity. But it is such that have come to the state of perfection (which is not all that a passive contemplation) denudation and obscuration do not proceed from a natural cause or the quality of their disposition, for they habitually dwell in a state above the ordinary condition of nature; but the obscuration proceed from a more supernatural cause, by the special working of God, at such times and in the manner which He sees will conduce to the humiliation and good of

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the soul. Indeed, it is recognized as a principle among doctors that grace does not destroy nature, but rather accommodates its operations to the natural qualities of the individual, in so far as they are good. And of themselves they are good: what is evil in them has come from the corruption of mankind through sin, since he fell from the state of original justice. Grace, then, tends to remove what is distorted and corrupt in our nature, and leaves the good still in it, yet even works upon it and increases it.

The spiritual exercises of Dame Gertrude, therefore, did not tend to diminish her affections towards God and creatures, for in itself it was natural and good; but the exercises continued to remove what was distorted, or aversion of self-love and self-seeking, and to raise her affection to Him, God more purely, and wholly to apply itself towards Him. Hence, when her exercises had given more spiritual grace was able to make good use of the affection of her disposition, and brought it to center in her exercise towards God: the intention of nature being purified and accommodated to the intention of the Holy Spirit, which was directed towards God for Himself. Thus, grace aiding and directing the propensity, raised and turned the soul to all her acts to intend God purely for Himself, though intending at the same time her happiness with Him.

Although Dame Gertrude's spirituality somewhat altered the activity of her imagination and other senses, it did not destroy them, but reduced them to good order by applying them towards the spiritual and true love of God, so that it might be said of her: "Et facta est in corde eius semper in me" (Gen. 1, 2). Hence it will be seen

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that when Dame Gertrude had attained to contemplation, her affectionate nature and the activity of her imagination or other senses still remained, but were brought into subjection to the spirit, and made to serve it in due order.

We have seen that Dame Gertrude was full of fervent work of various kinds and in other ways beyond her mind—clear proofs of her activity. But most other contemplative souls are not usually so active as she was either before or after she attained to contemplation. Her writings full of which were written after she attained to contemplation are full of natural, sensible affections towards God; and so likewise were her talks and words with others. But her affections were now more rectified and full of grace. Her affectionate disposition is thus alluded to in some verses written by her in her latter days:

For sweet love in other times,
How can I number find,
Her only way of love,
By love to me assigned!

And when on this world's work,
It yields a silver sound,
But if the sweet I cannot see,
Methinks I wait my ground.

By this it will be understood why Dame Gertrude so often says in her writings that her way to God was and must be by love, and that she in no way retained, but, on account of her nature and the quality of her spirit, advanced an opposite course, which, as she mentioned, would draw her into a kind of servile fear that would utterly deject her spirit, and these four in. In this,

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she believed that any other course would have made her deeply subject to all the miseries of her nature, as she had sufficiently experienced, and would have undermined her health, which, God knows, at least was the least that sufficed for the needs of her spirit and the service of God.

Besides, in itself and of its own nature love is a nobler and more suitable passion for the perfect love of God than fear, which implies much less familiarity with, and even a certain distance from, God. Whence, too, of their own nature are ever fearful and affectionate. Hence the passion of love speaking of women generally, should be promoted, and the passion of fear mortified and restrained rather than increased.

Nothing but the exercise of love had Dame Gertrude by other herself out of the miserable condition of nature wherein she was formerly plunged and almost buried. In particular she had of her could bring her out of her trouble, but rather fear plunged her more deeply into it, putting out the eyes of her intellective soul, and thereby depressing her will, so that both understanding and will had been utterly dejected. Her way, therefore, was to be led by love, and not by fear, as she declared in the following letter she addressed to me: "I must do that which I am able to do for love and not from fear. You know upon what terms you found me. Verily, I was out of hope of ever seeing merry days, and have had more a night's waking upon bare or dross, in some other place, or that I had never been here. This was partly out of the scrupulous humor I was in, and partly because I wanted instruction, which I had been very diligent to seek, of all the more that came before

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and by all the books I could lay hands on, and that would be to begin if I gave way to that which would draw me into dejection and fear. And though some slight consolation from your instructions, I can draw no such thing out of them, but find that you speak as much of me, than others, some allege that we are singular and consume others, but I think to instruct you draw me to some sincere love and respect to all men than you do, if they be rightly understood." Dame Gertrude consider the letter with these words: "And now, if our Father can discern anything, it will be done, for we know and respect them with sincere hearts, and bless the day that we ever see them."

I know that Dame Gertrude feared hell—some scholars if more than she did—but to think on it, however good her purpose, would have been more likely considering her nature and disposition to send her to hell than to deliver her from the danger of it. The same may be said of the consideration of death, judgment, and other matters calculated to excite fear. The consideration of all such matters was more beneficial than harmful to her. For all these reasons Dame Gertrude could say most truly that her way to God was the way of love, and not of fear.

In Dame Gertrude's hold that the way of fear tended to multiplicity and dejection of spirit, she composed a sort of Litany in honor of her as a preservative against such evil:

From multiplicity and dejection,
That would lead me out of my content,
Deliver me, Lord, with Thy benediction.
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The multiplicity here referred to was indeed manner that is itself was good, and even necessary for such not tending to contemplation. But for contemplation each doctrine is improper and a hindrance to the simplicity they seek after, and is too restrictive of that liberty of spirit which is necessary for contemplation. Hence St. Paul says that where the Spirit of our Lord is working in the soul there is, not must be, liberty, so that the Spirit may work freely. And the Spirit is not free to work till the soul be delivered from multiplicity, and become simple, then she has perfect liberty and is able to work toward God in perfection. Contemplation will discern what tends to simplicity and what does not tend to simplicity in multiplicity.

As for other souls that are not actually tending to simplicity, they (though perhaps both burned and devoted) do not well discern the multiplicity which is contained in matter that is very good; they admire such writings and willingly embrace what they teach, and with good reason. But contemplatives as much other such doctrine for their own as the former would it. Active souls, on the other hand, greatly desire for their own practice what such contemplatives, and with in such reason.

Dame Gertrude in many places¹ speaks of a *videtur*, which is nothing but being the soul from multiplicity and other impediments. Evidence, she says, is so absolutely necessary that, when the director concludes it and helps the disciple to obtain it, in vain is all the rest he can do for the soul as regards attaining to contemplation. The co-operation of the director consists

¹ "Amply"
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In pursuing the abstract theory of spirit, declared by St. Paul to be necessary in the passage just quoted and in the following, where he says: "If you are by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (Gal. v. 18). Indeed, for spiritual tendence toward God nothing helps so much to acquire simplicity as the doctrine of *videtur*. Nor is any advice more pertinent than to counsel the soul for matter that involves multiplicity, or to impose on her anything more than is already intended by nature or in other ways. When the soul has come to the abstract simplicity and liberality from all multiplicity, then is she in the proper and immediate disposition for union with the Divine simplicity, which is the consummation of all our exercises. The happiness of this life consists in such union as may be had in this life; the happiness of the future lies in the union which is proper to that life, and is the perfect, consummate, and superior happiness of the soul.

All contemplatives should tend toward happiness in this life (even though they may not attain to it) by means of simplicity which they and their director see to procure by all possible lawful means, abhorring as impediments all multiplicity and the occasions thereof.

But to return to Dame Gertrude's way of life, from which I have strayed. When she came to me and knew herself by reason of her spiritual course, she endeavored by love, like another Mary Magdalen, or like her patron, St. Augustine, to purge her soul from the guilt of former sins, for which she now felt great sorrow. She had, like all others, a twofold love—the

¹ According to the degree of happiness secured here, as will be the happiness of the future life, so does the degree of union both here and there.
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love of the indistinctive soul and the love of the sensible soul. Her love in the former was expressed by resignation and conformity of her will with the Divine will. This conformity, among other things, implies an aversion from all manner of sin. Love in her sensible soul was that natural, sensible affection which is felt in our superior nature. Now, both these loves required God for Himself, or it would not have been true love. There is no true love in sensible affection save in so far as it descends from a true love in the superior soul. Of this kind was Dame Gertrude's sensible love, when she had arrived at contemplation, the latter purifying her spiritual love and converting her sensible affection, which before was not turned to God, but rather to itself.

Dame Gertrude had also a sorrow both spiritual and sensible, but it was a sorrow proceeding from love, and that a true love; whereas a sorrow proceeding from an unrequited love is not from a true love of God, but from love of self.

In St. Mary Magdalen both these loves were rectified, by the love of the superior soul she contemplated the Divinity, and her will became conformed to the Divine will. By the love of her sensible nature she shed those abundant tears, and displayed other tokens of love towards the sacred humanity of our Saviour. This therefore said that such was forgiven her because of her great love. Each love regards both God and the sin, but God more than the sin; or rather the regard that the sinner had of her sin was in God, who was considered as the end of all, and the sorrow she had for her sin was for the love of God. St. Augustine also had both these loves in perfection. The love of his superior soul may be inferred from the height of his contemplation, and

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the rectified love of his sensible nature is abundantly declared in his writings, and especially at his death, when he shed many tears during the recital of the seven penitential Psalms. This sorrow was the sorrow of love, and not the sorrow of servile fear, or other sorrow founded in self-love.

Dame Gertrude was really moved to tears. Still, when she arrived at contemplation, she restrained herself, I think, as much as was possible, lest she should injure her health and head, which were already very weak.

It is well here to call to mind that sensible love which is contemplative descends from the spirit, whether it takes the form of fear or other corporal emotion, does not obscure the superior soul, nor hinder its light, but rather promotes its affections; whereas the sensible love of others, though in a manner directed towards God, rather darkens the superior soul than enlightens it, because the spirit is, as it were, drowned in their sensible nature, as though they consisted only of chiefly of corporal nature, without spirit, or life, or affection of spirit. But the love of contemplation, which I called true love, overcomes all the passions, which are sorrow, fear, hope, and the rest. Love is the noblest and the predominant passion, and is the true end of all the rest, for all of them intend love as their end and not content, so love conquers all. This is indicated in the following lines of Dame Gertrude, in which she expresses the attitude of a patient lover:

I feel him, then by some sign,
And thus I wait for him,
As if my own would have said
Some answer to them.

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How can this theme be waded my love,
When I remember
Answer were a burden on,
Whence I try not to feel?

Fear when, my Lord, my God and All,
From me and the
To I do love Thee as Thou wouldest,
The which shall at compare.

Dame Gertrude being interiorly converted (which was not perfectly accomplished till she entered her spiritual course), had a clear perception of the excesses of her former life, and particularly since she entered religion; and very feelingly she bewailed them, moved by love both in spirit and in sense, as may well be seen in many passages, of which the following is an example:

For if they do come to Thee,
The which did my unrepented soul,
Which was as like to love,
All grace and goodness of Thee hath
The which I have received,
By all our sins and unrepented souls
By which I love humbled.

Another reason why Dame Gertrude's corpse was the way of love arose from her propriety. Her propriety always drew her to an immediate regard of God, and ready to regard God for Himself, which is the truth and perfection of love. Her propriety would not permit her to entertain thoughts of her or other inferior considerations, but it led her to the simplicity of God Himself. For the consideration of created things could not be the love of God, because they were

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but common things, and the regard of them would have been in reference to herself, and for her own sake, and not principally to God; as they would not be the true love of God, but rather an exercise of self-love, though with a kind of relation to God.¹

Hence it may be seen that Dame Gertrude's way to God was by love, and for two causes. The one was on account of her affectionate disposition, which was more suited to the exercise of love than to any other passion, for no thoughts could move her towards God so efficaciously as those of love. The other cause was the direct and proper intention in the will of the intellectual soul, which ever draws the soul more and more into God and His love, which daily increases during life, if the propensity be duly exercised.

Dame Gertrude was very anxious in promoting interior ways for such as were capable of them. She walked in them herself, and judged them to be of the best, though she recommended also other good ways as right and profitable for those for whom they were proper. Indeed, she speaks as well of these ways and as hands of her own that in one place she writes thus: "Those who through the gift and grace of God have found and had an interior life will not condemn, much less condemn, those who speak against it, but will humbly themselves in all things, knowing that others who live unassisted

¹ It may be well to note that by true love of God Father Maker men are understood to mean prayer to God. Hence the particular love of God causes to be God for His own sake, with our direct adherence to infinite contemplation. Cf. "Contemplative Prayer" Book II, chap. 10, pp. 261, 262.

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from may be more pleasing to God than they, and that for many reasons which they may easily conceive, which yet do not hinder them in least, might not) from promoting the happy way they see in."

Dame Gertrude had an excellent judgment for discerning what books and matters best help such towards contemplation, what tends to produce simplicity in soul, or what multiplicity was a decided impediment to contemplation. Judgment she might well have from experience and by finding an interior life herself, where by she could easily discern what tended to simplicity and what to multiplicity in herself, and thus in other souls.

For her own part (and the same may be said for all other contemplatives), Dame Gertrude had no reliance on books, sermons, or instructions, that she would do to certain persons (not all of them) individuals, and might lawfully (if themselves) be omitted. She would have contemplated all in that they could concerning such things. Hence, the books and instructions that aimed for her were those that in general instructed and taught souls to observe their call from God about the different things. As to the practices that each individual soul should take up, none could teach her that. The soul herself must observe what is her call from God.

There are few books or preachers, unfortunately, that encourage or commend the observation of Divine calls, but either they omit to speak of them altogether or give instructions which hinder them—instructions tending to multiplicity rather than simplicity. Hence neither Dame Gertrude nor her Sisters took much notice

¹ "Aging?"
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of such books, and still less of sermons. But if they looked upon anything in a book that tended to an interior life, or to simplicity (which is the same thing), they would take note of it and embrace it, leaving other things alone as not concerning them. Indeed, nothing depicts a contemplative soul more than to hear exhortations and sayings that would limit or tie the soul down, or give her overmuch to things out of obligation, and without regard to what the spirit wishes or has a call or inspiration for, be it concerning the matter or manner of prayer, or any other kind of exercise.

It will now be understood what I meant when I spoke of contemplative and interior souls finding and enjoying God in the interior. I meant a certain retirement of the soul from the trouble and noise caused by sensible images, and the going of herself to an immediate, clear, quiet converse with God, and attraction towards Him. All this is done in contemplation. God is those found and enjoyed in the best manner that ordinarily is possible for the powers of man's soul, aided by grace in this life. This was Dame Gertrude's ordinary manner of finding and possessing God. The extraordinary way is more rare and supernatural, consisting of the infusion of God upon the soul as present.

Of the former state Dame Gertrude writes thus:

My soul, when thou art with Love,
Being thus thou art with Love,
Oh, how do I love, be content!
To be in His love, be content!
To His vision one may have
As often as you pray,
Into the state of the least,
Come again thou to divine.

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All men have God within them, for, as St. Paul says, "He lives in us and moves and lives in us" (Rom. viii. 10). But all do not find Him as enjoy Him after the manner of Dame Gertrude and other contemplatives. Others only enjoy God by grace, in common with all who are in a state of grace. But contemplatives find and enjoy God in a more intimate manner than others, who are much distracted and confused interiorly by the presence and omnipresence of sensible images.

There is still another finding of God in the interior, to which I have more than once alluded, that is far more sublime than ordinary contemplation. It is supernatural, and above the ordinary ability of man to attain to, for it depends upon the free-will of God. All that man is able to do is to work towards it, and to dispose himself for it. It is the intuition of God to which I refer, and is usually called a private contemplation, wherein God discovers Himself in a clearer manner than He does by the light of faith only, the light vouchsafed in ordinary contemplation. Here God manifests Himself by a certain special created genius, of which I can say no more, being a matter that passes my skill, and of which I am unworthy to treat.

One principal sign of the truth of these internal matters, when called in question, is the confidence of the accused person's conscience, provided he is pursuing an interior life and the exercises belonging to it—namely, serious daily recollections, and, on the other hand, the diffidence, or at least her slight confidence, on the part of the accuser. It is impossible but that an instructor must will discover the falsity of his interior life (if so it be) in course of time, especially if he be driven to look



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late himself by occasion of external objections raised against his way of life. He must at least have a doubt or just fear, and so no confidence. Hence he will be very loath to face a public and exact inquiry by Superiors or other lawful judges, being the doubt, he will probably see all the reason he can. "Empty" says the Gospel, "that doth knoweth his right, and cometh not in the light, that his work may not be found fault with" (John iii. 21). But when he is ready and courageous (yet in the face of the Lord) to come into publicity and to have the innermost recesses of his heart discovered and judged, and sees nothing in his conscience that he need be afraid or ashamed of, or that others can justly reprehend, this is a strong argument and token of the truth of his life. As the same Gospel says, "He that doth the truth cometh in the light, that his work may be manifest unto all who see the light" (v. 31).

Such was the condition of Dame Gertrude and her Sisters. They knew best the character and quality of their interior life; they had the best reason for knowing it. They were ready with a certain alacrity to have their interior life brought into the open, and they felt a kind of confidence which precluded the possibility of falsehood or error.

In the testimony of a good conscience, which alone can produce confidence, Dame Gertrude lived and died. Such assurance in her interior could not have been possible if she had not been fully convinced by the judgment and decision of her Superiors as regards both interior and exterior matters. It is true a soul might feel great reluctance to leave a course from



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which she had followed in such benefit (as was the case here), and have no hope of being put into a better one, or one even as good. Still, the intention that she had, and for Him to His satisfaction, and the power of Divine grace which she moves and however cold, of herself to true obedience, are above all. Though the soul at that might have some difficulty in obeying, yet, undergoing a just trial, the grace of God might, and it may be hoped would, assist her heart and make her obedient. God, indeed, often withholds the abundance of His grace even from such whom He loves most tenderly, all the occasion arises wherein they stand in evil and. Obstacles when He means to sleep such graces, He prevents the occasion, so that it may not fall upon the soul. Dame Gertrude more than most often "faute" words: "God rewards no works but His own." The meaning whereof is, that God does not reward works (even though good in their own nature) which we do merely out of the impulse of nature, as, for instance, those which we do out of our own heads, and undertake without a Divine call from God.* This

* Father Baker cannot here mean that no good work has any merit unless we are conscious of our intention, as he does not hold in it, for a Divine impulse to virtue prevents, except in those who have advanced to habitual contemplation, because the better often act in a disposition to take note of themselves. He appears to mean, when, that our actions are undertaken to be rewarded, so as by an external and/or immaterially through ignorance or other causes, or by natural inclination or impulse. And the more we allow other motives—natural inclinations—be mixed with the intention or even to take its place, the less satisfaction will be the action. Hence the Church bids us ask to see of her most



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attain chiefly from the want of purity of intention in our natural actions, for nature always faintly intends itself, and not God. But when we act naturally wholly to follow the Divine call, and shun from underhanding and interference, save only upon Divine calls and inspirations, then to God the end and only reason of our death. Moreover, He not only moves us to them, but He also moves us to intend Him as their end. Thus we are but God's instruments, and He is the beginning, continuation, and end of the work. Thus the work is truly God's work, and therefore worthy of an eternal reward. Whereas our own work, proceeding merely from ourselves, though good in their nature, are yet but natural works for nature, in all that it does, even in itself its own good and pleasure, and are not meritorious of an eternal reward. Hence the necessity of obeying the Divine call, for without it we cannot merit our eternal reward. But by the obedience to such Divine motions or calls (whether the calls are immediately from God, or by means of inspirations, love, or other obligation or necessity), the soul merits both grace and glory. One will natural grace or habitual intention to do all for God cause sufficient purity for merit, because it is nature that principally works in beautiful prayer. "Present, we beseech Thee, O Lord, our actions for Thy Holy Spirit, and carry them on by Thy precious assistance that every prayer and work of ours may always be such as Thee will be able to supply others." And also, do Thou bestow on natural impulses by the grace of Thy inspirations, that every prayer and work of ours may be begun and proceed from Thy impulse and command.

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those deeds of ours, as God will seek. Our intention, therefore, need be naturally or supernally directed to God. This can be only when we perform our actions in obedience to His will or call, and for His will and call. Acting then, we expect ourselves, or those ends which I called natural ends. The practice of such obedience to Divine calls cannot truly exist without the entire pursuit of perfection, a complete degree of abstraction, which consists in not meddling with things further than God demands of us, and other practices of mortification already alluded to, and which sufficed to make Dame Gertrude for other souls to follow her call from God. Let, then, those who have experienced the fruit of the practice of attending to Divine calls put aside their fears, and seek and proceed with all their industry what conduce so much to salvation for themselves and others. Furthermore, the work which God directs us to undertake are commonly brought by Him to a successful termination, according to the words spoken by His prophet (Isa. lx. 10): "My word shall stand as fire, and my word shall not return to me void, but I shall be victorious, and shall prosper in the things for which I send it." Thus, even by God's own promise, things undertaken at His word flourish the more there's shall prosper and come to their proposed end. Surely the reason why works undertaken by Churches and religions so often fail is not improperly because such works were not assumed or prosecuted under Divine inspiration or call, but upon some natural impulse or human end, which they did not discern, because they were not tending to a which would enable

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them to distinguish between a Divine call and a natural impulse. But, on the other hand, works which we undertake and pursue out of a Divine motion and intention God permits, provided we do not abandon our intention for natural or self-seeking ends. But when we undertake things out of our own hand (which is the impulse of nature working in us), God shows us to our own natural abilities, which often fail us for want of knowledge or other defect, and are unable to carry out our purpose. In place of success, we may sometimes receive, confusion, and shame. It is otherwise, however, as I said, when we act upon a Divine impulse. God's impulse is omnipotent in itself, and is able to render us, as it were, omnipotent as His instrument. Hence we should meddle with nothing but that God directs us to do by His internal or external call, performing all only as from Him and by His will, and then our death will be full of grace and satisfaction, and will in all instances obtain their desired effect in this life. Those who follow the practice of Divine calls do not often engage in many works and much business, as others do; but, because they undertake them, they merit much by their work, and they commonly bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Of such the Virgin Mary may have spoken when he said: "It is that it has as much as I have made." (Luce. xxviii. 14). He that is in few distractions is better able to discern Divine calls and put them into practice. Certainly, few undertakings are more likely to be brought to a conclusion than many, according to the saying: "The

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more things we are intent upon, the less attention is given to each."¹⁷
From what I have said, it will be understood that all work, whether great or little, that proceed from the Divine impulse are, as it were, Divine; other actions are not. Hence, from the abstinence, silence, and solitude of observers of Divine calls, being done in obedience to the Divine impulse, are likewise Divine works; whereas the deeds of others, however great in themselves or in appearance, or however difficult, are but as dust or chaff when brought to the touchstone of a Divine act or examination. But the works of true observers of Divine calls, of whom it is to be feared there are not few on this globe, will be the number when they are applied to the touchstone. Hence the reason of Dame Gertrude's words in her fourth "Confession," "The words, O Lord, are works"—that is, when God bids a soul under His guidance to do a thing, and of His word she acts about it, He will give her the ability to carry it through, and so to effect it. His work and His word proceed to be also work. Neither habitual grace nor an habitual intention suffices to render our human, natural deeds truly Divine in the sense already specified. Our deeds must proceed from an actual, or at least virtual, Divine call or impulse, which in practice those only can properly observe who seriously pursue recollection by some kind of mental prayer. In other words, those who do not permanently pray, together with constant abstraction, and freedom from solicitude and unnecessary thought about external matters, are incapable of observing and

¹⁷ "Finitio immensae naturae est signa aeternae."

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perceiving the Divine light and call by which the soul is taught what to undertake and what not to undertake with, the end she is to propose to herself—namely, God, and to obedience to His will and His voice and will. The last works done out of a Divine impulse are of as much merit as the greatest considered in themselves, because they proceed from one motive or cause, and tend to one and the same end—the Divine will and pleasure. Still, there may be circumstances in a work which will render it more meritorious than another, as when we find greater difficulty in it. By overcoming our difficulty and repugnance we acquire greater merit; and this is true in cases of abstinence and suffering, as well as of action.
Moreover, a deed done with greater fervor and pure intention of charity causes the act to be more meritorious, whether the work be great or little in its own nature. Still, each fervor and intention have their root and cause in the Divine impulse, the measure of which the soul cannot exceed.
God sometimes moves a soul under His guidance to enter on a matter which He does not intend to be carried out. This He does for the mortification or other good of the soul, or for the good of others. Still, the intention of God and of the soul herself is truly carried out; for God intended no more than what He enabled the soul to do, and the soul also intended to do no more than what God should enable her to do. Thus the soul proceeded in the matter with resignation and with the desire to do God's will in it, and not her own. Nor will she continue in the work longer than she finds it to be God's will, and is willing to continue any longer

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or continue that comes by it, or any difficulty that she may find in it; for she handles the business as God's work, not as her own; thus she is without self-seeking or affection to it. In this way should all observers of Divine calls act. Thus also did Dame Gertrude behave in the best of her power, as appears from words she uttered on several occasions. For instance, she says that she died not so much as with deliberation that anything should happen otherwise than it did. To quote her words: "And when I thought fit for the honour of God and the good of the convent, I did not fear any degree of difficulty that should happen to me in what I thought fit to be done. What I did out of other intention or natural inclination, I desired that God should purge me for it by any failure in the business He pleased." Was not this a resignation well worthy of one who faithfully followed Divine calls? "O you see in truth," that simple intended God! Show me another who can say with a good conscience what you have heard Dame Gertrude say, and I will maintain that he is as happy as she is, and that is very happy. For of whose happiness may we better possess than of a soul so sincerely disposed towards God's love, so anxious for the common good of God's house?
No wonder that a soul should be so wholly devoted, as was Dame Gertrude, to the observation and pursuit of Divine calls. For to what end, pray, did God call her—? for the matter of this, call any soul be required? Indeed, for no other end but to be able to attend to the Divine call better than he or she could have done in the world. And shall the soul called into religion for

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the purpose be departed from it? Hear what Dame Gertrude says on this point in her "Apology": "O religion! O no religion! where the knowledge of Eternity calls it, as it were, unknown, when it be in speculation. Or, perhaps through ignorance, it is persecuted, despised, obscured, derided, handled, sought to be pulled out by the roots, and kept out of the hearts of those that desire it and are capable of it. Surely God will raise all this as done to Himself, and revenge it in an extraordinary manner: among others, invincible ignorance causes this proceeding. But as to the verity of this doctrine and the general practice of it, God will never permit the gates of hell to prevail so far against it as to be able to extinguish it, it being the root and cause of all sanctity in His Church; however, He may permit it to be lost out of the hearts of some particular persons through their faultiness and the workings of others. O my God, abide with us forever! Let Thy gracious Spirit instruct us, direct us, and lead us in the way that leadeth to Thee. Of ourselves we are blind, and there is no light within us. Live right, and abide Thou to us and in us. Let the dust of darkness and ignorance be dispelled and brought to nothing."

CHAPTER XXII
THE ROOT AND GROUNDS OF HOLINESS:
A FURTHER OUTLINE

I HAVE said that the excessive natural activity of Dame Gertrude's senses was in the latter part of her life much abated, so that she could better bear to be alone or disengaged; and this not only at the time of her meditation or when making ready for it, but at other times too that were unreasonable for reflection, as shortly after meals. At such times during this period she could abide in solitary silence, and not doing, whereas in the earlier part of her life her senses would have been, as it were, used if they were not actually employed either on some exercise towards God or in conversation with creatures. This arose from the great natural activity of her senses, and the condition of her natural inclination which lived and reigned in her, and were still unsoftened by supernatural influences. These were not yet great enough to restrain such senses as were natural to her senses, and which hindered perfect contemplation. Moreover, her senses prevented her from entering deeply into her soul, and thereby into God; but could the whole soul in the height to which she attained, but was quickly brought down again by the strong activity of her senses, which ever sought to draw her soul into them and into their actions.

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But in this latter period of Dame Gertrude's life, through the constant exercise of interventions, the power of her senses became weakened. She was also helped by her sufferings, especially by her physical temptations and trials. Besides, her interventions in time of reflection became more and more profound and internal, her soul being thereby detached, and, as it were, separated from her senses. She was also able to continue for a considerable time in this separation, with an ever deeper and deeper descent, or rather ascent, but herself and her spirit, so that there came to be a certain habitual separation between the soul and the senses. Indeed, her senses grew to be almost stilled and greatly mortified as regards excessive activity and the power to distract over her, so that they were well content to rest and do nothing, save in so far as it pleased her soul to call upon them and make use of them. They were then ready at command to give their service, not with precipitation or eagerness, but deliberately and calmly, as usual creatures, more subject to the spirit than themselves. In neither days they were lords and masters, but now they had come to leave themselves and become servants, so bound in reason and justice.

Dame Gertrude was now so habituated to her profound interventions, and her senses were so stilled and, as it were, weary, that after her recollection she was well content to sit still and do nothing at all, not even to think to obtain by way of recreation, but to remain in a certain rest of body and sense. She did not, however, give herself to prayer, so it was not a reasonable time for it.

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I may compare Dame Gertrude's state at such times to a man who has been engaged in much hard labour, and is extremely tired after his work. Such a man is well content to lay himself down and do nothing, neither talking, nor thinking, nor yet sleeping. His bodily weakness sufficiently abates the use and activity of his senses for the time. Even so was it with Dame Gertrude. Her recollection over by means of her deep interventions therein, her soul and senses were well content to remain idle, not working, nor talking, nor performing any other exercise of body or sense.

After taking such a rest, or with sensible exercise of body and sense, when the hour for another recollection came round, Dame Gertrude could instantly, without seeking any means, interpose herself most profoundly, ever increasing in the depth of her recollection, till the end of the time allotted to prayer. During this state the soul is for the time far removed from the troublesome images of corporeal objects, the intellectual soul, which is a spirit, being in immediate intercourse with the Divine Spirit.

The root or cause of such interventions is the propensity, aided by grace. Dame Gertrude's propensity could never have prevented her to rest in this life, but would have ever urged her to a further tendence towards God. This is what I mean by saying that her interventions became deeper and deeper. For interventions are nothing else but the operations of the will raised by an ascent and ascent towards God. The something which is drawn out of oneself is the most spiritual part of the spirit that lies hid in the very centre of the soul.

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impulse proceeding from the almsward propensity, increased and helped by grace. Although the act of elevation may not be caused by disapproval or mourning, yet oftentimes it receives some help from weeping by way of motive, which causes the elevation to be far more intense than it would have been if the propensity had acted alone. Still, the will in its action does not carry with it the motive, nor any representation of it, but proceeds blindly and blindly of itself—that is, without further use of the understanding, or of any sensible image. Internal motives are used by contemplatives chiefly to intensify the elevation of the will, so as to make a higher ascent or to enter deeper into God than would have been possible through their natural propensity and ordinary grace. For example, suppose an interior soul is engaged at her recollection, and some cross or difficulty comes to mind, or some thought that inspires fear, as of hell, judgment, etc., or a strong feeling of love for God—and all these are sensible, external things—all serve to intensify and deepen the elevation of the will. For that reason, ideally God often causes such thoughts and affections to come to mind, especially at the time of recollection.

In the affairs of this world, natural inclinations serve to bring things to their intended issue. But in supernatural matters, as the spiritual good of the soul, natural inclinations are utterly insufficient. They are of use only to work upon the supernatural impulse of the Divine Spirit, to observe them and act upon them. In short, natural ability must wholly accommodate itself to Divine impulse, behaving as an instrument of the Holy Spirit, and not as an independent worker.

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Although oftentimes mere human or natural action in religious matters makes for a while great acts, like the fantastic fire kindled in the life of our Holy Father, still, in time it will be found to be nothing but smoke, and will come to naught; and chiefly because mere human action intends human ends, and so will do little for the soul's good. For example, when a Confessor teaches obedience without giving relation to God, when alone obedience should be given, such a teacher may receive obedience for a time and while he is there, but as obedience is founded on him, it comes to naught when he leaves, and the disciple is no more holy, humble, resigned, and obedient than he was before. But the teacher who teaches obedience immediately to God, in as it were, passed over, and the disciple is brought into immediate relation with God, who is ever permanent and present. Hence whatever becomes of the teacher, whether he live or die, remain or depart, the soul continues still in her Divine obedience, and in her union according to the Divine will. This distinction is clearly stated by Dame Gertrude in the following passage: "And this it was that made me so affect Father Baker's instructions when he first delivered them to me—because I saw that were grounded upon God, and not upon himself. Who could never fail, whatever because of Father Baker. Whereas another, who teaches obedience in any other way of his own, when he is gone the soul will have as far to seek for her instructions as over the had before, and so must ever be learning anew under every new Confessor, that

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likely enough will teach in a manner other than did his predecessor."

Certainly no soul has obtained holiness of anyone save in so far as it made her more humble, resigned, and obedient to God and to man than the world otherwise have been. Hence by observing herself a soul may best discover what real good she has obtained from any creature. If she has altered her spiritual course at the instance of any man, by observing herself she will probably be able to judge whether the change were made by leave or at the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, or merely through a natural impulse. In Dame Gertrude's case, the doctrine planted by God, and founded in God, through proposal by means of her Confessor, still remained after her separation from the tool of the Father and Teacher. Our Blessed Saviour in the Gospel declares the structure of such a soul to be firm and sound, and the soul is prepared for building on such a sure foundation. She is likened to "the wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and the house was not shaken, because it was founded upon a rock" (Matt. vii, 24). But how different is the spiritual structure founded merely on unstable men, or on other uncertain supports! The builder of such a structure shall be likened to a "foolish man who built his house on sand, and the rain fell and the floods came"—that is, a new teacher, who discovers and condemns the doctrine founded solely in and by his predecessor, a moral, subject to error—"and the wind blew, and they fell against that house, and it fell," etc. So also in another place our Blessed Saviour says that every

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the which His Heavenly Father—that is, the Holy Spirit in the soul—shall not please shall be saved up. Dame Gertrude says in her writings¹ that the interior will stand well also. The interior gone well and hence the exterior shall by hearkening to and following the Divine call or inspiration. For a soul capable of an interior life this should be all in all. Well, now—yes, a thousand times too—to the soul that is frightened by demons, overcome by temptations, cast by fear into perplexities, which render her unfit to hear or follow what God speaks to her, and discouraged from pursuing prayer, which may be called impotent, so powerful is it with God! You see, therefore, that are capable of prayer, be grateful to God for it, for it is the greatest happiness we can possess in this life. If by one can really pass through all things, however hard and painful. If it we become familiar ever with God Himself, and have our conversation in Heaven, as St. Paul observes. That Dame Gertrude continues at considerable length to describe the happiness of prayer with much feeling and ardour, writing only for her own spiritual comfort and edification—despite her opposition the found, and famous was yet to be, from others.

All Divine calls are the root and ground of all sanctity and salvation, I will say yet more on this subject. In instances where the observing of Divine calls is not practised there can be no exercise of true religion, chastity, or other righteous virtue, especially thanksgiving, in which a religious life principally consists. For such a religious does not do what she ought to do, or be

¹ "Apoxyg."



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done it against his will, or if he performs the action with a good will, it is for some natural, human motive, or some other reason which has no relation to God. Thus at best he acts out of servile fear, and not principally out of regard to God Himself. But when Divine calls are observed, the soul not only performs all that she ought to do as regards doing, abstaining, or suffering, but she acts willingly, and only out of an immediate regard to God, because it is His will and will, and for His sake alone, rejecting all motives ending in self, as are all that terminate not in God. Hence she observes Divine calls belongs not only to those whose propensity is to seek God internally, but to those whose propensity is to seek God by external deeds. For the latter also have Divine calls after their manner; thus are their deeds full of grace and meritorious. Still, their deeds are not equal to the actions of interior souls, for the latter have greater purity of intention, and regard God more immediately in Himself or for Himself, than the former, who cannot rise higher than corporeal images, and so cannot enjoy God in spirit. Purity of intention depends upon how closely we approximate to God in Himself. From this we may gather to what happiness Dame Gertrude attained through the purity of her intention, which proceeded from a clear, immediate regard to God internally enjoyed.

Souls with a propensity to the exterior remain ever much in themselves and in their senses, and so their deeds partake much of the limitations thereof, but interior souls get more and more out of nature, and further into God, hence their deeds increase in purity



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of intention, and consequently their acts of resignation become pure. The ground of this tending out of themselves into God is their interior propensity, aided by grace, which causes an insensible hunger and an insupportable thirst in the soul for a fuller possession of God. Through the soul desires God, as it were, infinitely, she can obtain Him only as a limited measure. Still, this taste of God affords the soul some satisfaction, while the desire of a fuller enjoyment of God ever remains. Through God cannot be fully possessed by the soul in this world, still, by looking after Him, she obtains more and more of Him, yet always after the manner of this life. Dame Gertrude's strong propensity and ardent desire to possess and enjoy God made her choose for a motto the words of the Apostle, which she wrote at the beginning of her Brevery.

¹ "Deus meus inquit omnis desiderium meum."

For none but He
Can satisfy me,
In heaven where He is seated
Nothing but love is wanted.

By what light does the soul tend towards God for the more perfect enjoyment of Him? Forsooth, by observing and following the Divine voice or call, and the Divine light therein. Unless she act thus, she acts as regards the soul purpose, blind and impotent. Her own natural light, or the light she may obtain from men, is of itself but darkness, and utterly insufficient for the purpose. No creature, no demon, no conception of man or of any man, whether our Superior or



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otherwise, he to serve as himself or vice in natural affairs, will be of use, as far as he can be disposed to observe and pursue the internal voice or call.

What, then, is to be said of a writer of these days who appears to have had no perception of Divine calls, but rather throws them out of doors, and substitutes for them what he calls the counsels and duties of men? I have argued that all things in religion are to be done in obedience to a Divine call—whether it be an external thing commanded by God through the external call of man or law, or be it an indifferent thing, compelled under no certain law, but left to the soul herself; and the greater part of our actions even in religion are included under this head. In all these different cases a contemplative soul should merely regard the internal Divine impulses and light, and not concern, nor be over natural inducements or opinions or imaginings, nor the instructions or teaching of superiors, nor of books, however learned or weighty. But the author to whom I alluded just now requires the soul in these indifferent matters to follow his human opinions, and thereby defuses the soul from regarding what the Divine call or will would have her to do in such cases. Thus this writer omits all mention of Divine calls, as if he did not know of their existence, or wished to detach them from his school of perfection, and substitute for them his own particular instructions for the guidance of souls.

For example, this writer says: "When any labour or humble office has to be performed, and yet not committed to anyone in particular, every one of you should strive (with obedience and discretion, it may be to have

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it imposed upon himself rather than on another. Yes, everyone should show himself ready if she could do so to perform all the labours and menial offices in the house, so that the root might do nothing but contemplate the goodness of Almighty God and sing His praises. This should be done from a sense of one's unworthiness and the excellence of Almighty God. For, on the one hand, we should deem ourselves the least worthy of all in the house to praise God, and therefore most suitable for such menial offices. On the other hand, we should consider that Almighty God is most worthy of all praise; therefore, to suppose His grace we should get all others to praise Him, while we alone who are unworthy of anything better are engaged in inferior concerns. If this be not permitted, we must accept the more honourable office in itself, and through necessity, and not because we think ourselves worthy than others. Such holy continence is laudable, and will preserve your convent from the vice of jealousy, which prevents free ambition, self-love, conceit, the root of dissensions in communities."

Thus for this writer, the root holds the community which has no better instructions or guidance than this to preserve it from pride and other causes of dissension; or where the observance of Divine calls, which alone can preserve from such evils, is neglected or unknown, as would appear to be the case with this author.

But here, pray you, it is said to attach to such a degree of humility as is here commended by this writer? Not by limiting to such human remedies and actions, but by hearkening to the Divine voice, and by pursuing His impulses, which are not only words, but works, and

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which give strength and grace to fulfil His will. This might be not to be found in such human notions, nor are they ever present in the soul that professed some of her own unworthiness.

If a contemplative writer had to deal with such a case, especially when writing for contemplatives, he would have advised each soul to observe and pursue the Divine call, to have first sought by prayer to learn God's will, before venturing to undertake such business through a sense of her unworthiness, or from custom or choice, or by the light of mere natural reason. When souls act thus, God will move such as He thinks fit to undertake the employment, and the other souls will perform the Divine call and will, and the work will be carried out according to the Divine appointment. To proceed thus is to act according to the spirit of our holy Rule, which would have us undertake nothing out of our own head or without consulting God, but would have us observe Divine inspirations.

How unlike to Dame Gertrude would have been such instructions, whether before or after her spiritual conversion. Before her conversion such thoughts of her own unworthiness would never have entered her head; or if they had, they would have done none of the good expected by that writer. After her conversion she would have smiled at such a project as to thrust herself into any employment out of a fancied unworthiness without first consulting God and seeking His guidance. At an earlier period, in consequence of her impetuosity, she was as yet unworthy of her unworthiness. Was she, then, on such a pretence to abstain from resolutions

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which she gladly uses to be the only means by which she could become more worthy in God's eyes than she was at present? Alas! such means do not even exist, did not even exist, if such good, because these practices have no relation to the Divine call or will. They are, indeed, but wandering beams or twinkling sparks, which may yield a pleasing sound for an instant, but have no permanent fruit in the soul.

Liberty of spirit is freedom of spirit to attend to and follow the light of the Holy Spirit. Opposed to liberty of spirit are human actions opposed to the soul out of her own hand. The idea of the aforementioned writer are opposed to liberty of spirit in two ways. First, because he would have a soul out of her own hand, and not by an internal light or impulse from God to undertake external employment. Consequently, the soul neglects to seek, learn, and follow the Divine will in the matter, whereas the rules of a contemplative life require that a soul should have no such burden laid on her; nor should she undertake it, if she may rightly refuse it. She should rather keep herself in her own spirit—in a state of abstraction or freedom from such burden, even to the point as they may be imposed on her by the Divine Spirit. The second reason why I think the writer's teaching is contrary to liberty of spirit is because it imposes on the soul, as the motive for taking up such employment, her own unworthiness, the weakness of others, and of God. By this means the soul is turned away from the proper object of her contemplation, which should be the immediate regard of God in Himself, after the manner of this life, and is directed to the abstruse consideration, by which she is

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deprived of the liberty which tended to the immediate regard of God. Moreover, she is drawn away from the simplicity of soul she sought after, and her mind filled with multiplicity and distraction, by considerations which cannot be made without the use of sensible images, with which the soul becomes bound; whereas she should seek to be free from all imaginary things and attend to God, and be united to Him in simplicity of spirit, to raise above all imaginations and considerations.

A person who is not contemplative will scarcely believe, nor can he imagine, the degree of a contemplative soul in having his hand or spirit fixed with such considerations, or at being hindered from an immediate, simple regard of God. Nor can anyone who is not actually in the way of contemplation easily distinguish in this matter, or in any other matter, what is or is not opposed to liberty of spirit, or what tends to multiplicity. To such souls all seems good, and that is because such reason, or conferred to the natural judgment of man. But a soul that is actually in the way of contemplation has the eye of an eagle for such purpose, and can instantly distinguish what will lead to her multiplicity and deprive her of simplicity or of liberty of spirit.

It is not surprising, then, that many—say, most—souls would admire the teaching of this writer. For, indeed, I think most of it is in conformity with natural reason, and may do good to spirits that are not contemplative. Nor can these latter know what will hinder or promote contemplation—a difficulty which contemplatives themselves do not find. Indeed, even learned men who have not experienced contemplation may do well to seek

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from those that tend to greater simplicity and liberty of spirit which promote multiplicity and hinder true liberty.

I think this writer uses the term "contemplation," as when he speaks of contemplating the goodness of God, yet he probably did not mean true contemplation. For contemplatives do not, properly speaking, contemplate the goodness of God, or His other attributes or works, but they contemplate the simple Divinity with their understanding and direct their will towards It, and this they do without discourse or other exercise of the imagination about the attributes or works of God. Nor do they think about their own condition, their own unworthiness, or the weakness of others, unless such notions are represented to them, as sometimes happens by the Divine action or by some cause independent of themselves. Even then, the contemplative soul does not tarry in such representations, but sees them only as a way for a more fervent direction of its will towards God. But the ordinary contemplation of such souls do not consist in these particular apprehensions, as the aforementioned writer seems to imply, but only in a simple notion and regard of God above all imaginary apprehensions, as I have said. It is hard for men to know terms for their art or science which entirely belong to another. Hence some writers term certain exercises of discursive prayer contemplation. But in the school of true spirituality such exercises are not contemplation, but more properly are to be termed meditation. What contemplatives mean by the term "contemplation" is the regard of the Divinity immediately and above all particular images, and is called in our holy Rule "pure prayer" (*pure oratio*).

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CHAPTER XXIII
CORRESPONDENCE WITH DIVINE INSPIRATIONS THE
PRINCIPAL NEED OF A COOPERATIVE SOUL.
No affliction or adversity (which consists merely in the
contraction of the will) can befall a soul that is fully
established in the way of contemplation, so common
whenever the affliction proceeds, whether immediately
from God or from Superior or other creatures, nor
can it hinder the soul from tending towards God by
contemplation. These contractions may be of the
nature of a dispassion, denial of a request, restraint, or
bodily affliction, loss of good name, goods, etc.—all
such crosses of the will are profitable for the soul, and
even in a measure necessary for they cause her con-
templation to become more elevated and efficacious.
Without such afflictions (which God will provide by
some means or other) the soul would make very slow
progress, or perhaps cease at all.
Contractions, then, will not be a hindrance to the
soul. For, the understanding not being deluded by
them, she will still be able to contemplate and regard
God, even the more clearly perhaps on account of the
contractions to her will. The contemplation and
regard of God will also enable her to surmount and
overcome the difficulties occurring in her nature.

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Moreover, her propensity to seek after God, being
quickened and helped by grace, will not permit her to
be overcome and set down by her contractions, but
will urge her the more on account of them to tend
towards and into God, as in Whom alone she can find
satisfaction and protection from the pains and misery
which these contractions cause her. Thus the soul
benefits by contractions to her nature.
It may happen, however, that the soul is yet so im-
perfect, and the affliction so heavy, that her nature not
only feels much pain, but becomes even hardly rid of it.
In such a case, she may even lose strength to such a degree as to
attain neither by her look and posture, yet all the while
being habitually resigned in her superior will, she makes
insensible progress on that very account in contemplation
and perfection. For one who is not a tender spirit in it
the contractions to her will may be so great, and she
herself so weak, tender, and unskilled in the way of
contemplation, that they may endanger her progress
and completely oppress her. But God is never likely
to send such heavy contractions. He always accom-
modates them to the grace He bestows and to the
degree of strength already acquired. It may, of course,
happen that the Superior or others may overburden a
soul with things which are contrary to her will through
ignorance of her internal disposition or the measure of
her grace and strength. It is, therefore, best for the
Superior to lay on a soul no more burden than are
contrary to her will that necessity obliges him to do.
These burdens will then be able to those which God
Himself immediately imposes on the soul, and are never
likely to harm her or hinder her progress.

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But when the burden, in addition to being contrary
to the will of the soul, also occasions confusion in the
understanding, whereby she is deluded, entangled,
and perplexed in her contemplation and immediate
regard of God, then the soul will be in much greater
danger of being stopped and overthrown in her spiritual
career, yet, even though she should be already well
exercised and experienced in the way. These troubles
of the understanding are decisive and decisive of the
soul, from a weakness of conscience, and other such
matters. They are apt to lead confusion and per-
plexity in the understanding, and hinder the contempla-
tion of the soul. To these troubles of the understanding
Dame Gertrude was at times subject.
It should, however, be noticed that as these tempta-
tions are the greatest and most perilous, so for the soul
that bears itself aright under them they are to be
accounted among the most profitable of all. When
they proceed from the action of God, or which in all
end from the natural disposition of the person, there is
less danger of his being overcome, because God, their
Author, provides grace in proportion to the temptation,
if only the soul will make use of it. But when such
temptations come from men, as from the Superior or
Director, the soul is in much greater danger of being
cast down unless Almighty God provides a greater
grace, commensurate to the greatness of the temptation.
In the case of Dame Gertrude (and her Sisters, too)
you will find these observations justified. For neither
persecuted her so deeply to the quick, and so threatened
the destruction of her spiritual course, as those tempta-
tions which tended to perplex her understanding and

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hinder her contemplation and regard of God, whereas by her remedy for all the miseries of life, that the afflictions which touched her will only more easily repulse and disengage her from regard of God; what enabled her, as she says, to walk on thorns—that is, on crosses—with so much pleasure as if they had been roses ("Apology").

Of the other afflictions of the understanding Dame Gertrude very frequently and feelingly complained; indeed, she greatly loved them. Of this kind was the passion of fear, which tended to darken her understanding, and to which, on account of her peculiar temperament, she was much subject. From this fear spring her doubts about her former confessions and the security of pursuing her spiritual course.

These, the happiness of the soul proceeds from this: that we perform our actions at the inspiration or call of God, by which means His enlightens the understanding and moves the will. This is evident from the words of the prophet (Isa. xlii. 11): "O Lord God, Thou wilt give unto us peace; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us." Hence we may say with the Psalmist:

He is my light, and all my light.

This principle applies not only to action, but also to refraining from action, meditation, and suffering. In all these respects our conduct will be as a Divine work, if our action is guided by Divine inspiration. Other works, however good in themselves, if undertaken out of our own head by a natural light or impulse, will be unprofitable, because they are done in God ("John iii. xxi). This necessary quality in our works cannot, however, be obtained without the serious pursuit of abstinence and mortification. "Gird with strength all things for Himself" (Prov. xii. 4), says the Wise Man; that is, for His own sake. He therefore not only moves the soul to do the work, but also to do them for Him, and to exclude other ends. This produces purity of intention in the work, and consequently renders them meritorious. Works which proceed from other motives or notions can have no such purity, and consequently can have but little merit in them. Hence we must, above all things, attend to the Divine call or inspiration; not in there any other means to secure our sanctification.

In souls that are ruled by Divine inspirations, God is both the beginning and end of all that they do, or refrain from, or suffer. In such a life the soul has the knowledge of God and of her self-knowledge which alone is to be desired, for it teaches and provides the road to all humility and cheerfulness. "The knowledge is

* It must not be thought that an actual abstinence to God is required for each act to make it meritorious. A virtuous action or meritorious action, the more actual, however, the attention is directed to the point in the action and the more meritorious. Cf. note p. 218.

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have but a natural end, and consequently will receive but a natural reward, and this even though the works appear to one's office or vocation. This is what Father Robert writes to us that God reveals no works but His own. Such works will ring true when tested by the Divine touchstone: the others will not. This distinction is indicated in these words of the Gospel: "He that saith he hath reached to the light, that he will walk in darkness, because they are done in God" (John iii. xxi). This necessary quality in our works cannot, however, be obtained without the serious pursuit of abstinence and mortification. "Gird with strength all things for Himself" (Prov. xii. 4), says the Wise Man; that is, for His own sake. He therefore not only moves the soul to do the work, but also to do them for Him, and to exclude other ends. This produces purity of intention in the work, and consequently renders them meritorious. Works which proceed from other motives or notions can have no such purity, and consequently can have but little merit in them. Hence we must, above all things, attend to the Divine call or inspiration; not in there any other means to secure our sanctification.

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obtained by taking to heart the injunction *Facite et videte*. "I have chosen meditation which disengages me from contemplation; while in contemplation I find obtained in reflection, which enables the soul to discern the Divine will, and obtain strength (which the impulse communicates to the heart) to perform what is commanded; you, and to perform it only because it is God's will. Such a will cannot but be at peace with God, since He works His will and pleasure in her and by her, and she in all things accommodates her will to His.

This was the disposition of the holy prophet's will, therefore, might he say: "Lord God, Thou wilt give unto us peace; for Thou hast wrought all our works in us." Nor is there true humility or obedience, save when it proceeds from observing Divine inspirations; for nature, corrupted by sin, is blinded and incapable of coming or carrying these or other virtues as they should be exercised. These must, therefore, be a power above nature to effect in us, namely, Divine inspirations, observed and pursued by the soul. How is it that so many souls who have been thirty and forty years in religion, and have done and suffered extremely much, are still so unenlightened, proud, and discontented, especially as they were when they took the habit? Indeed, perhaps they are even worse than they were, for it was the Divine inspiration that brought them into religion; and for a time at least they endeavored so best they could to follow the Divine inspirations. But these souls, not having been taught to observe inspirations, they left them; or, rather, these souls turned away from their inspirations; hence they daily increased more and more in self-love.

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...the perfect present regard. But—how the kingdom of God cannot come thus! Some, indeed, will perhaps go further, and assert that the practice of attending to Divine calls or inspirations is perfidious, and so utterly deter souls from observing them. Such persons teach souls to seek the kingdom of God here on earth, when it is not to be found—what is, in some particular exercises, without further relation to Divine inspirations which alone can cause the kingdom of God in the soul. Teachers that following their own experience or fancies will never be able to lay open the things suitable to the needs of their disciples. "They should be taught to attend to the Divine Teacher, who teaches aright in everything, readily and with clearness, being always present; for He is light itself, most willing to teach, and knows all things. This was signified by the prophet when he said: "The Lord reached me, and working shall be wanting to me" (Ps. cxlii.)—that is, I have, according to my duty, referred the rule and guidance of my soul to God, and I shall lack nothing that is necessary for me to have and to know. The soul in whom God thus reigns lives according to the true knowledge of God and of himself. This is the only knowledge we should seek after, as St. Augustine implied when he said: "If I should know Thee, I should know myself."²²³

But no one, it must be confessed, can teach practically another how to observe Divine inspirations unless he has learnt the practice experimentally himself, and is already possessing it in his own soul. For such knowledge cannot be had except by experience in oneself. This is the principal reason why there are so few capable

²²³ *Summa Theologiae*, question 184.

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...teachers of the way of perfection, because to few spiritual guides give themselves seriously to the observance of Divine inspirations. Not only are such guides unable to teach the observance of inspirations, but, speaking generally, they show little zeal for promoting, as much as they might, the practice in others. As they themselves are remote in the observance of inspirations, what interest can they have in promoting it in others, especially when, from want of experience in themselves, they scarcely know what the doctrine is, or what or how to promote it in others?

Indeed, the observance of inspirations is precisely what I have termed the doctrine and practice of an interior life. This no one can know or rightly understand without experience of it in himself; by leading an interior life; without doing so, it is impossible for him to instruct or promote it in others.

It will be well for want of something better; if a soul that is already in the way of perfection be not just one of it, but be referred to follow it quietly, and pick up such help as she may need, or be able to find. But if such a soul will not adhere to her Interior Teacher, He will procure for her all friends and means necessary to support her in her course—not perhaps friends who are pursuing the selfsame course of the spirit, for of that I could not assure her, but friends by other titles, natural friends, whom God will supernaturally direct to love her up. These friendships, indeed, not springing up through the bond of a similar spiritual course, but for extrinsic reasons, which are very various, are apt to be unstable and variable. It is different, however, when the friendship arises *ex natura rei*, from love of

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...the spiritual course itself. Friends of this kind are drawn together by their interest in the spiritual course itself, and consequently the soul feels more confidence and security in her course than she would if she had been assisted by friends who were friendly for other extrinsic reasons.

CHAPTER XXIV
THE PRINCIPAL BENEFITS OF ATTENDING TO DIVINE
INSPIRATIONS

I have shown at considerable length that no one without experience in the way of the spirit, or, as it is all one, without practicing correspondence with Divine Inspirations can teach it to others. But on the other hand, a soul who has practiced it, if only for one year, and is otherwise instructed, will be more capable of teaching it than another, however learned, who is without experience. None have I heard of anyone, who is not an expert, who, without personal experience, was able to put a soul into the way of the spirit. But many souls, as St. Teresa and others, with no guide but experience in themselves, have helped others into the said way. Many, however, are taught of God, without any help of man.

But let us see how souls enter upon this way. It often happens that souls in their avocations have to endure many mortifications and contradictions to their wills. But these afflictions avail but little to produce the habit of mortification, which comes in a spiritual death to self and created things. Consequently the benefit they might have derived from these mortifi-

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ations is wasted and lost. The reason of this is that the soul is not in a course that will enable her to get out of nature into God. The only thing that will lift her out of nature into God is the almighty working of God, Divine Inspirations, and the correspondence of the soul therewith. Nature can never be truly mortified except by the soul getting out of herself into God, and this is the only means to accomplish it.

When the soul has strayed in the way of the spirit, all occurring contradictions avail to increase in her the habit of mortification, for they present her with the occasion to elevate herself more efficaciously out of herself into God. Such a soul by prayer and mortification, in time (if she perseveres) will acquire a perfect habit of mortification and of Divine love. I say in time—some sooner, some later, according to the grace of inspirations and their correspondence therewith; for the soul, however eager, must exercise patience and await her destined time, which can be known only to God, Who is the absolute Disposer and Ruler of all. These mortifications, together with prayer, raise the soul more and more out of nature into God—that is, out of the property of nature, will flow into a simplicity of obedience and conformity of will to the Divine will. Mortifications holding souls who do not correspond with Divine Inspirations cause pain, and make them perhaps wiser in human affairs, but leave their nature untransformed and their lives full of self-love and self-seeking. Thus will our nature ever remain until it flows itself in God; and this it cannot do except by means and careful correspondence with Divine Inspirations, both as regards prayer and mortification.

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To the soul that sets these souls upon and virtue will in time be communicated, that natural propensity to self-love and self-will will be, as it were, annihilated, and thenceforth the Divine kingdom will be introduced in stability and perfection. Mortifications borne out of natural will and judgment (whenever they proceed) will be powerless to form the habit of Divine and mortification, because they are undertaken at the bidding of nature, and tend to serve nature only. But when they are performed with and by a Divine inspiration, they tend to mortify the soul in every deed, and render her truly Divine.

It is not surprising that some persons make a just of the mortifications they suffer in the servitude, or after-work in religion, if these persons were embraced out of a natural will and judgment, no matter whether they were assumed by themselves, or induced by God or Superiors or others. Such mortifications do the soul no good, because they are not embraced in obedience to a Divine inspiration or call.

Moreover, nothing can so efficaciously liberate the soul from all kinds of hypocrisy (to which the religious life is much subject) as correspondence with Divine Inspirations, for they purify the intention in everything; whereas the soul that does not pursue this course suffers, abates, or acts from a motive of shame, or for fear of penance, or to gain or keep the good opinion of others, or out of custom, economy, or other motives not truly Divine. The habit and production of the religious life denote purity of intention, or at least a striving after it, and this can be attained only by correspondence with Divine Inspirations. For what in truth is hypocrisy

Chapter XXIV: The Principal Benefits of Attending to Divine Inspirations

Divine Inspirations

but attending and making them interiorly, while outwardly we pretend to seek God, His love, and His honors? Our holy Rule in its very first words lays this foundation, and urges us to build upon it. It says: "We are returned to God by obedience, from whom we have departed by disobedience" (Prologue). As our disobedience was subject of the former voice, so our return to innocency and virtue must be by obedience to the Divine voice. In this is included obedience to man (as is signified by our Saviour in the words, "He that would save himself let him lose himself") but the root of that obedience must be the immediate submission to the Divine voice or inspiration.

In another place (chap. ix.) our holy Father desires us "to fill daily by our deeds the commandments of God." This also should be understood of obedience to Divine inspirations or the Divine will, and should include also external authority, the Abbot and other superiors. In the chapter on the office of Abbot he is bid to do nothing, not against himself, but outside the limits of God's command (see preface). Observe that in that the Superior should not teach or command anything without consultation with the Divine Spirit, taking all his light and instructions from Him, or at least doing nothing without His leave. If the Superior sees that his soul will be adorned and replenished with Divine justice, and all his external acts and teaching will be seasoned with the leaves of Divine justice abiding in him. His teaching and deeds will be sanctified or, as it were, sprinkled on the minds and hearts of his disciples, and will work in them a Divine and supernatural effect, because both word and deed take their

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root and derive their power from a supernatural Divine spring or fountain, which abides in his soul. This is the wisdom which our holy Father desires (chap. liii.) to see in the one who shall be chosen Abbot—not natural talent or learning, for the more knowledge others have in a high degree, but that heavenly light which will enable him to understand the things that will benefit souls and to guide them to their supernatural end.

Certainly there is no true justice nor work of justice, as understood by our holy Father, save in so far as it proceeds from the kingdom of God reigning in the soul. God using the powers of the intellect at His pleasure, and causing her to follow His inspirations, and not the inspirations of her nature or of other creatures.

What, then, is to be thought of that treatise to which I have alluded, in which the author seems wholly to rely upon natural light for the right conduct of the Abbot and also of the subject? He seems to suppose that they have little or no relation to Divine inspirations for their conduct, or at least no light can be had from them. Observe that where the author instructs the Abbot how to act in the discharge of his office there is not a word about inspirations; nor does he so much as say that one should have recourse to God for light. He speaks only of the great difficulty to command right, and how I am one with him. Still, the difficulty is not so great, nor perhaps great at all, if only the Abbot acts in his office in obedience to God, if he has recourse to God for light and help in all his designs. If he act thus, there can be little doubt but that his difficulty would be much diminished, if not wholly

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taken away. But if he rely on his natural ability and experience, in which the author seems to refer him, and on which they depend who do not attend to Divine inspirations, though he should have the brain and experience of all the men in the world, it will not avail him to promote souls to the eternal supernatural end.

This treatise, moreover, seems to suppose that it is as easy a thing to obey. It is nothing of the kind. To obey right and religiously by our natural light or ability (to which the treatise refers the subject) is not only difficult, but impossible, as may be seen from the following words (Book II, chap. iii.) of Cassian: "The holy Fathers of Egypt and Thebes declare that to govern or be governed rightly belongs to a wise and perfect soul. To rule or be ruled rightly they hold to be the highest gift and grace of the Holy Ghost. For a ruler knows not how to lay upon obedient subjects whatever precepts, unless he himself be furnished with all virtues within; nor is a subject able to obey his Superior right until the subject is perfect in the fear of God and in humility."

But let us turn to the actual words of the treatise, and see if they do not bear me out, and apparently refer all things to natural ability, without any reference to Divine inspirations. And if the author expects to refer the Abbot to God for Divine light, which is so necessary for the government of others, how much less likely is he to omit the subject to that Divine source!

But what he writes: "To me it seems a thing so difficult (namely, to command right) that I know not the art of it myself, or cannot teach it to others." I believe him. But God can teach the art, and will

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teach it, if the Abbot will depend upon Him, and not on his human abilities.

But hear how our author continues: "I have had some practice in the matter of obediences, and have heard some lessons in it." But if those lessons were without reference to Divine inspirations or calls, they were very poor lessons indeed.

He continues: "But as regards commanding, though I have had some little experience in it, I find it is a matter which requires very great discretion." I believe him there. But where is discretion to be had except by the descent of it from the "Father of Lights"?

But he continues: "So that I know not on almost every occasion what to do." He means, of course, when in authority; and I believe him, if he relies on his natural light only, and does not depend himself to receive the only true and adequate light for the purpose.

He continues: "The command another director about whose price I cannot easily judge is very hard." But God directs all dispositions, and can make them to whom He pleases, and will disclose them to him who should know them, and who depends on God for such knowledge. But try to find, if it be possible, any difference in the procedure of this author and that of a secular magistrate—perhaps a judge—in the government of a commonwealth. They both act merely according to the light of natural reason.

But our author continues: "Do you think, then, that I could give lessons to teach a woman to govern without faith?" I believe you can do little in the matter if you trust into her only your own natural ideas; but if you teach her to observe Divine inspira-

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time if she does not already do so, you surely teach her much, and, in fact, as much as she needs.

The author continues: "Yet even if I could give such instructions, they never would be found a woman that would learn and practice them." Why not? May not a woman learn them as you learn them—them natural reason and experience, if you had them then, or from the Divine Spirit, if that is the source from which you derived your knowledge?

He continues: "I except always Saints, in whom these cold parts of the world are very barren in these days." But why pray, do you except Saints? What difference is there between them and ordinary souls, save only that they observe Divine inspirations better than others? And why did Saints rule better than others, except that they obtained more light from above for it, and for which others did not seek or dispose themselves? Again, why should that part of the world be termed cold, except that souls living there are cold in Divine love? And this proceeds from not attending to and following Divine inspirations. Again, why are we barren in Saints in these days, except that we do not see, as they did in better times, apply ourselves to the observation of Divine inspirations? If you had commended the pursuit of them to the Abbess for the discharge of her office, you would have given a sufficient lesson, if she would but take it to heart. For beyond all doubt there are plenty of men, capable of pursuing Divine inspirations, and without the pursuit of them to spiritual progress can contribute but little weight. So long as the members of our Order both taught and

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praised correspondence to Divine inspirations, so long did the Order flourish in sanctity; but when they gave over attending to inspirations, and began to rely upon natural reason, they fell off to nothing. Such was the case also with other Orders, especially the Order of St. Francis. As long as his disciples observed Divine inspirations, which are specially commended in their Rule, they remained indeed upright. In one passage, for instance, St. Francis, having declared that he did not desire his disciples to become learned, went on to say: "But above all things let the brethren desire to have in them the Spirit of God and His holy working." The decay of the Order has proceeded from the neglect of that teaching; and all its members pursue a right course in this matter, and revive the ancient practice, they never will attain to a true reformation that will produce sanctity, however exact the observance they maintain in external matters, as is often done by Congregations in these days. The same is particularly true of nuns. Until we revive this doctrine and dispose ourselves to attend to Divine inspirations, and actually labour to live according to them both internally and externally, our apparent reforms are mere shadows, without substance; nor will our reforms ever come to anything really substantial or truly holy.

But, alas! I fear that this doctrine has so far departed from among ourselves and other ancient Orders that there are a great number (God grant that it be not the greater number!) that know not what Divine inspirations are, either practically or speculatively. I mean that few seem to understand that the external observance of

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the Rule was instituted and our Constitutions drawn up only to enable us duly to pursue Divine inspirations. Observe the Rule and Constitutions would be of little worth, for the observance of Divine inspirations is the main purpose of the query in our Rule—"For what have you come?" (Ad quid venisti?) etc. etc. How many in our Order are ignorant that this is its principal scope, and that this is the purpose of all other Orders, especially of Contemplative Orders! How many there are in the Order who do not so much as imagine that those words of the Rule intimate or intend Divine inspirations or who fail to understand that the words "return by obedience" to the Divine voice, or that exhortation "to do nothing without exact prayer to God," by which light and strength is to be had for the matter in hand, is intended to teach this same doctrine! Oh, again, in the following passage how many know this: "Our eyes being opened to the kingdom of light, let us hear with attentive ears (if the soul what the Divine voice duly administered us of . . .) and that we never depart from the guidance of God, but persevere under His teaching until death," means nothing else than that we should correspond with Divine inspirations and the inward teaching of God! These words are all taken from the preface of our holy Rule, and express the debt and end of the external observance of the Rule which follow, and are, as it were, founded upon the preface. And that scope or end, as we have seen, is that we should observe the impulses, guidance, and light of the Holy Spirit.

This it may be clearly understood that this was the source of the sanctity of the Order of St. Francis—and

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the same may be said of all other Orders—I will quote the words of Brother Riccio de Marcha, companion of St. Francis, and they will be found in complete harmony with the words of St. Francis himself already alluded to. The passage is contained in a brief treatise by Brother Riccio, called "The Sperry Way to Perfection." He says: "Neither must he think to direct himself by the care and foresight of his own senses and judgment, but he must remain always ready and disposed to follow the call of the Divine Spirit, which way cover it shall please Him to call." And a little farther on he says: "The soul, generally speaking, is guided by this light in all particular things which she has to do, because she is illuminated by the same light whereby she is fitted to know, reverence, and consider the honor and will of God in all things that happen to her. Also in this light the perfection of all virtues is given to the soul." Again, this writer says: "Just as a man who has a wall before his eyes at some distance may see not only the wall, but everything between him and it, so the soul that is illuminated by this light sees Almighty God and all things else that he has to do."

As this treatise is very short, and seems exactly to describe the way and means by which God directed Dame Gertrude, I will append it to the end of her "Confessions," though she was never acquainted with it, this copy we now have coming to the house after her death. I am sure it would have been a great blessing to her.

† Father John's version, unfortunately, was somewhat sad, and the copy has been revised to have any equipment. I have been unable to discover any copy of the work.

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comfort to her to have read it, but it pleased God to vouch otherwise, for her greater merit. He Himself abundantly rewarded her for the doctrine.

The ground of perfection in all souls ever was, is, and will be the same—namely, the Divine light or inspiration. The light or inspiration may, however, differ in different souls. For God enlightens souls according to their several capacities and requirements, much also according to the quality of their temptations; nay, even the same soul God enlightens or inspires in diverse ways according to her state or degree of perfection to which she has attained. Yet still and everywhere are Divine lights by which the soul must be guided towards perfection or the increase of it.

I would to God that the pious and unlearned reader would but compare the treatise of Brother Riccio de Marcha with the author I have been recommending upon, and observe whether the teaching of the latter does not tend to good perfection rather by natural than by supernatural light. But Brother Riccio, on the other hand, intimates that the latter light is necessary, and so necessary that without it no other light will suffice. Nay, he intones, and that most truly and justly, the supernatural light to be all in all, though I am inclined to think that ordinarily such light is only the clearing and illumination of our natural reason, which enables the soul to see what the light of nature in the state of innocence had of faith in our present condition suggests and teaches us. But we cannot clearly discern in our minds such truths by the light of reason on account of the inordinate passions reigning there through sin, for passions darken or

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obscure the natural light of reason. But Divine inspirations remove or correct inaccurate positions, whereby the natural light is partially restored to the reason, and the latter is a measure returns to the condition or state of original justice. It, however, you should say that God, besides removing inaccurate positions and clearing the reason of false lights, often adds to the natural light some portion of light that is purely supernatural, I shall not contradict you, for I think that it may be so.

To the soul that thus corresponds to the Divine light and hiding, God bestows, after the manner of this life, what He is to the Blessed in Heaven—that is, in the words of the Apostle (Col. 3), all in all comes to dwell. For this is what God is to the soul when He is beginning, middle and end of every movement of body and soul. The mere creation of action at the Divine bidding is a thousand times more pleasing to God than the mildest and most wonderful deeds performed out of a mere natural impulse; and such are all deeds that are not done out of a Divine impulse. Moreover, as I have observed already, works that are undertaken out of a Divine impulse alone commonly attain that end, whereas works taken up out of our own head usually end in nothing. I am speaking here of supernatural things, not merely of human affairs. These Almighty God usually leaves to our own natural ability.

Our holy Rule and Constitution serve to enable us to observe better the Divine inspirations, as the former regulates external matters for the peace of the house, and thereby such soul is set free to attend more fully to

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Divine inspirations. Besides the Rule and Constitution take the place of immediate Divine inspirations as regards external matters regulated by them, so that concerning these the soul is under no necessity to heed or attend to Divine inspirations. In such cases the Divine inspiration directs the soul to perform what is prescribed by these regulations, but for God and in obedience to Him, and to exclude all other inferior motives. But a spiritual person who lives not under obedience, as our holy Father in his cave and thousands of other hermits, must be guided as regards both external and internal matters by Divine inspirations and calls.

In conclusion, attend above all things, as I have repeatedly advised to the Divine call. If you do so, it will protect you against all that Satin or other creatures can do against you. Then you may say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: when said I fear?" (Ps. xvi. 1). He is. When you are closely attended with carry you through all difficulties. But if you rely on any other support, you fail utterly. Still, you must ever distinguish God Himself from all His gifts, graces, calls, light, and other created things, in none of which are you to rely on or trust in God. Remember, that He is infinitely above them all. Use them not as other things, but as they help you to serve Him better, or to find more fully towards Him; but not set in the place of them, nor adhere to them with affection. Ever renew your desires for the Eternal Good. When we can never fully possess in this life; yet may we ever draw nearer and nearer to Him! Our end attachment to Him will be deferred to the future life.

Observance of Divine inspirations in relation to

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prayer is particularly commended to us by our holy Rule (chap. xv.). It tells us that prayer must be short when it proceeds from an ordinary Divine inspiration; for such inspiration gives light and power to the soul only for a brief space of time. Prayer is intended to proceed from a Divine inspiration, for otherwise it could not be pure—the second quality required by St. Benedict. By pure is meant free from the images of creatures. Only Divine inspiration or working can create such purity. For if a man work by himself only, it is wholly by the use of the images of creatures, and then the prayer cannot be pure. But when the Divine inspiration is extraordinary, or as St. Benedict expresses it, when the grace or favor to prolong the prayer is given by God beyond the ordinary time, the soul should correspond with the invitation and abide in her prayer. So that both a long prayer and a short one are to be exercised according to the Divine impulse or inspiration.

Though our holy Father speaks specially of the duration of prayer in the above passage, he must be understood also to mean that the soul is to observe the other qualities of Divine inspiration about prayer, as, for example, how she is to exercise her understanding, and will in it. Divine inspiration should especially guide her about the application of the will, treated in chap. 11. "Fervor of heart" (*ardor cordis*)—that is, that the soul should not strain her natural powers, but will particularly (if the understanding is not much used here), in order to elevate it to God. The soul should elevate her will neither more nor less than the Divine inspiration invites her or enables her to do. In a word, she should duly correspond with the Divine

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Inspiration is all the circumstances and qualities of the elevation of her will. For if she apply her will and desire to him that the inspiration directs her to do, it would be a culpable remission on her part and on the other hand, if she attempted more, it would be presumption and harmful, for she would be trying to do more than God would or enable her to do; and she would make it appear as though she could do with her natural powers what indeed, God alone can do or as if she could add to the power and operation of God by her own activity. In such a case her efforts would be not only inefficacious, but a cause probably of interior confusion, and some injury perhaps to her head or senses. The ability to elevate the will, as I have already said, lies in the propensity, whose action is intended by grace and inspiration on the part of God, and by purity of intention on the part of the soul.

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CHAPTER XXV

SOME REFLECTIONS UPON THE FACULTY OF DEVOTION

INTRODUCTION

When speaking on the subject of abstraction, it will be remembered that I said that abstraction was a disposition to contemplation. I will now add that in order abstraction perfect it must be both external and internal. External abstraction is a corporal fortitude which requires us from meddling with things not committed to us by the Divine inspiration. The fortitude includes a certain firmness of mind, for solicitude involves the use of the corporal internal senses.

Internal abstraction consists in restraining our affection from the things committed to us by Divine inspiration, and directing our affection wholly upon God alone. Internal abstraction can never be practiced unless we practice external also. For if we undertake a matter out of our head and inclination only, we are nearly certain to handle it with inordinate affection; for the passion that led us to take the matter in hand will doubtless continue in the execution of it, unless the passion be cast out by some other which takes its place.

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External inspirations (and much more internal) cannot be practiced aright without the pursuit also of sanctification, for it is only by the light of sanctification that we can discern inspirations. So when the soul pursues sanctification, she will either take upon herself more than the Divine inspiration would have her or too little. The latter fault is as great as the former, for it proceeds from sloth or some other inordinate passion. Souls are usually in one or other respect, according to their several dispositions. For some are naturally too slow to take up the duties or matters that belong to them through idleness or timidity. Others, whose nature is more active, fall into the opposite error, by taking on themselves more than they should. From this proceeds the inability to distinguish between what appears to them and what does not, and the things that concern them they perform with much sorrow and labor. Such disorders indolence avails very much for rectification, so that they will not so natural persons recollect; or if they do pursue it they derive little spiritual benefit from it, unless through the light obtained as it they strive to reform these disorders. When these active natures neglect to use recollection for the due guidance of their actions and take upon themselves what does not concern them, they only darken their souls and render themselves less fit for recollection and the right performance of what Divine inspirations impose upon them. The conduct of such souls closely resembles the man, as recorded in the "Lives of the Fathers," where Arsenius saw in a vision cutting wood. This man made a load so heavy that he was unable to lift it in his shoulder. He then went to work and cut more wood,

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and added that in his former books, and again that he lift it, but found that he was still less able than before. This internal direction causes purity of intention, for the intention then runs wholly upon God. But, on the other hand, being unacquainted not of our own mind, without a Divine inspiration, are performed in other words than as we begin them—namely, out of will-love or self-love. Now, if they be related, in what the spiritual life of Dame Gertrude and her Sisters consist? It consisted wholly in correspondence to Divine inspirations and calls. This being so, could they distinguish their course as the suggestion of man or other creature? I think you will not say, No. But I will venture to say more, as I have already said enough, though indeed it is hard to say too much, when it is applied to a creature that is necessary for perfection, and he that liberate the principle of conduct from man's influence and contemplation. Indeed, when Divine inspirations or suggestions are obeyed, unless they obscure and carry out Divine inspirations, which should enlighten them and enable them to obey man in the way God requires. God has no wish to find with man seem to be far as he has neglected His inspirations and calls (and I think there is a heavy cross, in I suppose, in containing all kinds of obligations); nor, on the other hand, has He any reward laid up for him now in so far as he has obeyed Divine inspirations. It was faithful correspondence to Divine inspirations that rendered Samuel in his old age so confident in his conscience that he was able to say to the people: "I should have from my youth I have lived among you, and you have seen my

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conscience from that time when he was a boy. Let, I am here in your presence. Speak of me in the presence of our Lord and of His Church, which is, I suppose, c. 20. These words of Samuel plainly declare the confidence that a soul who is united to correspond with Divine inspirations enjoys both in life and in death: no other will can have such true confidence. According to the soul's fidelity in corresponding with Divine inspirations, so will be the confidence of his conscience, either more or less. Though the prophet Samuel speaks to the people about external matters subject to no other could they testify—no man presume that he internally, as well as externally, corresponded with Divine inspirations; for otherwise it would have been not merely idle, but hypocritical of him to make such a solemn protestation. For what satisfaction could it give him to be innocent as to commission of crimes externally, if in the secrecy of his heart and nature he had yielded to them, and had not internally as well as externally corresponded with Divine inspirations? Oh, how happy will be the death of those who have such confidence in their own consciences! Nothing can prevent this confidence, but correspondence with Divine inspirations; and whatsoever shall correspond diligently, though he will not escape those faults which are inseparable from this life, he will at least need no comfort or assurance from any creature, for he will find it where alone it is to be had, in his own soul, or rather in God. Whom such a soul enjoys as her own. As to the nature of the work which the soul takes in hand, God neither cares nor need the soul care. The

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work may be great or little, easy or difficult, noble or humble; it may be a matter of doing or not doing, a work of satisfaction or pleasure; but provided it be a work that God would have her to do, and that she undertakes it not merely to please God with her to do it, it will be all one to her that in all things desires to carry out the Divine inspirations. Her will such a soul draws a distinction between one kind of work and another: for all such she understands for God, and as for as she can, she regards God in them all alike—that is, she acts as purely as possible for His love, honors, and service, recognizing all personal advantages and ends. For such she can also expect success may attend her work, for in that she also refers herself to God's will, which is to do respect the same request. Indeed, God cannot not what we do, provided only that we are doing His will. This doctrine is well illustrated in the "Lives of the Fathers," where we read that some of the hermits, who wholly pursued Divine inspirations upon their own working habits, though long years past they would never see them, but more than at the end of the year.

This doctrine which I have expressed is in harmony with the teaching of mystic writers. They strongly advise us to find that God equally in all kinds of works, accidents, and events whatsoever, provided they are lawful, and not to seek or regard God specially, as if He were more in some works or things than in others. He should be found equally in all kinds of works. He who acts thus acts according to truth, for God in Himself is always alike; and in He is in all things, and is even the existence and essence of all things, so in



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Himself, He is always alike and ever the self-same. He, therefore, may be alike found and enjoyed in all works undertaken for Him, whether small or great.

It is the greatest—yes, indeed, the only—happiness and peace of the soul to have God as the Master, Director, and Ruler of all her powers, the Light of her understanding, the Mover and Director of her will. Such a soul needs no help from without for the guidance of her interior relations since true happiness consists more in so far as the internal master reverts her to others for help or light. This commonly is only about external or corporal matters. All the comfort and confidence, therefore, that the soul has or needs to be wholly in God's hands. Thus she neither needs nor may seek comfort, help, or light from creatures, save only according to the will of her internal Lord, and in obedience to Him, in Whom she wholly believes and ever desires to belong. A more certain sign that a soul belongs wholly to God, and to make His guidance and protection, there cannot be than when she seeks no comfort, light, or help from creatures—because, enjoying perfect happiness within, what more could she have to seek or from without? This union is the case with those creatures, that in the end is the true of her death. Especially in this disposition to be contented during her last sickness; for there can be no doubt but that she would not only have accepted, but would have sought spiritual comfort from without, if she had not enjoyed internally what sufficed for her happiness—namely, the presence of God, as the Lord and Master of her powers. As she enjoyed this Divine presence, it was not difficult, but rather a pleasure, to



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be without help from without, especially when she saw that it was God's will that she should be deprived of the most precious pledge of His love in the Sacrament of His most precious Body for her Viaticum—a happiness most good Christians enjoy when they are dying. This happiness, however, was denied Dame Gertrude through her most trenchant illness for it, so far as might be God's will, because her throat and mouth were so burned and stopped up by her illness that there was great fear lest she should be unable to consume the Sacred Particle. For her sake of intention, it was decided two or three days before her death to isolate her from the rest of the community, and those who were appointed to attend on her. By this she was deprived of the advice of their presence, and especially of the Abbess, whose company would have been most grateful and helpful, had there been need. Dame Gertrude, however, perceiving that this was ordained by the providence of God, willingly accepted the disappointment, not only of being cut off from the comfort of the community, but also of the Abbess, who could have afforded her so much consolation, if God had permitted it. She was, however, the more easily comforted, as she enjoyed within her His presence Who alone could give her perfect contentment, peace, and satisfaction.

In consequence of her interior occupation, peace, and satisfaction, Dame Gertrude did not seek for any comfort from man or woman, except that she made a brief confession on the usual appointed day. Indeed, so much at peace was she that when she was asked if she would like to see her ordinary Confessor, who, it was



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reported, though kindly, had returned from Chapter, she replied that she did not need him, and did not desire his presence, though he was better acquainted with her interior or more likely to promote its welfare. The same Sister likewise asked Dame Gertrude if she would like to see her former Confessor, with whom she had the difference of which I have spoken, but again the answer was in the negative. Had Dame Gertrude, seeing that the Sister was not satisfied, and was disposed to press her to see one or other Confessor, replied more emphatically: "No, I will see no more."

I may also mention that two or three days before this incident, the Abbess had asked Dame Gertrude whether she would like to see her former Confessor in England, or any of the other Fathers who had assembled for Chapter at Down; but she replied that she thanked God there was no need for it, but that she humbly begged that they would all pray for her.

No, it is impossible that Dame Gertrude, a soul believing in and desiring eternal happiness, and abhorring the contrary, would not have desired and sought comfort and help by eternal means, had she not found and enjoyed within herself that comfort which can be obtained only in God. No doubt, too, she saw that if she sought comfort from without, which she did not need, and which she had no leave from her internal Lord and Ruler to seek, she would have hindered and conditioned rather than increased her interior happiness. Hence her contentedness herself with that whom she was to give her true and full enjoyment—namely, the contemplated presence of God in her soul, with the working of His light and grace therein. This alone,



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then, even if there were no other evidence—which is far from being the case—would suffice to show the happiness of her soul at the time of death, upon which depends the happiness of the future life.

There who have no such satisfaction within themselves, on the other hand, always seek for it by some means from without. There cannot, therefore, be a greater or surer token of a happy death than that which I have alleged in the case of Dame Gertrude. I except only the certitude which God, by His omnipotent power, can cause by a miracle or other extraordinary and supernatural means. But we should not expect such revelations, nor does God usually impart them.

But may we not justly look upon Dame Gertrude's case as a miracle or sign of His great entity—of how many do we see this?—and also as a record of the inclination of God's hand? For is it not a wonderful thing to see a young maiden, full of fear and respect for nature, shaken, terrified by solemn warnings from without by those in authority, and about all desiring and abhorring eternal damnation, to seek help or comfort from man or woman, especially when she had no hope and no good a chance as anyone would wish to have? Indeed, so far from being troubled, she, on the contrary, found herself so comforted by God, and so fully comforted and satisfied in Him, that it would have been a great outrage and injury to the Divine Majesty for her to have sought comfort from creatures. It is not this, I say, a miracle, or at least equivalent to a miracle? What better token, then, can we reasonably demand or expect of a happy and holy death? Lord, how vain it would have been for me to



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have gone to her out of my own head, or for any other, even with leave of Superior, and to have uttered words of exhortation, or to have encouraged her to resignation, confidence, etc. For what more could we have done? For, in truth, Dame Gertrude was already actually engaged in the exercise of all her duties, in virtue of the light and impulses of the Holy Spirit, whose efficacy was infinitely above anything that could be wrought by human words or works. To listen to me would have been, for the time, to cease to attend to the internal Speaker; at least, my words would have been to no purpose, if they did not actually cause disturbance, for the condition of a soul that has a strong, living propensity, such as Dame Gertrude had, and is pursuing an interior course in which the soul presently is worked upon by grace, is such that God immediately provides what she requires; or, if He wills her to seek help from without, He directs her to do so. If, then, such a soul looks not for aid from without, it is a sign that her interior Lord has provided for her needs from within, and the soul herself and all others should be satisfied. "If anyone see that you are not at peace, or that you are in pain, or that you are in danger," that what she has said and the soul herself can tell that she is in peace and happiness! None but those who are acquainted with her interior dispositions—and they are not few—or those, perhaps, who are pursuing the same interior course. Others can judge only by external appearances, and these alone afford little indication upon which a judgment may be grounded. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at if the latter formed a different opinion



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about Dame Gertrude from those who were acquainted with her interior dispositions, or were in the same spiritual course, and consequently were better able to form an opinion about her. "All the beauty of the King's daughter is within" (Ps. xlv. 14). What more could you wish to hear of her? She was one of those whom St. Paul describes (Rom. vii. 14) as the children of God—who are wrought in, led, carried, guided, and ruled by the Spirit of God. The rest of the number whom our Blessed Saviour Himself terms "new adorns of God" (1) and He seeks for such as will adore Him in spirit and in truth (John iv. 23). But, on the other hand, He seeks not those who, without one internal worship, seem to adore Him by their many words (multiplicity), and speaking, or many and great external deeds. But, she! who can distinguish the children of God, those true adorns! for their working is practically internal and spiritual, not visible and visible to the eyes of others. True adorns may perhaps be recognized by those whose internal spiritual senses are exercised in the same manner. These can often distinguish by small external indications the working of the Holy Spirit in other souls, because of the resemblance to His working in their own. Hence those who are not experimentally acquainted with the internal working and illumination of the Holy Spirit rarely are in their judgments about a soul that is wholly in the hands and under the guidance of God, like Dame Gertrude.

These observations will be plain to anyone who can lay a claim to a sound judgment in these matters, if he will but consider the writings of Dame Gertrude, and

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what I have already recorded of her life and death. I shall add yet further evidence for the edification of those who are favorably disposed, and for the reflection and enlightenment of those who are inclined toward or take offence at everything, that those who may be brought to acknowledge the truth.

If, person during life or at the hour of his death speaks differently to St. Peter or St. Paul, or any other apostle, or even, if he give one reason to think that his mind was not illuminated by the will moved by the Holy Spirit, I should not be much edified by his words, nor should I pronounce him to be a saint, or give to him the title of God. What external act, then, without further knowledge of a person's interior life, can enable us to measure the internal maturity of another? There is none whatever. But my knowledge on the part of the interior life of a person affords us a corresponding knowledge of his holiness. "For all the glory is within" (Ps. xlv. 14). When, then, an interior soul approaches the hour of death, and, regarding the fulfiling of her function, is observed to speak only when necessary to make some reasonable reply to a question, and continues in silence for a good space before death, and even until the moment of death, I should have every confidence in the eternal happiness of that soul. And I should believe that during her eternal silence, she was employed according to the will of God; and what greater happiness can a soul desire?

I think we may draw a similar conclusion from the demeanor and course of Dame Gertrude. For instance, among many others, we may mention her bearing towards Father Calbert Horeau, who assisted her

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and put her various necessary questions, to all of which she answered briefly and clearly. "Yes, with all my heart." I shall presently give the precise account of his conversation with her, and the conclusion he arrived at from his own observation, and from what he heard from other reliable sources.

I think, however, that there is a difference, which I may mention, between souls that have arrived at a state of perfection and imperfect souls at the time of their death. It often happens that the former will take occasion out of their abundant Divine light to discourse on spiritual things; but the latter most commonly keep silence, for they are in greater need of attending to themselves and immediately to God, and could not discourse to others without incurring distraction. But perfect souls can discourse without distraction, retaining contemplation even while they are speaking, and, indeed, producing their words out of their contemplation and meditation.

These observations are in harmony with the teaching of our Holy Father, who says in his Rule that it belongs to the master—that is, the perfect soul—to speak by way of teaching, though God may sometimes employ an imperfect soul out of a kind of necessity, for want of perfect souls, who are scarce, especially in these days. But imperfect souls are advised by our Holy Father to speak only when they are spoken to—that is to say, they are not to speak with the purpose of instructing or teaching, but only by way of dissent or necessary recreation, or for brotherly or sisterly conversation. This kind of speech is lawful both for the imperfect and the perfect. Perhaps it is even more allowable to the

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imperfect than to the perfect, for the latter need this kind of relaxation less than the former, and are better able to endure silence and solitude. Such recreation may be allowed to the sick as well as to the healthy, for the former cannot be always actually engaged in internal exercises, but must sometimes take rest, and at such times it is proper that they should reflect themselves by conversation, so that they may be able at other occasions to employ themselves intensively towards God.

In this spirit Dame Gertrude remained humble, when she thought fit, in conversation with her Sisters. It was on such occasions that she declined to let Lady Abbess venture particulars about her interior life, for they were always very distant with one another. Dame Gertrude, however, was not attempting to touch, but only spoke of such matters to each of something better to talk about. The Lady Abbess has put on record what was said on that occasion, and her narrative will be inserted presently.

Repeat the brief and useful opinion of Father Coulbert already recorded, Dame Gertrude gave no express indication of her state. How otherwise she stood with God or employed her time internally can be known to God alone; but we are not to be too sure of such strong propensity and so much grace was diligently and actively corresponding with God's invitation, according to the power He gave her and according to His will. Some external signs of her internal occupation appeared and could not but appear, as will be seen in the accurate given of her last moments by witnesses.



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To conclude, I cannot do better than quote what I wrote in a commentary on Brother Eusebio de Marcella's treatise, and which I added to Dame Gertrude's "Confession": "For the time in question furnishes a point of much moment in Dame Gertrude's life—namely, her recreations and conversations with others at times when she was not disposed to retire and recollection. The passage is as follows: "You have heard our author say that vain and secular talk or gossip would cause an impediment between God and the soul, and hinder her progress in the way of perfection. But you must understand these words to mean when the talk is in itself evil, as murmuring, which is specially mentioned by the author; or when the person talks out of mere natural inclination, even though the matter were in itself indifferent, or to gratify his sensible nature, but not when he speaks out of a Divine light or with the Divine approbation."

There is no doubt but that the Holy Spirit will allow, and even commend, His disciples to talk about different things for a just cause, as for recreation, or for the sake of brotherly or sisterly intercourse, or some other pious motive. Conversation in such a case is not to be esteemed culpable or idle, nor will it be an obstacle in the way of perfection. The Divine Spirit will allow and commend in time of recollection the prayer, and the soul may exercise to outside the hour of recollection. In the same sense we other authors to be understood when they declaim against vain and worldly conversation.

This may be shown by the example of great Saints—



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you, even Saints that had most retired lives, two of whom come to mind. St. Paul the Hermit and St. Mary of Egypt. Of St. Paul we are told that on one occasion, being visited by St. Anthony, he asked the latter what men in the world were doing, whether any houses were being built in the ancient cities in place of the old ones, how the world was governed, or who was Emperor, etc. St. Mary of Egypt also, when visited by Zosimus, asked how matters went abroad, how it stood with the Emperor, etc. Such questions were not put to gratify curiosity or sensible pleasure, for they cared little how it went with the world in such matters; but they made these inquiries, I believe, because they did not well know what she to talk about. In spiritual matters they were experts, and, as one may say, Doctors in the Faculty. It would, then, have been to little purpose, and perhaps unseemly, to have talked on spiritual matters, and one to have instructed the other. Hence, as it was fitting that they should converse a little together, they talked of matters that were to them—above all, least indifferent, and they conducted the conversation good and profitable by their questions, which was of the best. In a similar manner, as we read in the same work, "The Lives of the Fathers," the hermit Copres behaved towards Rufina and his companion, when they visited him upon the report of his remarkable piety and mortification, some of which he worked in their presence. "The hermit" says Rufina, "was at that time about eighty years of age. We having come into his presence, he asked us with the kiss of peace, according to custom, joined with us



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is pure, and washed our feet. When he had done
this, he retired about the office of the world, or what
was happening there. But instead of answering his
questions, we brought him that he would rather tell us
about his own life and exercises, etc."

CHAPTER XXVI
 DAME GERTRUDE'S LAST SICKNESS AND DEATH

Thus far I have dealt with the three earlier periods of Dame Gertrude's life. Now I will speak of the final period, which begins with her last illness down to the hour of her death.

The final illness which terminated Dame Gertrude's life was an attack of malaria, which she caught in the house while three or four persons had been laid up with the illness, but had recovered from it. She was taken ill on July 29 or 30, but had no idea what was the matter. Moreover, an external sign of the illness was apparent when she arose to go to the garden on that day. I was to leave on the following day for Douay to attend the General Chapter, and Dame Gertrude came to the gate to confer with me about the spiritual course pursued by the sisters, and which was to be dealt with by Chapter. She did not allude to her health, and appeared to have all her wits about her, as at other times. Yet this was the last time (though we know it not) we were to meet in this life. After we separated, she began to feel more and more indisposed, so that a few days later she was carried to the infirmary, and then the disease declared itself. I

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never held any further communication with her, but departed on the appointed day for Douay.

Now that we have settled Dame Gertrude in the infirmary, let us consider her disposition for a happy death. The disposition consists in the internal state of the soul, though this may disclose itself externally, when the occasion is so to require.

The first sign of Dame Gertrude's good dispositions may be seen in almost the last words she wrote in her "Confession." "I will sing," said she, "unto Thee mercy and judgment all the days of my life, watching always that Thy will, which do justice unto, may be wholly and perfectly accomplished in me. Thy will be done, Let us live as we live in a flesh. Thus, or die in the very beginning of those my desires to love, good sickness or health, riches or being poor, poverty or abundance, give them as thou wilt I be by all the world abandoned." ("Confession.")

Such words of resignation, and much more to the same effect, Dame Gertrude poured forth to God, and they plainly discover a will perfectly resigned to death, a mind of the greatest simplicity. Justice she could add anything to these words, she was suddenly surprised by her doctors, which proved to be her last. Thus God gave her occasion to practise and exercise what had been ready in will and intention. Such a consummation the way Divine Providence deals with souls that He toucheth loose. He first disposes them internally, and then He actually sends them the probation for which He had previously prepared them.

A little before her last sickness Dame Gertrude

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wrote some lines which also show her excellent disposition. I may call these her swan song; they express the longing of her soul for death.

My heart shall only die desire,
 That Thou, my Lord, dispose
 How as Thou pleasest in all things
 'Till I have seen Thy face

By death, which, as much desire,
 Remains to will possess
 He mercy my Lord and All,
 When I shall be secure

That none from me can take my Lord;
 But be worthy,
 I shall enjoy my only Good,
 And to His love be

United by a love of love
 Which nothing shall ever
 He will remain as permanent
 As His Desire

O happy love, when with these words
 had I my own love,
 That I my Lord and praise my God
 For evermore,

Contemplating His glorious face,
 With all his love when
 Imagining with them His sweetest grace
 For ever and evermore. Amen

A further indication of Dame Gertrude's disposition and preparation for death is to be found in some petitions she wrote in an introduction to a collection of devotions she put together a short time

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before her death. Her words were as follows:¹ "These collections once more I offer to Thee, my God; and those that in giving thereof are moved thereby to love and praise Thee, be they, my God, mindful of me in their holy prayers, which are most pleasing to Thee. I also desire those of their charity to read those things to me which hereafter follow when I shall be departed, so that I may be accompanied with those fears and terrors which ordinarily accompany that dreadful hour; at which time, as at all other, be Thou my helper and protector, and in the bosom of Thy mercy, good Father, remember me, poor sinner, and from heaven send me now and at the hour of my departure Thy grace, which may bring me to Thee, where I may, with all the elect, praise, adore, and worship Thee for ever and ever. Amen.

"I beseech you, all Saints, and those especially, most benign Father, St. Benedict, with whose feet and hands I have lived, that together with me ye crave of the Lord that He grant me a happy end.

Maria mater gratia,
Mater misericordie,
Tu sis mihi protego. Amen.
Certe scilicet bene libens in terra servavit.

"O infinite Goodness, Who art Charity itself, pour Thy grace abundantly into my poor soul! I beseech Thee, my God, by the merits and intercession of all Saints, that I may be admitted to the multitude of Thy most abundant mercies, a fourteen years' journey deep."

¹ The following passages are quotations from various writings of Dame Gertrude which are at the end of the "Index Divinus," 191st edition.



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The Saints in Heaven and servants on earth, to have mercy on me, both now and at all times, and especially in my last extremity. All I desire is that in life and death I may be disposed according to the multitude of Thy most abundant mercies, a fourteen years' journey deep."

By these preparations it may be gathered that Dame Gertrude had some kind of internal illumination of her approaching end some time before she fell ill or had the first symptoms of sickness. If there was no direct illumination, she was at least intently urged and enabled to prepare for death, as is evident that night on long talks there.

In Dame Gertrude was certainly for the good of her soul, and was endowed with internal impulses towards God both by sense and by grace, so that we may be sure that all went well between her soul and the Holy Spirit. As He had been careful to guide her and work in her during life, so now that death drew nigh, in which His Divine work was to be consummated, we are not to doubt but that He perfected it, for otherwise all His labors had been in vain. It is the end that alone crowns the work.

As Dame Gertrude's sickness became more serious, and death approached, so did the need for the exercise of resignation increase. To this call she responded by acts of resignation to the pains of her illness, death, purgatory, and the Divine judgments generally, both for time and eternity. In a word, she resigned herself to God in all nature general and particular, according to the suggestions that arose in her mind. The Divine Spirit is wont to suggest various acts of resignation.



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according to what may be most profitable to our natural will and proportionate to the grace He bestows for it. As Dame Gertrude increased in resignation, so also did her confidence grow. Nothing is so profitable and secure as confidence grounded on resignation. Nothing but resignation can disperse or cause true and just confidence. Where, therefore, we consider the varied tokens of resignation and confidence which are to be found in her writings, and in other ways, we may conclude that her resignation and confidence were truly Divine.

As Dame Gertrude was most careful in time of health to observe, as all in all, Divine inspirations, so we may judge that in time of sickness, with death approaching, she was, if anything, more careful than ever to attend to them. She enjoyed the full possession of her faculties till the moment of her death, and could not have failed to observe the degree of strength and the coming of death; so that ever, from time to time, she exercised herself inwardly towards God, as the following accounts will show, and as we may properly infer from our own knowledge of her spirit and propensity. Hence we may conclude that Dame Gertrude's soul departed from her body in much grace and purity.

Divine inspirations in very interior souls like Dame Gertrude always tend to draw them towards interior questions and interior actions, and to little that is exterior save in so far as may be necessary. Hence such souls, when they come to die, bring the finest external tokens of any good souls how it fares with them internally. Not will they talk of their interior or of internal matters without necessity, and this seldom.



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alone; but they by preference talk of my honest, indifferent external matter by way of reputation; for in their estimation the interior is so dainty and tender that they will not meddle with it, or disclose it to others, without the leave, light, and will of their internal Guide. Such was the conduct of Dame Gertrude. Not being always able to attend to the spirit, she often during her sickness diverted her mind by conversing about external matters; but as for internal things she avoided touching upon them without necessity. This was the reason among others why she declined to see either of the two Fathers who happened to arrive just then from Douay. This is all the more remarkable because it was reported—though erroneously—that one of them had been her Confessor.

Dame Gertrude made her confessions to Father Maurus Pritchard, who had recently arrived from England, and who remained at Chartres on purpose for the confessions, in the absence of the ordinary Confessor. Dame Gertrude was not long at her confessions, and, as she afterwards declared, did not go back to her former confessions, but submitted directly to the advice she had received from her Confessors. I cannot tell whether she had any temptation to return to her former confessor, but certainly upon that point, as an entire, she did obedient and full of confidence. Dame Gertrude's conduct in this matter shows clearly that her confessor was in God and in the testimony of a good conscience, and not in man, nor in her own willful or will. This is a point on which Dame Gertrude much insists in her writings, and which she considered to be most important for the happiness of

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the soul. This is quite different from the conduct of those who, wanting confidence in God and the testimony of a good conscience, have never done with their interviews with their Confessor, and seem to have no confidence but in his words—a very miserable state and full of fear.

There are various reasons why Dame Gertrude did not wish to see either of the Fathers from Douay. One of the two priests was the Confessor who had most often himself most opposed to her spiritual course; the other was, as she supposed, the priest who had her into it, and gave for its present the general instructions which she followed till her death. But to give in detail all the reasons which we may justly suppose she had for refusing to see either priest would be tedious. Besides, some of the chief reasons are spiritual, and not easily expressed or understood; nor, perhaps, are they likely to weigh with souls of another spirit or course; nor, perhaps, some might even take scandal, as great in the tenderness, or rather errors and ignorance, of some consciences concerning spiritual matters and conduct. This reason may, however, satisfy all sorts of spirits—namely, that the Council of Trent and the laws regarding enclosures for convents forbid the admittance of persons apart from the community without necessity, whether Confessors or others. In Dame Gertrude's case no necessity could be alleged for either Confessor to see her.

4. We may well suppose that Dame Gertrude followed in her last sickness and at the time of her 3. Thus, if cases, were numerous Fathers that and Father

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death those general lights which she enjoyed in health; for the Divine Spirit neither teaches nor can teach contrary ways or better contrary lights, but they are always alike and the same in substance, though there may be a variation in their conditions or circumstances, according to the diverse states and needs of the soul.

In this general light before her illness Dame Gertrude made some observations to me about death on more than one occasion. The following statements give the substance of her remarks:

1. That one should live as one would die, and thus to die as one had lived.
2. That the proper way for her and other souls of a kindred spirit to die was in the exercise of patience, silence, interior solitude, resignation, and the filling up of the mind to God in the manner that God best could direct to do.
3. Particularly as regards conditions, that one should not yield to the tenderness and fears of nature, and make no account of the great indignity and obscurity of the sepulchre, in the great indignity and obscurity of the sepulchre. Nor, indeed, should one admit anything contrary to the lights enjoyed in time of health. For the Holy Spirit never teaches contrary to Himself. To follow the Divine light, then, is the only secure way, because it tends to make souls suffer and abate, contrary to the will and inclination of their nature. Thus, in one respect the light may lead souls to martyr their nature, though in other respects there may be no mortification to nature at all, but only pleasure.

Indeed, in souls that follow Divine inspirations and calls, health, sickness, life, and death are all one. They make as it were, but one spiritual way towards



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heaven, though the subject-matter of the inspirations may be most diversified. One thing only is common to all such—namely, that in all their thoughts and reflections they follow and obey the Divine inspirations and will.

4. During time of health Dame Gertrude was not anxious as to what should become of her body after death, nor what kind of funeral she should have, nor what remembrance of her would be preserved after death. She resigned herself in all these things to the Divine will, thinking only upon the happiness of the future life, in which she knew true joy is alone to be found, the things of this life being transitory and vain, even in so far as they conduce to future happiness.

It was a singular act of Divine Providence, worthy of note, that both her Confessor—the one who had been opposed to her spiritual course and the other a strong supporter—were absent just at the very time of her last sickness, and a stranger alone was with her, yet sufficient for her needs. As the adverse Father was unexpected for her, so the other was unannounced, and even perhaps undreamed of, as may be easily imagined.

I will now let those speak who were with Dame Gertrude during her last illness, and at the time of her death, and who can testify to what they actually saw and heard. The first shall be Father Gilbert Herby, a monk of our Order, who was appointed to hear the confessions of the house during the absence of the ordinary Confessor, and was the last man to be with Dame Gertrude, the prior, Father Martin Fritchard (whom I said had lately come from England, and was

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staying a few days at Canterbury, having lab for England. In reply to my inquiries, he wrote as follows:

"Reverend Father, I received yours, wherein you request me to let you understand to particularize as I can the disposition I found the religious dame in for a good death. Verily I will with all my heart. First, of patience, resignation, and confidence in God can give testimony of a good disposition to die with the dead well and happily as ever I saw creature in my life. When I was called in to give her the Last Sacrament, I spoke with her alone, and asked her these questions, viz. (1) "Is there anything that doth trouble your conscience or disturb your inward peace?" She answered: "No, Father. I thank God, nothing!" (2) "Do you willingly accept of these afflictions, or whatever else it shall please God His Divine Majesty, to lay upon you for the satisfaction of your sins?" "With all my heart!" (3) "Are you content to die, if it please God to take you in this sickness?" "With all my heart!" (4) "Do you forgive all your religious Sisters, and all the world for whatsoever they have offended you in, and do you desire likewise forgiveness of them all?" "Yes, with all my heart!" (5) "Are you confident, and do you believe and hope, that, by the merits of the Passion of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, your soul shall be saved?" "Yes, Father, I am confident in Almighty God, and do really believe and hope He will!" (6) "Do you desire this Holy Sacrament of Extreme Unction?" "Yes, with all my heart." With that I called in the midwives, and gave her that Holy Sacrament, and afterwards the Passy

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Abolition, which we have by participation from Spain, and executed some other ceremonies, according to the rubric of the Ritual, and came forth. After this I saw her no more, but still inquired how she did, and answer was given that she remained still in the same quietness till her very last breath. I have given you a particular relation of her disposition to die well as I can. My Lady Abbess can particularize to you much more than I, for she was almost continually with her, both before and after. But certainly she gave signs of a good resignation and confidence in Almighty God as could be seen in anyone, which without all doubt is an evident sign of her being in the favour and grace of His Divine Majesty, Whom holy tradition I doubt not but she enjoys, which of His infinite mercy He grant us also." The letter is dated October 26, 1613.

The second letter is from one of the religious, Dame Ann Moss (sister of Dame Gertrude), who was appointed to read her confessions in her last sickness. The letter was written to one who was a houseman both of the writer and of the deceased. "The letter afterwards came into my hands, and from it I make the following extract:—"It was my good fortune to be with her [Dame Gertrude] for the time of her sickness, and by her when her happy soul departed. I beseech Jesus to grant me grace to imitate her innocent life, that I may have no happy a death. Truly she hath left us great edification to us which are behind her, but my poor pen is not able to express. The pains which I took about her in her sickness are not so to be compared to the great comfort which I received to see so great patience in a sickness so long

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some as hers was. Verily I have seen in her Job upon the dunghill. Lawrence with his sons, an angel in paradise—so resigned was she to the will of God, so willing to die; so ready to suffer more, if I pleased God, as from a condition, with humility, in Almighty God; always praying; still calling on the sweet Name of Jesus.

The first account I had given that of Sister Hilda Percy, a lay sister, one of the four appointed to attend on Dame Gertrude, and who was with her till the end. Sister Hilda wrote as follows: "Her [Dame Gertrude's] sickness began to appear on July 20, though she had been a fortnight before much indisposed as to meat and drink; still, she was able to go out and walk the house till August 1, upon which day she found herself so weak that she was not able to rise to her room, and that same day she went to the infirmary. The doctor of physic, coming to her, could not find what her sickness was, nor perceive any fever and the smell upon her was not offensive; but she continued much anguish and pain with admirable patience from the first hour until her last breath. Thus she continued, the smell upon her being so coming out for the space of ten or eleven days, with great patience, her danger still increasing. Lying in the same room with her and being about her house, but asked whether she desired to speak with Father Baker, or would have anything signified or set to her concerning her. She answered: "No, but to give him thanks a thousand times, who had brought her to such a pass that she could confidently go out of this life without speaking to any man."

"Continuance being come, which was then upon

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every Saturday), she desired a priest to come to her, and at that time there was none to be had here but a stranger whom we had never known before. His being come in, she humbly went to confession, but could not communicate by reason of an extraordinary still phlegm, which took her upon her first coming into the infirmary, and continued till the breath went out of her body.

"The doctor, coming frequently to her, gave her many things, which she took with great patience, except one syring which seemed very loathsome to her, which she desired for God's sake to have given her no more, to which I immediately answered her: "For God's sake she must take it, but received being of great concern to me." Whereupon, without reply, she took it, submitting as often as it was given her, which was every half-hour. She never complained of her pains, but as we plainly discerned, with all severity laid on when she suffered, and when she felt better and when worse. Sometimes she called and said: "I die! I die without! But all is nothing in comparison of what I suffer in my throat." In all her sickness she was never troubled at anything that was done or said about her except once. It being observed that she suffered great pain with much patience and resignation, one of us happened to say to her: "God be praised, dame, that you have us as good as though to hear what suffering it had upon us, which, with a disturbed countenance, she shook her head and said: "Hildy your pains?" But the person replied in her hearing that at that time she was doing something about her which caused her much pain! "Though you are not willing to hear it, yet we ought to take example by it." To which she made no reply.

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"She often desired to be quiet, wholly giving herself to God, praising His Divine Majesty, Whom she experienced never laid upon His servants more than they were able to bear. At other times she desired to be recreated, and this she heavenly and freely did to our comfort, signifying how those recreations did her much good, whereby we perceived her pains, both of mind and soul. Upon some occasions which I do not well remember a dear friend of hers said unto her: "Though your life be very grateful unto me, yet I do not so much as beg it once of Almighty God." Hearing which, she said joyfully: "That is the very best of all. They both concluded, 'His Holy will be done in all things.'"

"She, finding herself to grow worse, desired to have the Last Sacrament administered to her; but she was not perceiving any present danger, yet it off for some four or five days, during which time she never spoke more of it, but left it to God's providence and our care, we having all things in readiness against the time.

"Upon August 16, in the morning, My Lady sent word that we the four appointed to help her, might, if we would, come to the choir to communicate before Prime began. One of us went to her and told her that we were going to the choir to communicate, and asked her whether she desired that we should take the body of our Lord for her Viaticum. To which she replied: "Yes, for God's sake." And so we did. When we returned the grave woman, as she had always changed before. She spent all that day very quietly and steadily, stirring little until towards night, and then she desired to be held up a while; but she was

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not able to be long in that posture, but hid herself down, beseeching to many holy aspirations.

"Sometimes I begged she would remember me in her prayers, and she answered me confidently that she would when she got to Heaven; and the like she did when she was several times asked to pray for all this company.

"To conclude: she spent her time very devoutly, with great application to us all that were present, until towards twelve o'clock at night, when she called for something which she took, and after that lay quietly, yet seeming to draw very near towards death. And, beginning to pray, we frequently pronounced aspirations into her ears, to which she answered as long as she could speak. When she could not utter a word more, she blessed the crucifix and lifted up her hands, and so happily expired in Our Lord upon August 17, 1611.

"Much more might be said of her sickness and pangs, but for my part, I am not able to speak what she desired. As touching the nature of her disorder, you have heard of it. I will, however, touch one point, and that is how it was most infectious and odious, very near the plague; and, indeed, her death, both inwardly and outwardly did not vary, so that we had much ado to keep the fire from making seats in her face and setting it white alive, and she sat us all complaining. I asked her whether she felt them, to which she answered: "Yes."

The fourth account is that of the Lady Abbess's her Spectator. This is the correspondent I have already

¹ This was Dame Catherine Georgian.



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frequently cited. She was very intimate with Dame Gertrude. The Lady Abbess wrote: "This time of her [Dame Gertrude's] last sickness (which was not long, but wonderfully painful and vehement, she hath left us a great example of patience, resignation, and confidence in God, as all do affirm that had anything to do about her, or who were present with her in the time of her sickness. As she had been faithful to God in practicing and prosecuting the happy course which Father Baker first put her into, and which she had so often in her lifetime professed to be beneficial to her soul, and most earnestly begged of Almighty God that she might persevere in the practice of it till death, so here I constantly affirm that she stood faithfully to the principles and practice of it all the time of her last sickness, in the very last moment of her life. For the happy exercise of love and confidence, which, as I say, she had practiced with so much diligence and fidelity in her life, God Almighty did seem pleas'd to send did give her grace and ability to continue the same till her very expiration; in the which she was in the time of her sickness to attend to with such a calmness and equanimity of her mind, which were very precious. But instead of comforting her, we were continually oblig'd to see her so patient, so truly resigned to the Divine will for all things without exception, or humbly content in the goodness and mercy of God; and, in a word, so sweetly and happily disposed for God that I know not how to express it. When she had been some five or six days sick, and her illness growing so ill that she found it would hinder her speech, she desired to have the Confessor to come in to hear her confessions,



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which he did, and gave her a Plenary Indulgence. But her disease was in such a manner that she could not, nor was it thought fit for her to, communicate then, and much less afterwards. Ever after that condition, she seem'd to have her soul settled in such peace that she had now no more to do but only to resign herself to God Almighty's disposition, neither fearing to die nor desiring to live, but only to do His Holy will, living or dying.

"I did ask her sometimes when I was to write to Drou, if she would have me to say anything for her to any one, where they were assembled for a General Chapter then being holden, and whether she desired me to speak with Father Baker, or with her ancientest Father (Dionysius Fosse), who was then there, or with any other of our Fathers: for I said I was sure they would say of them come to her. And she answered: No, but humbly desired, for God's sake, all their prayers. She said that (if anything in the world had troubled her conscience, she could have spoken it to the Father that had heard her confessions, as well as to any other, if she seem'd to have been very glad of Father Maurus; for he had served her ten or twelve years in the world could do. Some three or four days before she died, when we heard she would not change I went to her one night, as I used to do, and I thought fit to let her know she was in danger, and so I told her. Whence she seem'd to be nothing at all moved or dismayed one jot, but by words and gestures shew'd all signs of resignation that could be. I told her how loath I was to part with her, and what a loss I should have. And she, perceiving me to be troubled, answered: "Oh, do not fear; do not doubt God



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will apply? I said again: 'If he be the will that you express, it would be a great comfort to me, that if He will have you to himself, I am not content. His help will be done.' 'Yes, that is the best of all, said she, 'His help will be done.' Then we fell into prayer—I know not how—about Father Baker. 'God reward him, said she, 'for what he hath done to my soul, and God reward him for all he hath done to this house! that in doing this he hath done to me, as though he did, she hath nothing to trouble her, but to only wholly give God.' And speaking something of His great goodness and disposition in all things, and especially His 'wonderful mercies herself,' God, said she, 'hath given me peace in my soul, and what can one desire more coming to die? His work will be done in me and in all things! Methinks I have nothing at all to do but to leave myself wholly to His disposition, and let Him do what He pleases.' And those were her very words, as near as I can remember, and more to the same effect did she say, which plainly sheweth how truly rejoiced she was both to be her own particular and for all things concerning the house, and how contentedly she relied upon God Almighty's providence and care of them both. For presently she fell to speaking of things concerning the house. 'It is a great comfort to me,' said she, 'to have all things at so good a pass. I do not doubt but my excellent Father will think his journey well bestowed, and will go away well satisfied about us. There are a great many fine souls in the house, and I doubt not but that God will have many a Saint out of it.' And more she said to this effect—how much God Almighty had done for us, and sheweth



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How wept she in their trial and manner did seek and endeavor to please Him. And that she discerned with me in a good space together, in a perfect season and manner as near she had in her life; so that, although I was almost sick with weeping there, yet could I scarce find in my heart to leave her, she spoke so comfortably to me. Before this she said she did in some times in her sickness mention to me how careful and diligent ever she was to fast, and how charitable and loving all were to one another. 'Good Lord,' said she, 'when I see the custom that was said to be so much amongst us?' 'For the former Father that was so adverse to her had many times told her that she was odious to those in the house, and that they had great difficulties with her.' 'In those proceedings, said she, 'show as if there were anything?' 'Therein I said I thought it was not possible they could diminish the matter and make such a show of it they did not do it really. And she replied: 'No, now; it is not possible: they must too well do so.' 'Upon the assumption of Our Lady the physicians wished that, with all speed, the Last Sacrament might be ministered to her. And by Father Confiant there is an account as following, near ended, which for that cause was hastened, and he received them with great devotion. And he also gave her that the Absolution, which is usually given at the point of death, for we all thought she was very near it, and the doctor said she could not live past midnight, and wished that she for as could possibly might be about her, the infection did so increase and grow still more contagious to several souls. And though I must not to have left her as long as she was



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alive, it was fit that I should forbear in respect to the community. Besides, I was very sick that night, and the doctor said I had been almost too bold. So that hereafter I had no more company with her. Only there were four appointed to read her, and we expected every minute when she would expire. Yet she lived all the next day, and all midnight again, and the most part of that time, as I conceive and gather, she spent in prayer. For the nearer to death the more quiet did she lie, and desired less to speak, save only at times to refresh and refresh her. 'The night before she died came to our holyday the former Father Confiant, and because there was another with him, word was carried to the infirmary that he and Father Baker were come. And one of the four asked her if she desired not to speak with Father Baker, and she answered: 'No.' And they asked her if she would speak with the Father, the former Confiant. And she, speaking a little more freely and cheerfully, said: 'Oh, with so much. Then they asked if she would have God, and she answered: 'Yes, which plainly sheweth us, as seems to me, how contentedly she died, relying wholly upon God, and contentedly so far as could be gathered by her, all the time of her sickness during several months. His in such manner as He did enable her, without seeming to have any impediment between her and Him, but always by love applying to Him. 'She fell sick the very day Father was from home to Down, but was indisposed some days before. When she and I parted with Father Baker at the gate, she went to her chamber sick, and the next day was carried to the infirmary, and the 17th day of the



Chapter XXVI: Dame Gertrude's Last Sickness and Death

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month of August, 1514, after midnight (she consented being at Madrid), about one of the clock, she rendered her happy soul to God. When she awoke and looked after with no great a love that she esteemed all her reflections relating to His sake.

Dame Gertrude died at the age of twenty-seven years, four months, and twenty-three days, having been born on March 25, 1546. She was nearly ten years in Religion, and was almost seven years in the practice of her spiritual course, which she crossed and commended with a happy death, as the preceding narrative may justly give us cause to hope, and to praise the goodness of God for the same.

Epiphany to par. 4. am.

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APPENDIX

When Father Baker had almost completed his life of Dame Gertrude, it occurred to him to ask the lady of "a certain person" who was particularly well acquainted with the nature of his subject. He therefore went to the said person, extremely desiring her to set down in writing, saying that she would not be tired that was at all worth recording. As Father Baker knew that this person was an scholar, and indeed, unacquainted, though of Church and habit, and was moreover very much occupied, he suggested that she should set down things just as they occurred to her, without being solicited about the order of time or other circumstances. The said person responded to Father Baker's request, and she then the account mentioned Father Baker. The same attached much importance to the writer's statements on account of the "worth of the person," and also on account of her having better power of knowing the incidents she recorded than he had. He therefore advised the reader to give the preference to the account which is in any way different from his own. In point of fact, the difference was very slight. We have not been able to obtain the full text of the letter, but the principal portion is here given.

Epiphany to par. 4. am.

BY command of the

"The Dame Gertrude had done some hold and that she came to Religion much against her will, and in a manner forced by this which she had not power to

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ment by reason of the great affection she bore unto him. It seems to me that he did see some tokens or signs in her of God Almighty's grace, and did keep her great good estate in some distrust; and did keep her far persons and build upon her for a foundation, that he would not be denied by her, when so yet she herself was so unwilling and far from it. And though she seemed, at least when he had long and much conversed her, to be willing, when she saw there was no remedy, yet she proved inwardly, and retiring, and withdrawing herself in secret, would sit weeping and sighing for it. And this grieving was not that she desired to take any worldly course for she would say that her nature was not delighted nor did take comfort in anything of this world, but it was because a contrary life as she esteemed the life of religion to be was wonderful contrary to her disposition, and therefore she had a great apprehension of it. And when her friends and those of the house did observe an alteration in her, so that she did give more interest and industry, they returned it to be more devotion and nothing else, and that she had been praying when to reality she was getting privately to heaven.

"I have said to her sometimes, that I marvel that she had no mind nor desire to such a course. And she said she had no mind, but thought she had been brought to that condition. And when she saw that her clergy father (Dove Breast Jones) made full account of her, and was resolved upon it, she would not disagree nor disagree him so much (and indeed, she said he had won her heart so much, and she was affected towards him that she could drop him nothing), but that at least she would be willing to make trial of a religious life, and that was all she would promise him, and she did so.

"In this manner she came and received the Habit, &c.

¹ Her spiritual father, Father Dove Breast Jones.

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with no desire or intention at all to profess. And I would say to her I wondered she would live in such such terms. Did she not esteem it a disgrace to leave it? She said, No, not any disgrace at all. She had an apprehension of that, for when she had made trial, she had done the enterprise she could. Her spiritual father did write to her in the time of her weakness, and told her that if she should not have her health which God would send her, she would not be able to do this life, but for the more, for her so habitual resolutions. And though he would not go about to dissuade her from any course which our Saviour might call her to, yet if by any means it were discovered that she was in the course wherein she could not persevere, then to His honour and glory, she could promise of him as any time for she would never depart her heart from over her, but would be ready to converse further with her what he could. And to this effect did her father write.

"I do not know how she passed through most part of her life, I think with much content and satisfaction to herself, though to others all seemed to go well and content with her, and great hope there was of her proceeding. Towards the time of her profession she wrote to her father that she by the grace of God, she had made her resolution to profess. Yet when the time of profession drew near, I am sure she was wonderfully overcome and much troubled about it, so much that when Father President came, and was here for a week or three days before our profession was observed, she did come going to his life that she would not profess, but she was always hindered from doing so and put off upon some occasion or other, and so it should seem God would have it; so that she could not possibly get to speak with him, and she knew she was to do so, and she would have said that to him that he could not have accepted or admitted her to profession. But it seemed God

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Almighty intended and provided otherwise; so that either she did so speak to him, or else when she was with him she had not the heart to open her grief. And the way she takes for private confession she was most troubled, and wished to get to him in the evening, but could not by any means, until she was called during her time that night before the Council for examination, where she was accepted and admitted to profession, as were all the rest of her company. That same night, I remember, I was sent with her only upon an occasion, and she did not sit with me, but she would not sit in the house and profess; whereas I would, and said I hoped she never would otherwise, for I thought she that she had but parted with me, and did not know of her interior trouble and grief, and how full and heavy her heart was at that time, so she has since sometimes told me.

"The other her profession was made, then she did live in greater misery than ever before, discontented in mind and wonderfully afflicted, sorry for having taken the course upon her, grieved at all those who had furthered her in any way, or been an occasion of her grief, but she was such lively and fervent in her devotion, that she was able to be, which seemed most fitting and laudable to her. Especially she was most of all afflicted with her greedy Father of England for having brought her to so great misery that she was never able to return to him, but she never ceasing every day thinking in her mind against him. Indeed, at one time, when others did speak of him, saying, what a kind and father he was to the house, and how much we were obliged to him, and especially how great a friend of hers he was to her, she told me several times that she was not able to hear it with patience, but, crying, I wish, did not to be, and she would say she would have been glad to have seen the misery she was in, for having thus required her so great love and affection to him with misery which

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she could see no end of it, and unlike concepts as those she had often in life. Thus did she live in much affliction and disorder, which did daily increase on her father, because she would not comply with her obligations, having within her a weak and infirm body, which added to her interior grief. And she understood how others could take any comfort or satisfaction in their state, or have it quiet and something, but quite the contrary; and yet she labored by all the means she could to do her best, and sought out all our Fathers that she hoped to get any comfort or advice from, and even tried out her superiors, who took much pains with her, and her Father spent much time and many hours with her to take away and lessen the tortures of her affliction. And she hoped did read much and turn over all the books she could get at home to find some that she did find her comfort from God, and from the uncertainties of her imperfection. She, who had told me that she did not have recourse to grow much worse and more perverse in every respect, and especially she did release herself more voluntarily to her superior within, whom she had no great difficulty with, but she could not find but a great consolation, much more than she ever enjoyed before, and she was in anything. Yes, says to her Mother, whom she then much affected, she was sometimes so perverse that when her Mother did see her she almost in the weep, she would say, "Here is Dame Gertrude, but I would I had never known her name again." And she increased in her imperfections, and her heart rather turned herself to live in this manner, it much perplexed and troubled her conscience, for she desired to please God, but could not find the means for it, nor any remedy for her distressed soul.

"I think she had always infinitely sweet confidence,



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for she did not make any general confession either at clothing or profession, as others did. And she hoped that perhaps by a general confession she might be something quieted, and able to do better, and thus upon she made a general confession. And after she had made the same, she was far more troubled, and much more tormented in conscience than before; so that she was obliged to keep all things and events that were said up from her and that she might not know in all her conscience, and not her heart, and that for herself she hoped only that she could no longer being her weak of body. And indeed, as she had told me, if this misery of hers had lasted but a while longer, it had surely killed her, and brought her to her final end, had she not been a creature of some other divine or infinitely that would quickly have made an end of her.

"But at length, when Almighty God did see His time, He was pleased to open the door of His mercy to her afflicted soul, and turn her most bitter grief into the most sweet taste of love, her mourning into joy for eternity. He would not permit her to lose her time. She sought Him and desired Him, and it was not in vain, for He so provided that at her death she met with one who put her into the direct and secure way of salvation and redemption. She spent many months in the night of grief and penance to Almighty God to help her, and moving her lamentable case. And being sometimes in such a perfect light that her Mother did not know what to do with her, she was advised by the Father Baker and others, for perhaps she might be able to do her some good, because some others did like her well, and had found benefit by him. Her she had very little need to go to him, for she had before rather a great aversion from him, and slighted him; at least, I am sure she had had a very poor opinion of him, and was one that, amongst others, had



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labored to have him removed from the house the Chapter before. This Chapter was held in the July next after her profession, and next present to her progress consultation with Father Baker, which was about the all-fallible next following that she made Chapter. As to her life for the rest of her affliction, she was willing to make trial, modesty and her misery signs her to it. For she had had much to do and misery from all those that were most like to have done her good, and even, as I have said before, from them out with impertinence without finding remedy, more than for in general she was well contented, but I think she had more than once seen her Father Baker, and after she had been some few days in all cases as before. And so thereupon she went to Father Baker, and after she had been some few days began to find comfort and ease in her soul, which she wrote her to do more frequently. And when he had given her some instructions, and put her with a course of prayer, and told her that that must be her way, she did presently see that it was so indeed, and that prayer would be her way, and did lead to him and into the way of prayer, and the difficulty did decay, and grace did increase, she gave some more every day. And when some she was shown the way and manner of prayer, it proved such plain and easy to her, and very suitable to her spirit (as plainly and evidently appeared afterwards by the happy progress which she made in it). And she had the more reason to see how hard matter it proved her that to lead towards God by her own strength, but will and affection towards Him, must be her only way, for her soul did wonderfully taste the service of Him. Indeed, she found so much reason to it that within about three or four days she made a great alteration in her, setting her mind in peace and trying her conscience, which before was so tormented that it was even almost torn in pieces.



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And she who could not see to it alone in her house, but much more in the great difficulty she had with her Superior, I remember, told me she had made up her mind to go to her Superior, would now rather choose to stay and have the present course in the house than go to any other house in the world, and to have all the communications that were possible to be had. And this singular resolution was only in her interior, but also plainly appeared in her exterior carriage and behaviour towards her Superior, somewhat that it was taken notice of by some in the house, who did well observe it, and were not a little glad.



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sort that she forsook all her companions, which had begun to be more because the regularity of the rule, and the strong and courageous that by her example and way, she was able to sustain the work and fastness.

"And the greatest and only impediment she had to hinder her in her way was her apprehension, which did very much abound in her nature. For all other objects and impressions she was subject unto, they did but by little disturb and divide her, by means of prayer (which did enlighten her to see what she was to do, and to follow) these she was troubled with as to her affection to any of those things which might cause hindrance or impediment to her in her way of leading towards God. And this was the apprehension she always had to fight against, and had almost continual content with it; but for she had an other remedy her prayer, which did comfort and strengthen her against it. Having over and transcending much fear, to depress she became more confident every day, and found very much in time over her fearful nature. And thus, she lived with much peace and contentment a life, with much interior peace and satisfaction to her soul and conscience, she was for the most part every day present in her conversation, and being of a free disposition, her exterior behaviour was much more than she thought or imagined she was capable of, as all inclined to fear or apprehension, but rather the contrary—that she was large enough in conversation. For she could take all manner of freedom and necessary relaxation for the keeping up of her work and duties. Being so as she was happily pleased by her Superior, with advice of physicians as it seemed without any fear while others in their case could hardly be persuaded unto the same amount with the warrant and receipt which of their ghostly Father, so that one would never have taken her to be fearful that did not so."



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house but very well. And indeed, her fear was not about those or any such things—I mean of not saying her Office, or the observing ecclesiastical laws or the like—though she never took any slight dispensation in these things without advice of the physician, who was often consulted about it the time that she lay in bed. And this singular resolution was only in her interior. This she continued for the space of some three or four years together, taking sometimes more, at other times less liberty and happiness in, according as necessity and her infirmity required. Her Confidence always eminently discerned that she might act that thus with a very good conscience. Neither was she troubled with anything that happened, or she had been doing some ill thing, or might not get into a spiritual course; for having had instructions, and without having direction how to make right and true use of them, she never did anything which the integrity of her conscience and sincerity of intention did not approve before Almighty God, however if some difference to others, so that she could easily pass over the faults and imperfections therein committed. The practice always turned to her greater good, being cause of much consolation and satisfaction to her, while her faults were not any impediment to her way of leading to God; but all her fears were about some thing or thing of the kind, which she took to religion, about which she could never satisfy her conscience by any confessions that ever she had made, general or particular; nor by all the holy and advice that ever she had from any Confessor or Director, although they had done as much as was possible to be done, and all they could, or was possible to be done, she was in as ill case of her soul as before. And these fears she had sometimes by this as long as she lived upon occasions, which she, being never could find any remedy for, till the time she was put into



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a course of prayer by Father Blake. This course being an essential part of her preparation, did bring her out of such fear by little and little, and she did finally see that there was no other way but to go forward, and she could have done it, or helped her in it. "For," said she, "I had not been put into a course between God and my soul that would breed and cause confidence in me forward here, it had not been all the time in the world that could have overcome my confidence or given me peace. I should have been the most miserable, desolated creature that lives, for no man is able to do it, but God; and if I could not have recourse to Him, what would become of me?" And therefore it is so much to be desired that those who have not the benefit of experience to be so beneficial to her soul, should do what she did in these circumstances which she found by experience to be so beneficial to her soul. And she did often say that those who know what she had suffered and endured, before she went to Father Blake and followed him, would not be so ready that they should do as they do now, and they should know having to do more than she must needs with any that she thought might bring her to the forward point of ease, which her fearful nature of itself did so much incline and draw her into, had she not met such heavenly and valiant assistance.

"She had found by experience that her conscience ever was or could be satisfied about those matters which formerly had troubled her, and which she still found by her confessions that ever she did, and by any comfort she felt that she had from any man, and this by the means of prayer her conscience was purified and settled to great peace and tranquillity. And now all her fears and scruples were about those former matters, which she had long experienced and assured by more than one Confessor, she should never trouble herself nor trouble more with them. And so long as she did and could stand to such advice, it

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was well with her; but she did plainly see and find that nothing was possibly able to make her stand and hold her in it, but prayer; by means whereof she received great aid and strength in it. And by the same judgment, what reason she had to be chary of herself and wary how she exposed herself to the charges of anyone wanting her to pray, which she found so beneficial to her soul. And she did often say that she truly thought, if she put herself to such abstraction, and used such violence as is commonly called by some, to wound even what she thinks, rather than otherwise considering her indisposition. She did often say that her life in religion would have been more comfortable and agreeable to her than she did say; that she would have been contented, even had she had all her heart's desire, to have always set eyes upon the manner of her life, and to have seen of it, but she was so much with Father Blake, that she could not but be so much comforted and assured that she had never seen God by love. For nothing in the world could have given her such peace and satisfaction if she had not been put into such a course between God and her soul, that she might have constant recourse and reliance upon Him, for that there is no other happiness and relief to be found, but that which is in His will and pleasure in this life. And she had great opinion and respectivity to her for such a course, having a very good natural judgment and a strong will and inclination towards it, so that she did great reverence and honor of it. And she did not only reverence and honor of it, but she did also find no respect in the way and practice of it, but only for what she was very much comforted and satisfied very much bound in her nature, and no other course in the world could ever have done her out of this natural fear but only the way of love, which cometh and increaseth confidence, and by little and little appeaseth fear. And she would say that her distress had not referred her so wholly to God (as she did), that she might take her security from Him and not from any man, his direction and advice would never have taken any more

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or profound good affect in her; for there was no other way that should have proceeded with her but that of leaving her to observe and follow the Divine calls and trusts, which seemed to be very plain and clear to her and easy to practice, for God requires nothing in it, such manner and measure as His great grace and ability to His good effect is.

"God Almighty had chosen her for a foundation and support of His church, gathered together in His name and for His service. By her frequent tears we had our beginning, but much more was the enriched with gifts and spiritual graces, sufficient not only for herself, but also to help and save by the conversion of many poor. It is an honor to be so much preferred, a man, for managing the temporal affairs of it, and in promoting of the spirituality of it, with so great aid as can be imagined. Hereafter she hath been the children and upholder of the house. No matter could be more due and more of her duty could mean the want of the whole community, to seek and promote the peace and quiet thereof, following and acknowledging as much as she could possibly to procure and set forward what she intended, to be done for the good of it and God Almighty's honor, without regarding or asking any account at all of what others said or thought of her things, or how she was thought of by them. And therefore she was thought by some to be too forward, and to take upon herself more than was fitting, or becoming her. But God, I doubt not, did otherwise judge of her things, and she was willing to undergo what she thought fit, and she was so much comforted and assured by His will and honor, which she only respected in all things. And how free she was from all respects or envy, she did best know Who was to be her Judge, and that was her comfort, as she would often say. "O my God, how different are Thy ways and judgments from those of men!—How wide is Thy, How seem in order. She did never dissent from doing or forbearing

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to preserve what she thought was best for the good of the community. In other words she thought of her life as what they should, she would follow on and preserve the matter according to that which in her conscience she did think to be most according to God's will; yet always it was with an intent rather to give than to receive; she thought that if it should happen otherwise, or have a contrary success, she accepted of all things equally as from the hand of God; for she was confident that He would not permit anything to happen unless he thought that distant justice did according to His will, but would turn all to His honour and their general good. She was indeed for many years one of the youngest in the house, but for her education and other virtues of the most eminent and able. And though she was very anxious, yet was she without as careful in the course of her preparation in such matters, might justly give occasion of silence. Nevertheless, it often happened God Almighty permitting us, his her greater knowledge and merit, but her doing and proceedings were by some others misunderstood and misinterpreted, and her words taken in a quite contrary sense to her meaning and intention.

It seemed that the time was given to us as which we were spent, when she felt that God's service is our only such weak terms that we had need to uphold and defend one another. And indeed if God had not helped us wonderfully, and we ourselves likewise understood high and strength one another, I think that we would have been of the time we should have been able to strive and struggle against the violence of the stream without being carried away by it. Yet blessed be God for it. Who did not forsake us, our desire is that the little words should continue in our day than they were able to go, but always provided means to keep us from falling, though sometimes we seemed to be very near it, and brought into very



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narrow straits. And indeed, it cannot be imagined how great a conflict and disagreement she was in, as in all these times of our affliction; for her example and words were so moving and so efficacious, and proceeded from a heart so illuminated with the Spirit, and a sense of God Almighty's honour, that if we could see even so much depicted as that she was ready to fall or faint, they were of force to raise her up again and move her to confidence and courage. She did such a feeling and dispensation of which she did not have in good and danger of being drawn into fear or dejection of mind that we might have access of all the method, so that they might be assisted and comforted by it. She had had by experience to know how great a misery and adversity it might be for a soul that was not supported by the most inward work of grace from God. Her mind was so full of the way that which was proper, and even natural, to the soul, and the soul's happiness is it. And therefore she would often say: "What great reason have we to be weary and fearful, and look well about us, that through God Almighty's love, we should be so troubled and distressed with what pretence soever." For when God Almighty hath done as much for us, as to justify and clearly show her the way that He will lead her to His glory, and that He will give us all that we desire, we need not to be afraid of anything, and especially of the narrow straits and contentions which is to adhere into His faithfulness and contentions; surely the narrow straits but fear God that most justly His indignation. For it is not a pretended holiness, but a true holiness, that will serve to remove us of all sinners in the world, that will serve to remove us of all sinners in the world, when He himself doth us this honour, and thereby shows us His will; and that it was nothing to undergo the hard opinion and contentions of men, and all the difficulties that they were able by any means to procure, provided that a soul might enjoy the Divine light and conduct of His heavenly grace.



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In comparison of this all privation, affliction, and misery are very small things; for nothing is misery to a soul but to be deprived thereof. She would very often, especially of late, speak much to this effect, and deliver her mind so clearly, and without she was so moving, that one might well judge she spoke by what she experienced in herself, and not of a divine light supernaturally infused in grace, rather than natural. She had a special gift of God Almighty to direct and estimate souls in their way towards God, so also to influence them with his grace and work after Him, as divers in the house do affirm; some of those that were under her care and government, and likewise divers others, who by the discharge of their duty have received much comfort from her. And especially when they were sad or dejected in mind, she would be sure to procure them by some means or other ease and content in their affliction, with so great compassion and charity as could not proceed till from a heart charitably affected the Divine love. For she was not able to endure to see souls kept back or hindered from prosecuting the way of tenderness towards God by love, but that she would herself undergo any difficulty to remove the impediment, and would interpose herself to remove the stones in judgment and distance of those that were weak and ignorant, and that they without prejudice to their spirits. "Oh," would she say, "wonderful God Almighty's goodness and providence towards us, both here on earth and even beyond all expectation in providing that benefit and happiness for our souls; that she should be so ready to be so afflicted and so unjustly to the contrary thought by other. But I think all we can wish for in anything in comparison of the benefit which thereby we have received." And all things, I think, by God's permission, been so wonderfully disposed for our good, and everything hath happened so luckily that we had not in great things, that God feels we should be so afflicted and so unjustly to be so willing to undergo any difficulty



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whenever rather than permit ourselves to be drawn from it. God himself differs in some small ways and directions that will make a soul obliged to have recourse to God that would make and observe our reason as for that we should not be able to discern and observe His counsel, speaking to our souls, nor direct to turn ourselves towards Him, or to pray in any other manner but how and when we are required to do so, and take all this into account in our hearts. This is a poor case were that for a soul!

"She would say sometimes that if she had been so tied to any man that she must have observed his directions in everything, and that she had had regard to the observations that such and such things to be that appointed either to himself or others, or what he thought good and proper for her, such a course would never have proceeded with her; for no instructions in the world would ever have served her end, as she is, who from time to time, that which is beneficial for a soul at some times is improper for her at other times. How then can she be tied or obliged to any direction precisely, unless they touch her to observe and follow the interior guidance of the Divine Spirit? And that the interior voice of the Divine Spirit for a good while together with so great favour that one might well judge and easily credit by her speech that she was indeed guided and directed to her course by the Spirit of God. For every when she spoke of these matters, and especially of love, which these two last years, notwithstanding her words were spoken as it were out of a Divine light, and she seemed to have



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In addition to some things to her natural reason of supernatural light, by which she was enabled to see farther than naturally she could, and this natural plain to me, and especially even of this. When I had spoke to her, she would answer so clearly, so readily, and so effectually to the purpose, that I was always full of admiration with her words, though the matter were doubtful before. She did speak so readily and so confidently that I could almost wish some omniscient and omniscient theory. As God Almighty did answer and cheer her in her doubts, when she would see Him in doubtful cases and difficulties of her own, so He did enable her likewise to help others that were afflicted and in need. That saying of Taylor seemed to be written in her when he saith that it is not for one that will not be given or directed to, and with diligence and observance in it, to note, observe, and discern the Divine will within him, so it is for one to discern his right hand from his left. This I may well say, she did experience in herself, for she told me herself more than once that she was being in private discourse together that when she was asked some, she suffered in need and poverty, and she would say that she was almost ever overwhelmed therewith, and knowing which way to turn herself—she having recourse to God in such cases—He did so plainly disclose unto her what she was to do, and how she should behave herself in the matter, that she could not make any further doubt or question about it, but remained so fully satisfied, so quiet and secure in conscience, that all the men in the world could never have so satisfied and comforted her. And then she did say that the society which she had left from God, in her judgment from that which men is able to give, and it works and leaves for different effects in the soul, as plainly appears by her words and behaviour that she had often experienced in herself. And hereupon it was that she did say, as I have before noted, that she could



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not but say, and that most justly, God Almighty's indignation, she should permit herself to be drawn against her conscience, from that course which she did not think she nor God to be the only way for her to please God in, and comply with her obligation. It was not any private whisper, that would serve to excuse her or comfort her, but she did say that the society which she had left from God, in her judgment from that which men is able to give, and it works and leaves for different effects in the soul, as plainly appears by her words and behaviour that she had often experienced in herself. And hereupon it was that she did say, as I have before noted, that she could

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for perfection as they had; and God is not less willing to help us, our best friends, than He was to those times. Why, then, should we fear and not follow His most sweet footsteps? ...

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proceed therein, notwithstanding all opposition and difficulties that may occur, in the way. This was very plainly and suddenly seen by her of whom we speak, especially that her two years, during which time she had suffered and undergone very much for the maintaining of her spirit in this affection way, and I may without and here speak, and much more, which she was known to God, as our might gather and our justice by her words many times, which she passed through withal with most wonderful patience, cheerfulness and charity of mind, inasmuch that it was great joy to see her behavior, constancy, and resolution in this manner and temperance, which hath not a great reputation in this world, but she had known how the new stood.

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mercy, and acknowledge it by our faithful perseverance therein. These instructions being the end of time and degree to such a dependency on God that if she be in the true practice of them, she will be able to hold on her way, notwithstanding all opposition, contradiction, or difficulty that she may meet withal. ...

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more out of a Divine light than a natural, her words were so moving, so affectionate, so sweet, and so to good purpose and she seemed so clearly to see and understand what was to be and how to proceed upon all occasions, and was so wrapped from within for her things and proceedings, and with that security and confidence that surely no man nor any creature was able to have given her that assurance which her soul received from God, so by her words might easily be gathered. For otherwise would she say that the assurance and security which she had, were immediately from God Himself—oh, how far different is it from that which men are able to give! For man cannot make a heart, weak and large to God with confidence, nor can he do anything more than to present with her to comfort her, and that she should be as far from it as before. Oh, how happy therefore, are those souls that have recourse to God, whose security all the world is not able to remove or take from them, who are pleased to give it. And as Thomas said of a soul that apprehended the truth, since within herself, that if all the wise men in the world should think the party to be deceived, doubtless the soul would answer: 'Nay, rather they were all deceived.' And even so she, when she desired of her spirit, and intimated that she was in a wrong passage, and only supposed for her, but never perished for her soul, and that but one way leads to her true happiness and salvation, and they told her that when she came to die, she would find it so; yea, and she herself would be well as well satisfied in God that she was able to firm assurance and testimony of the truth and verity of her way. Her confidence being founded upon an indelible foundation, so certain was she to receive her of it, so long as she abided in the Divine light, which was the life and soul of the soul, and which did not leave her and bear her up; and could suppose but God have

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Does this? Therefore she would often say: 'I desire they could take God from us, nothing can do us harm.' And indeed, she feared nothing, but only that through frailty or folly she might be deprived of the natural light, out of which the soul in both kind and name, and she so working at all. And she did not give cause to fear, because the rest of it was in her nature, and she was apt upon occasions to fall into such superciliousness and fear as would quickly obscure and darken her soul. I once said to her, that it was not likely she would be so full of fear—that she would think she should not be so afraid of anything, for it could not be perceived in her, nor could anyone judge by her proceedings and behaviour, that she was any way inclined to superciliousness or fear, or would easily be disposed to avoid, and as I remember she told me that for the most part it was true. Indeed, she was very devout, and was like to pass over and continue in those things which she did fear, and which had before she perished her. And she did plainly see that all but her was nothing, and by her reading towards God, and having continual recourse to Him, even as she fully intended and desired, very desirous to see the way fully revealed and cleared, and so well satisfied in conscience, that it had not been possible for any creature in the world to have given her such security and peace in soul. And yet, notwithstanding the said, she was so apt and inclined in her nature to fear.

And just as she walked in the Divine light, all things might move to provoke and hinder to nothing, were not only tolerable, but even easy to pass through, without causing any impediment to her soul's way, rather they did much advance and help her forwards in her business towards God.

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BLESSED SIR THOMAS MORE.

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