

SEVENTEENTH MEDITATION.

OF FUTURE BENEFITS FROM GOD.

[§ 87. *Death and its immediate sequel.*] But, He who bestows on His own such great blessings in the present, what does He reserve for them in the future? As death is the termination of our present state, so is it the beginning of the future. Who is there whose nature does not shrink from it, and whose feelings experience no revulsion at the thought of it? The very beasts shun death, and cling to life, by flight, by concealment in hid den corners, and by a thousand other means.

Pay heed, now, to the answer thy conscience makes; and say, what assurance does thy faith make thee, what promise does thy hope hold out, what does thy love expect and long for? If thy life is a burden to thee, the world a weariness, and the flesh a grief, then surely death is thy desire; death that removes this burdensome yoke, and ends fatigue, and takes away the body with its pain. This one event, I tell thee, transcends all the delights, all the honours, and all the riches of the world; if only, by reason of a cloudless conscience, a faith not to be shaken, and a certain hope, thou art not afraid to die; as he will best experience whose soul after having groaned awhile under the tyranny of this fear of death, has at last escaped into a freer air. For this is a salutary foretaste of thy future bliss; to find, I mean, that as death steals slowly on, thou canst overcome this natural horror by faith, temper it by hope, keep it at arm's length by a conscience reconciled and pure; and if so, then death becomes to thee henceforth the beginning of repose, the goal of labours ended, and the end for ever of all moral ills. For thus it is written, 'Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord' ([Apoc. xiv. 13](#)). Whence the prophet, distinguishing between the death of the reprobate and the death of the just, says, 'All the kings of the nations have all of them slept in glory, every one in his own house. But thou art cast out of thy grave, as an unprofitable branch, defiled and wrapped up' ([Is. xiv. 18, 19](#)). Yes, all they have slept in glory, whose death has been composed and sanctified by a good conscience; for 'precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints' ([Ps. cxv. 15](#)). Yes, indeed; they have fallen asleep in glory, whose slumber is assisted at by angels, and thronged round about with saints that have sped to give assistance and minister solace to their fellow-citizen; for they do battle for him against his foes, repelling their onslaughts and rebutting their accusations; and so, escorting the holy soul onwards and away to the bosom of Abraham, compose it in a place of rest and peace. Not so the wicked; not so those whom accursed spirits tearing from the body as though they dragged them out of some loathsome sepulchre with instruments forged in hell, hurl down into the pit 'defiled' with lust, 'wrapped up' in the filth of desire, there to be burnt in fires through and through, there to be torn by birds, there to be suffocated with unending stench. Truly, 'the expectation of the just is joy, but the hope of the wicked shall perish' ([Prov. x. 28](#)). But

229

230

what that rest and that peace shall be, and that joy in the bosom of Abraham which is assured to those there resting; and what is the happiness that they expect; no pen has skill to set it forth, for no man living has experienced what it is. They expect, they wait in happy expectation for the number of their brethren to be filled up, that so, on the day of the resurrection, they may all enjoy together their double robe,⁹ that is to say, unending happiness both of body and of soul.

[§ 88. *The Day of Judgment: the right hand and the left.*] Now scan the terrors of that day when the virtues of the heavens shall be moved, when the elements shall be dissolved by fiery heat, when hell shall lie disclosed, when all hidden things shall be laid bare. The angry Judge shall descend from above, His fury burning, and His chariots as a tempest ([Jer. iv. 13](#)), to award punishment in His wrath, and destruction in flames of fire. O, happy he that is prepared to meet Him! And the wretched souls, what of them? How wretched then all they who now in this life are defiled by luxury, disordered by avarice, puffed up by pride. ‘The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just’ (St. [Matt. xiii. 49](#)), setting these on His right hand, and those on His left.

Now imagine that you are standing before the judgment-seat of Christ, between this company and that, and not yet assigned to either side. Cast your eyes to the left side of the Judge, and view that unhappy crowd. What shivering horror, what shame, what noisomeness, what fear, what agonies of grief, are there! See how they stand, all misery and woe, their teeth chattering, their bare breasts throbbing, their visage full of horror, their features distorted; crouching for very shame, and full of confusion at their foulness and nakedness. Gladly would they hide themselves, but that is not allowed them: they try to fly, but they are stopped. If they lift up their eyes, their angry Judge is frowning; if they cast them down, the horrible infernal pit flares upon them. There is no explaining away their crimes; to complain to their God of too severe a judgment will be impossible; for, whatever His decision, they know too well—their very consciences tell them so—that it is just. See now, O see, how worthy of all thy love He is, in that by His predestination He has severed thee from this accursed company, by His call has wholly drawn thee away from it, and by His justification has purified thee to Himself.

Predestinated, called, justified; turn now your eyes to His right hand; and bethink you, into whose ranks will He place you, that He may glorify you? O what grace, what dignity, what joy and what security are theirs! Some of them set aloft on seats of judgment, others

⁹ [*Duplici stolâ*: for the further explanation of this, see p. 128, n.]

resplendent with crowns of martyrdom, others all white with virginal flowers, others enriched with largesses of almsgiving, others illustrious with sacred doctrine and erudition; yet all, all, one and all, of them are bound together in one holy society of charity. And the Face of Jesus shines on them; no object of terror, but of love; with no bitterness, but sweetness all; not alarming them, but soothing.

233

Now take your stand in the middle, as it were, not knowing to which company the Judge's sentence will consign thee. O cruel suspense! 'Fear and trembling are come upon me, and darkness 'hath covered me' (Ps. liv. 6). If He join me with those on His left hand, I shall have nothing to complain against His justice; if He enrol me with those on the right, to His grace must I attribute it, not to any merits of mine. In truth, O Lord, my life is in Thy will. Right well, then, may your soul expatiate in His love; for, though He might well have pronounced on you the sentence launched against the wicked, He has chosen rather to unite you with the just, that He may save you.

Imagine, therefore, that you are united with that sacred company, and that you hear the sentence from His Lips, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (St. Matt. xxv. 34). And then, the wretches listening to it, that other word of the Lord, full of anger and fury, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire' (ib. 41). 'These shall go,' He tells us, 'into everlasting punishment; but the just into life eternal' (ib. 46). O cruel severance! O miserable lot! For, the wicked having been carried away lest they should see the glory of God, the just shall be taken, each one in his order, and set in his own place, according to his grade and merit, among the ranks of the angels; and then shall the glorious procession start upon its way, Christ our Head leading, and all His members following; and the kingdom shall be given up to God the Father, that He may reign in them and they in Him, sharing that kingdom which was prepared for them even from the very foundation of the world; a kingdom whose glorious state cannot even be conceived by us, much less described in writing or by words. This alone I know, that whatever you may wish to have shall not be wanting.

234

[§ 89. *The joys of Heaven, and the joy of joys.*] For there is no mourning there, no weeping, no sorrow, and no fear. There is no sadness there, no difference, no envy, no distress, no temptation, no changefulness and no unhealthiness of clime; no suspicion, no pretence, no flattery, no detraction, no sickness, no age, no death, no poverty, no night, no gloom; no need of eating, of drinking, or of sleeping; and no fatigue. What good, then, is there there? For, surely, where there is neither mourning, nor weeping, nor sorrow, nor sadness, what can there be but perfect joy? Where there is neither trial, nor distress, nor change of seasons, nor unhealthiness of clime; no summer too fierce, no winter too severe; what, what can there be but a certain perfect temperature of the elements, and true and uttermost tranquillity

235

both of body and of mind? Where there is no cause for fear, what can there be but uttermost security? When neither envy nor estrangement, what but real and perfect love? Where no unsightliness, what but real and consummate beauty? Where no poverty, what but perfect fulness? Where neither labour nor exhaustion, what but uttermost repose and fullest strength? Where there is nothing to oppress or burden, what can there be but plenitude of happiness? And where old age and disease are never expected, never feared, what but truest health? Where no night is, and no darkness, what but perfect light? Where death and mortality are altogether swallowed up, what is there but eternal life?

And what more can we require? Yes, indeed; we may ask for more, for something that transcends all this; I mean, the vision, the knowledge, and the love of the Creator. He shall be seen in Himself, and seen in all His creatures; ruling all things, but without solicitude; sustaining all things, but without exertion; communicating Himself in some strange way to each, according to his capacity, but without diminution of Himself, and without division of Himself. That Face shall be seen inviting all love and every longing, the Face that angels long to gaze into; and the meaning, the light, the sweetness of that Face, who, who shall tell them? The Father shall be seen in the Son, and the Son in the Father, and in each of Them the Holy Ghost. For He shall be seen as He is, the promise fulfilled in which He says, 'He that loveth Me shall be loved by My Father; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him' (St. [John xiv. 21](#)).

And from this vision proceeds the knowledge of God, of which He Himself says, 'This is life everlasting, that they may know Thee, the only true God' ([ib. xvii. 3](#)).

And from these two, the vision and the knowledge of God, there springs a love so great, an affection so ardent, a charity so sweet, a fruition so abundant, a longing so vehement, that neither satisfaction can pall desire, nor desire weary satisfaction. And what is this? What is it all? Ay, 'the eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him' ([1 Cor. ii. 9](#)).

Thus, my sister, from the recollection of past benefits from Christ, from experience of present, and from expectation of future, I have tried to sow in you some few seeds for meditations, whence may spring fruits of Divine love; only let meditation rouse your love, and let love awake desire, and let desire elicit tears; that so tears be your bread day and night ([Ps. xli. 4](#)), until you appear in His sight, and be embraced in His arms, and say as it is written in the Canticles, 'My Beloved to me, and I to Him, He shall linger between my breasts' ([Cant. i. 12](#)). Which may He vouchsafe to grant you, Who liveth and reigneth God for ever and ever. Amen.

236

237

238