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Blessed Seraphina Sforza

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Pray for Our Electors and Leaders

Bishop Giles, OFM

Dear Friends,

We welcome you back to our thirty-seventh year of publishing THE SERAPH. It has been a busy year, and we look forward to all that God has in store for us in the future. The month of September offers us many religious and moral aspects to consider and write about. Here in the United States of America, we are in the final stages of a presidential election year. Catholics often look to the clergy for guidance when it comes time to go to the voting polls. However, the clergy are strongly discouraged from getting involved and politically promoting one candidate or the other. What we may hear from the pulpit or in writing from the clergy are the basic principles of morality and their application to our lives today. Very often, we will hear the condemnation of various evils (blasphemies, war, civil unrest, abortion, divorce, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc.) Thus, we are instructed in what we must look for in our candidates

(presidential as well as others). The obligation rests with each of us to educate himself and decide how to vote.

The problem is: how are we to learn about the candidates and the issues at hand? Our sources of information are limited basically to the media, and thus are very biased. We can listen to the various candidates campaigning, but can we trust them? Most politicians have been trained as lawyers who are very adept at manipulating appearances. A good prosecuting attorney can make the most innocent person appear as the vilest villain. A good defense attorney can make the guiltiest person appear as the most innocent, falsely accused, and persecuted victim. The honest constituents are left to try and decipher a lot of half-truths, duplicitous phrases with double meanings, and even out-right lies. This is not really something peculiar to lawyers, or politicians; it is a universal malady that affects all of mankind. In the Psalms it says:

“Omnis homo mendax.” (Psalm 115, 2) (All men are liars.) Some just happen to be better at it than others, and some have even made this their profession. There are people, and many politicians, that will tell us whatever they think we want to hear.

Only God is all Truth, and all-knowing. So we are often reduced to accepting the word of people, even though we have been taken advantage of many times before. We must truly be as Christ sent out His apostles: “sheep among wolves.” (Matt. 10, 16). We are not to be devoured because we are also warned to be: “wise as serpents, and simple as doves.” (Ibid) We are to use the intelligence that God has given us to discern to the best of our abilities, truth from falsehood. Once we have done the best that we can do to find the truth, we are then obliged to act (vote) for the candidate that will best fulfill the Will of God. Too often, we are led to believe that we should vote for the candidate that will best satisfy our personal wishes or desires. We are told to act selfishly. Every Catholic should know that this is not the way to act. The question is: which candidate is best for our city, state, or country? Not: which

candidate is best for me?

It may very well be that the selfishness of the voters has brought about the evils that we witness in these United States of America. Even though the populous votes, it is ultimately God who gives them the authority over us. In rejecting or just in ignoring the Will of God, we often bring evil upon ourselves. The child who balks at the will of his parents is often allowed to experience the evil of being under the authority of others. The parents hope and pray that the child will learn from this as the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, 11-32) learned. God does the same with nations. Nations that have squandered or wasted their inheritance from God, are found to suffer many and great evils. However, God’s mercy is always ready to welcome them back, just as the father welcomed his prodigal son’s return. The United States of America is currently suffering many evils, the question is: Are we as wise as the Prodigal Son? Will we be humble enough to acknowledge our sin and return to God begging mercy and forgiveness of our sins? Will we return or at least strive to become: “One Nation Under God?” God has allowed

us to wander; He has allowed us to follow our own whims and passions; He has allowed many evils to come upon us; He is waiting for our return if we will only seek it.

Perhaps the question before us is not so much who do we want to elect, but who does God want us to elect? In seeking His Will, we will have a much greater success as a nation; if we continue to disregard His Will, His Truth, His Justice, His Mercy; we only have evil and destruction to look forward to – regardless of who is in office.

We would like to invite all true citizens and Catholics to: pray, do penance, and offer sacrifices; that God will lead us. Let us pray that God’s Will come forth in the election (even if we are given a leader, which we deserve, to punish our sinfulness). Once the elections are over, let us continue to pray, do penance and offer sacrifice, so that our elected officials may accomplish God’s Holy Will. Then, let us obey all legitimate authority as we are commanded in the Fourth Commandment of God – obedience in all things, except sin.



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Corpus Christi Construction Update

Fr. Joseph Noonan, OFM

It is my educated guess that only those who have been involved with some type of construction where professionals and permits are required understand the need for patience.

Two years ago (2014) this summer, it was announced that we would be building a church in Lubbock, Texas. The church would be built on the same property we have occupied since September 1992. The church would be built on the north side of the present building, the only place the City of Lubbock would allow due to “parking regulation requirements.”

All of 2015 was filled with steel building delays and putting the plans on paper. To put this in spiritual terms, working with the building company was truly filled with sorrows. Whereas, the local architect was a pleasure to work with, and was indeed a joyful experience. The steel building delays have since been resolved and the architect completed the plans early in 2016. It was also during this period the plans of the electrical, mechanical and structural engineers were

submitted. Yes, all of these plans are required.

The reality of the cost of construction today is realized when bids are returned from different contractors. This is when I suggested to Br. Anthony that we would need to turn to St. Joseph for help. We have been saying this novena throughout this year of 2016. It brings to mind a well-known saying; with God all things are possible.

Indeed they are, for our benefactors have been quite generous with their donations for this project. A benefactor several months ago presented a challenge to those who are in a position to donate at least \$1,000.00. He would match their donations up to \$10,000.00. It only took five months for the challenge to be met! Thank you for your generosity!

In February 2016, a local contractor was chosen for the project. As with any such project, there were details which needed to be completed before the plans could be submitted to the City of Lubbock for a building permit.

The permit was submitted in May 2016. The professionals in the Lubbock area had previously told me one must be patient when waiting for a permit. It would be anywhere from 30-90 days to receive the permit.

While we were waiting a few changes were required which involved the contractor, architect and structural engineer. Once the changes were made, the plans needed to be resubmitted to the City. It was on July 18, 2016 that the permit was given to the contractor.

Since the permit was expected in June, the contractor came and prepared the site. This meant removing the carport and asphalt in the construction area. As they were preparing the area, they found and removed the remains of a building that previously occupied part of the area. This included a concrete floor and footers. Three loads of soil were hauled in to bring the area to the proper elevation.

The contractors began the actual construction of the site on July 18, not wasting any time in getting starting. As of this writing (July 23), they are in the process of digging the holes for

the piers and footers. After so many delays, one looks forward to some positive progress!

As the construction continues, you may go to www.catholichour.org to see pictures of the construction as it proceeds to completion. Click onto the construction picture to see the progress or to leave a donation.

The stated goal from the beginning was \$250,000.00. It was a daunting figure, but as of July 2016, \$157,305.00 has been collected. This means about \$93,000.00 is needed to complete this goal and project.

We are thankful for all who have donated to help build this new House of God. We ask with humble confidence for your continued support. May Our Lord bless this project through the intercession of St. Joseph, patron of workers.



Divine Biblical Revelation and the Natural Law

By Brother Anthony, O.F.M

For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law; these having not the law are a law to themselves: Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience being witness to them, and their thoughts between themselves accusing, or also defending one another; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel (Romans II: 14-16).

St. Paul gives a very clear insight into the inner nature of man. He reveals two ways in which man can acquire truth. The first way is through divine revelation. In this instance, St. Paul is referring to the Law of Moses or the Mosaic Law. Its direct purpose was to show the Israelites what manner of living was considered to be acceptable to God. The second way is, as St. Paul here testifies, the law which is written on the hearts of all men. This is what is referred to as the natural law. St. Thomas Aquinas defines it as: “the moral law, manifested by the natural light of reason,

demanding the preservation of the natural order and forbidding its violation.” The “natural light of reason” means that the ability to understand this law is within our natural capacity and because it is natural; it applies to all men at all times.

It should be made clear that these are not two distinct laws which lead to two distinct truths, but merely two different methods that lead to the same truth. Since both come from God, there is no possible way in which they could contradict each other. In fact, it is possible to demonstrate that these same truths which were revealed to the ancient Israelites and now being preserved by the Catholic Church can be understood and proven to be true by a process of philosophical reasoning.

There are two basic methods of philosophical reasoning. The first is induction, which examines effects with the purpose of discovering their cause. The second is deduction, which examines the cause in order to

have a better understanding of the effects. The second method is the one which will be used and a more precise definition will be helpful. Scholastic philosophy defines deduction as: “a process of reasoning in which one concludes from the general law or principle to a particular instance falling under the general law or principle.” The general law or principle which we will be deducing from, is God Himself. The two facts about God which will help guide us are: that He is the Creator and that the universe He created is one of order.

The whole Mosaic Law, including its history, is recorded in four books of the Old Testament. These are the books of: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Through His mediator, Moses, God went into great detail explaining to His chosen people what manner of living is acceptable to Him. The whole Law can be divided into five parts: the Ten Commandments, the Laws of Sacrifice, the Laws of Cleanliness, the Laws of Holiness, and the Laws of Vow and Tithes.

To give even a cursory examination of all these laws and their relation to the natural law would take volumes of books. Our current discussion will then be limited to only five of the Ten Commandments, from the Book of Exodus, and to only one of those laws which are recorded in the Laws of Holiness, from the Book of Leviticus.

Let us begin with the Fifth and Seventh Commandments. At first glance, it might seem odd to group these two together, but they are in fact closely related. This is especially the case when discussing their connection with the natural law. With this in mind, it will be prudent to start with the Seventh Commandment: *Thou shall not steal*. In the beginning, when God created the world, there was no such thing as private ownership. All things were created in common for the general use of all men. It was God’s intention that the goods of this earth be used by man for his self-preservation and to help towards the attainment of self-perfection. Experience has proven that in order for God’s plan to be properly executed man had to own things privately for his personal use and for that of his family. The reason is

quite plain. In order for a man to survive in this world, he would have to possess certain objects which would secure not only his present needs, but also his needs for the future. Scholastic Philosophy gives a very concise definition of ownership: “the exclusive right to control and dispose of something as one’s own according to one’s will.” This “exclusive right” is obtained by means of occupation, which is also defined by the Scholastics as: “the effective seizure and possession of an ownerless object with the intention of making it one’s own property.” The important point which is brought up in this definition is that in order to have lawful ownership of a thing it must first be ownerless. If it is owned and someone were to take it, that would be called theft or stealing. Therefore, stealing is sinful because taking something which belongs to someone else is to deny him his God given right to private ownership. It is a disruption of the order which was intended by God when He created man.

The Fifth Commandment: *Thou shall not kill*. In Matthew V: 21-22, Our Lord teaches us: “You have heard that it was said to the

ancients, ‘Thou shall not kill;’ and that whoever shall kill shall be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment...” This statement of Our Lord’s is true; however, our focus is going to be on the intentional act of taking the life of another human being, or murder. So, why is it wrong to commit murder, or more specifically intentional homicide? The philosophical answer is that since man was created by God, he is the sole property of God and no individual human being has the right to take away the life of another, or even his own (suicide). This is very similar to the argument just discussed in last paragraph differing only in how it relates directly to God Himself. God exercises ownership in the absolute sense; He did not obtain it from any other being. His right of ownership does not come from occupation but from Himself. He is God – the Creator, Lord, and Master. He alone has the power over life and death. Anyone who violates this Commandment does not simply deny the rights of a creature, but he denies the rights of the Creator.

The Eighth Commandment: *Thou shall not bear false witness.* This means: do not tell a formal lie. A formal lie is a conscious and deliberate statement contrary to one's subjective judgment. Why is it wrong on the natural level to lie? The answer is very simple, practical, and logical. It is self-evident that God gave the power of speech to man for the natural purpose of communicating judgments and events to other people. Any falsehood is a violation which disrupts the order established by God and it is intrinsically evil.

The Sixth and Ninth Commandments: *Thou shall not commit adultery and Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's wife.* Our Lord clarified these commandments and applied them to all acts of impurity when He said: "But I say to you that anyone who so much as looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart (St. Matt. V: 28)." This is known as the concupiscence of the flesh. It sheds more light upon the definition of the natural law than what has been expounded upon so far; it reveals the struggle between man's higher faculties

(intellect and freewill) against his lower animal functions (sense-perception).

There is an evident hierarchy of order within nature. For instance, a rock is obviously on a lower level than a plant because it lacks immanent activity (meaning that it doesn't possess life). A plant is then lower than a brute animal because it lacks sense-perception and consciousness. Finally, the brute animal is lower than man because the brute animal lacks the faculties of intellect and freewill – which are the greatest in nature.

Man is composed of two incomplete substances, the body which is material, and the soul which is spiritual. The soul is the life force in man, it is that which gives him immanent activity and it is also where the faculties of intellect and free will are derived. They are of a much nobler nature than sense perception and it stands to reason that man should hold these faculties in a higher regard because they are what separates him from the brute animal. This fact reveals that there is a hierarchical order within the nature of man himself; man has an obligation before God to preserve this order. St.

Thomas' guiding precept rings true: "Man should observe the natural order which befits his rational nature." This precept's connection with the Sixth and Ninth Commandments is that these are mainly sins in which man sets aside reason and allows his lower animal nature to take control and dominate. Anytime the lower animal nature controls the reason, there is a disruption of the order intended by God.

The last example is the one which is contained in the Laws of Holiness. We read in Scripture that God spoke to the Israelites and said: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination (Leviticus XVIII: 22)." This is, of course, referring to homosexuality. God makes it very clear that it is considered an "abomination." This can be proven on rational grounds. To "lie" with someone means to have carnal relations with them. The primary purpose of these relations is for the procreation of the human race. God created two sexes to carry out this purpose – one male, one female. Therefore, homosexuality is an unnatural union which was not intended by God and violates the laws of right reason and right order.

After considering all of these commandments, from both the theological and philosophical point of view, one may ask the question, "Why does man divert from right order set down by the Creator?" Or, to put it another way, "Why is it difficult for man to do good and so easy for him to do evil?"

The philosophical answer is because ideas and concepts such as justice, prudence, fortitude, modesty, humility, etc., are abstract ideas which are not found concretely in nature. They are not things which a man can see, taste, hear, or feel; it requires effort and discipline to obtain these noble ideals. It is easier for someone to indulge into his lower animal functions. The body simply reacts to stimuli and from that reaction, it feels either pleasure or pain. So, if a sensation brings to the body some sort of pleasure, it is easier for the body to strive for that sensation rather than to deny itself of it. To put it simply, it is the path of least resistance.

The theological answer is known to every Catholic. For through Divine Revelation, it has been revealed to us how Adam and Eve sinned against God. The

result of this sin was twofold. First, the Gates of Heaven were closed and the stain of this original sin was passed onto all of Adam and Eve's descendents. Second, is the dulling of man's higher faculties, the intellect and will. Fortunately, two other truths have also been revealed to us. First, the Gates of Heaven were reopened when our Lord Jesus Christ made satisfaction for the sins of the entire world by His death on the cross. Second, we know that we can rid our souls of original sin and be restored to supernatural life through the sacrament of Baptism.

Ultimately, a person can believe in Divine Revelation and accept the fact of the natural law, but his belief and his acceptance are not enough – he must have the

will to do what God commands. St. Augustine addressed this same truth in a very concise manner when he stated: "Christ redeemed us without our help, but He will not save us without our help." It is true that without the grace of God man can do nothing which is of benefit to his salvation. "With our help" only means the cooperation of our will with those graces which God has freely given to each and every one of us. Let us all strive toward this goal! So when we are judged, "*...in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ...*," we will be able to glorify Him; because we have preserved to the best of our ability all of those laws which He has both divinely and naturally promulgated.



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Franciscans and the Protestant Revolution in England

Francis Borgia Steck, O.F.M.

PART SECOND

UNDER THE STUARTS 1603-1649

CHAPTER VII

VENERABLE MARTIN WOODCOCK, O.F.M.

His Protestant father and Catholic mother — He embraces the old faith — Student at Saint-Omer and at Rome — Joins the Capuchins in Paris — Dismissed from the Order — Serious doubts regarding his vocation — Received into the Franciscan Order at Douai — Ordained priest — Longs to join the missionaries in England — Permission at last granted — Arrested on arriving in England — Sufferings in prison — Before the judges — Sentenced to death for being a priest — Martyrdom.

The last Franciscan to die for the faith during the Puritan Revolution was Venerable Martin Woodcock.¹ Before, as

¹ For the present sketch, unless otherwise stated, we have drawn chiefly from Mason, *Certamen Seraphicum*, pp. 183-208.

well as after, his entrance into the Franciscan Order, his life was one long series of mental and bodily affliction, which he bore with heroic resignation to the will of Him whose judgments are incomprehensible and whose ways are unsearchable. "In the eyes of the world," Hope thoughtfully observes, "his life was a failure, for disappointment seemed ever to attend all his efforts in God's service. But in God's eyes his constant humiliations were the fitting preparation for the glorious crown which was predestined to him rather than to those of his brethren who might be deemed to have more worthily deserved it."²

Fr. Woodcock was a native of Lancashire. He saw the light of day in 1603 at Leyland, and in baptism received the name John. His father, Thomas Woodcock, was a Protestant, while his mother Dorothy, born of a good Catholic family named Anderton, was known for her piety and staunch adherence to the old

² Hope, *Franciscan Martyrs in England*, p. 216.

faith. Unfortunately, all we know regarding John's boyhood and youth is the fact that, possibly to wrest her son from the influence of Protestant environment at home, his mother entrusted him at an early age to the care of his grandfather. With him he stayed till his twentieth year, when he abjured Protestantism and embraced the Catholic faith. In consequence, as he had foreseen, his Protestant father treated him very cruelly. But he esteemed the treasure of his faith higher than earthly comforts. Patiently he bore his father's taunts for almost two years. Then having come of age, he made shift to follow what he sincerely believed to be a summons from above to the holy priesthood. With a number of young men, he accompanied F. Edward Squire, S. J., to the continent and soon found himself within the halls of the Jesuit College at Saint-Omer. After a year of study, during which he completed his classical training, he departed for the English College in Rome, where he intended to take up philosophy and theology.³

All this time, the young convert felt in his heart an earnest desire to enter some religious Order. Finally, after six months

of prayer and deliberation, he decided to join the Capuchins. The procurator general of the Order, to whom he had gone for advice, mistook the Capuchins at Faubourg St. Jacques in Paris for an English community. Accordingly, he told John to enter the Order there. The young man immediately set out for the French metropolis, and on May 16, 1630, received the Capuchin habit. Soon, however, a storm of bitter trials was to dispel the joy and peace of his heart. He had been with the Capuchins only three months, when the superiors found it necessary to dismiss him from the Order. The novice was inconsolable when he heard of it. So ardent was his devotion to the life he had embraced that only by sheer force, as Mason tells us, could he be deprived of the lowly garb of St. Francis.

In a letter to a friend, the unhappy young man explained the reasons why the friars had sent him away.⁴ His friends in England, and even his Catholic mother, had neglected to answer the letters which had been directed to them for information regarding his antecedents. Furthermore, his superiors could not discover

⁴ Mason brings a Latin version of this letter, which at his time was preserved in the provincial archives at Douai.

³ *Stone, Faithful Unto Death, p. 212.*

what had prevailed on him to join their Order in Paris rather than in Rome; it seemed incredible to them that the procurator general should have mistaken their friary for a community of English Capuchins. Moreover, from letters received through the Jesuits in Rome, they learned that the novice's mother, elder brother, and other relatives strongly discountenanced his entering a religious Order, which fact the superiors anticipated would in the end create difficulties for him as well as for the Order. Again, not only was the young man of Protestant extraction, but he had also been reared among Protestants. Then, his precarious health evidently militated against vowing a life of seclusion and penance. Finally, there was little hope of his ever becoming conversant with the French tongue, while the decided predilection he manifested for the English Jesuits who had lately visited him caused considerable comment. Therefore, "without any fault of his own," as Mason concludes, John Woodcock was compelled to leave the Order. "God made use of the injustice of men," Stone remarks, "to work out His own design, for if Father Woodcock had remained with the Capuchins, he could

never have attained the martyr's crown, they having at that time no mission in England, so that what was to him a source of grief and suffering at first, was ultimately the very means by which he was to ensure his happiness and reward."⁵

With a heavy heart, the young man left the quiet precincts of the convent where he had only begun to taste of the peace and consolation for which his spirit longed. Trusting in God for strength and guidance, he proceeded at once to Douai and applied for admission among the English Franciscans. At the same time, however, serious doubts regarding his true vocation began to harrow his soul. Would not his father's being a Protestant debar him also from becoming a Franciscan? Had he not better complete his studies, receive ordination, and secure a living? What if the Franciscans at St. Bonaventure's also turned him off? How, in that event, could he earn a livelihood, deprived as he was of his inheritance? While pondering what course to pursue, it suddenly occurred to him how, when he left Rome for Paris, Fr. Luke Wadding,⁶ the guardian of St. Isidore's,

5 Stone, p. 214.

6 The famous historian of the Franciscan Order.

had drawn his attention to all these predicaments and had promised to receive him into the Irish College of Franciscans. It was at this juncture that the troubled student made the mistake of his life, as he himself later confessed. With more zeal than forethought, he withdrew his application to the friars at Douai and returned to Rome. But the end of his trials had not yet come. For some reason or other, he was not admitted among the Irish Franciscans, and again his heart became a prey to doubts and fears. To join the Order of St. Francis was his one and only desire. With deep regret he thought of the friars at Douai. Had he only joined them instead of applying to their Irish brethren in Rome. To be received into their midst now was more than he could reasonably hope or ask for. "Thus," as Mason says, "he was tossed about on all sides and found rest nowhere, until, after escaping from many dangers, and overcoming many difficulties, he fell back upon his original design, and returned to the place which in the first instance had been designated for him by God."⁷

A natural sense of shame forbade him to appear personally at the

⁷ Mason, p. 197.

convent of St. Bonaventure, and he solicited by letter⁸ the aid of his friend Fr. William Anderton,⁹ who was then a member of the community. This letter breathes a spirit of rare humility, winning sincerity, deep faith, and religious fervor. In it he begs his friend to plead his cause with the superiors of the province, to declare in his stead that "through some weakness of body and soul, and through a fear not altogether reprehensible," he had justly incurred their distrust and displeasure; that now, however, having regained his mental and bodily strength, he was better disposed and earnestly desired "to heed his first call rather than to expose himself any longer to the surging billows of this world and to the furious onslaughts of implacable enemies; wherefore, my dear Father William," he pleaded, "by our old friendship which in this misfortune above all intercedes for me with you; yes, by the tender love of Our Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that pity on my miserable condition may move you successfully to endeavor to obtain favor and pardon for me. This is my desire, this I ask, this I wait for,

⁸ For a Latin version of this letter see Mason, p. 197.

⁹ Perhaps Fr. Martin was related to him; his mother's name, we know, was Anderton.

for this I sigh and yearn, and I shall await its accomplishment solely out of pure love of God and of his glory. Farewell. That which formerly you saw me long for lightly, you will strive now, for love of Christ, to secure for me more efficaciously. This will be my happiness; nothing else will ever cause me greater joy. Farewell.”

The superiors at St. Bonaventure’s were deeply touched when they read this humble and sincere appeal. Evidently, it was the outburst of a soul that the All-Wise was leading heavenward through the perilous gloom of sorrow and affliction; and in their little community, perhaps, that tried soul was predestined at last to find spiritual peace and consolation. Thus the friars reasoned, and eager to further the designs of Providence, they informed the young man that he might come and join their ranks. Without delay, John Woodcock repaired to St. Bonaventure’s, where Venerable Paul Heath, who at the time was vicar of the friary, vested him with the Franciscan habit and gave him the name Fr. Martin of St. Felix.

Humility had opened for him the portals of the friary; and it was this same virtue that

chiefly characterized his later career. Fr. Martin soon won the esteem and confidence of his superiors by his love of prayer and recollection and by the spirit of ready submission which he manifested on all occasions. Though of a weak constitution, he ate very sparingly and shortened his hours of sleep to satisfy his thirst for prayer. In the discharge of choir duty, he edified all by his promptness and devotion. Mason, who had occasion to observe him during the novitiate, assures us that Fr. Martin outstripped all his fellow novices in strict observance of the Rule and of other, even the slightest, disciplinary regulations. In short, so fully did he vindicate the hopes of his superiors and confreres, that after the year of probation he was admitted by unanimous consent to holy profession. He pronounced the vows in the hands of the guardian Venerable Francis Bel. Thus, by a singular coincidence Fr. Martin of St. Felix was vested and professed by two Franciscans who, like himself, were destined one day to shed their blood in defense of their holy faith and profession.

About two years after his profession, Fr. Martin was ordained priest, although he

had not yet finished the usual course of studies. His health was very much impaired, and it was probably this circumstance together with his age, — he was now past thirty — that induced the provincial to have him receive ordination. Apparently, for the next three years, till 1637, he continued to study theology. Whereupon he was empowered to hear confessions and to preach and was approved for the mission in England. His first appointment was to Nieuport as confessor and spiritual adviser of the Franciscan Sisters residing in that place.¹⁰ In 1640, the provincial chapter, which was held in London on April 19, appointed him chaplain and confessor to a certain Mr. Sheldon at Arras. But he lived with this gentleman only a short time, when his health broke down completely, owing to the austere life he had been leading and to the disinterested zeal with which he had discharged his priestly duties. The physicians declared his ailment very serious; wherefore, the superiors recalled him to Douai. Resigning himself entirely to the will of God, the saintly priest returned to St. Bonaventure's and, despite his physical debility, again took part in all the penitential exercises of

the community.

Since his elevation to the priesthood, and especially since the renewal of anti-Catholic hostility in England, Fr. Martin had hoped and prayed for the day when he should be allowed to join his brethren on the missions. But his health had grown from bad to worse, so that he finally despaired of ever obtaining the necessary permission. Mingled feelings of joy and sorrow prevailed in the community at Douai when in the spring of 1643 the friars were informed that Venerable Paul Heath had won the martyr's crown. On Trinity Sunday they held a solemn service of thanksgiving. No one was more impressed by the sermon which a Capuchin preached on the occasion than Fr. Martin. To lay down his life for Christ again became the ever recurring burden of his thoughts and prayers. Several times he wrote to the provincial in England, Fr. George Perrot, asking leave to come to the missions. But for some reason or other his letters remained unanswered.

Meanwhile, the state of his health had become so alarming that the superiors ordered him to take the waters at Spa. It was here

¹⁰ Hope, p. 218.

that he met Fr. Peter Marchant, the Belgian commissary general. With childlike confidence he told him how, ever since the glorious death of Fr. Heath, he had been yearning to join the missions. The commissary in turn bade him apply to his immediate superior, promising at the same time to use his influence in securing the necessary permission. Accordingly, the servant of God addressed the following letter¹¹ to Fr. Angelus Mason, the provincial commissary:

Reverend Father:

Since Trinity Sunday, which I doubt not your Reverence remembers, and previously, I have written three consecutive letters to our Reverend Father Provincial in England, asking for permission to return thither, etc. Recently, I also wrote to the commissary general. But now after speaking to him personally, I have obtained in writing his free consent to my desire, provided it meets your approval, as he pointed out to me. He affixed his seal to it and returned it to me open, that I might read and sign it when I saw fit. This I did on my arrival here yesterday evening. After due

consideration, however, I refrain from sending it to you, for fear it may be lost on the way, which would necessitate my beginning the whole matter anew. Trusting you will take me at my word, especially in an affair of this kind, in which I could not lie, I judged it better to inform you of it by these simple lines and to request your consent with return mail. By the tender love of the most sweet Jesus, I entreat you not to delay sending it. Indeed, I might propose to your Reverence the same urgent reasons which I have twice already laid before the above-mentioned superiors, though perhaps in a style little adequate to the subject. But I hope that this will not be necessary. Your Reverence knows me better than they do; nor have I less confidence in you than in them. Still, rather than fail in my cherished purpose, I assure you that, if it be your wish to try me, I am willing to rehearse the same reasons to your Reverence which I unfolded to them, though I by no means entreated them with importunity, but with modesty and with unpersuasive reasoning. Reverend Father, the season admits of no delay; winter is at the door and my health in consequence of this and other greater anxieties is not as robust as your Reverence and I myself

11 For a copy of this letter see Mason, p. 201.

might expect. Therefore, for the love of God, kneeling now in my room, I pray you to say Amen, and to send me your approval as soon as possible. What I have for its security I will send to you whenever and wherever you desire. Meanwhile, offering you my humble, submissive, and unfeigned love and service, I remain with confidence in you, ever yours, Friar Martin of St. Felix.

Great was the joy of the holy man when some time later the commissary general notified him that Fr. Angelus Mason had given his consent. The happy news seemed to restore the health of his body as it soothed the anguish of his soul. Without delay, he returned to St. Bonaventure's. On arriving there he learned that a short time before another of his confreres, Venerable Francis Bel, had suffered martyrdom for the faith. Now nothing could longer detain him. He hastened his preparation and before the end of the year departed for England, fortified with the blessing of the guardian. After a perilous voyage, he landed at Newcastle-on Tyne, and immediately set out for Lancashire, hoping to find his relatives and to convert them to the true faith. But God

had decreed otherwise. On the very night of his arrival, he was arrested on the suspicion of being a priest and brought before the magistrate, who without much ado had him thrown into the city jail.

Owing to the Civil War, which was then at its height, the circuit judges were prevented from holding regular sessions. Hence, for more than two years, Fr. Martin was left to languish in prison. During this time, he endured untold hardships. The prison was rank with filth and disease. The rations that the jailer or some Catholic friend brought to him, were coarse and hardly sufficient to sustain him. Many of his fellow prisoners were criminals of the lowest type; and the shameless and wicked conversation they carried on only added to the misery and distress of the saintly friar. But he bore all with heroic patience and divided his time between prayer and works of charity. From time to time, Catholics would venture into the prison to be instructed by him or to receive the sacraments at his hands. They were greatly edified and encouraged by the self-forgetting zeal with which he ministered to their spiritual needs. Even the Protestants

were at a loss to explain how a man of his physical debility could survive and even be happy amid such privations. What sustained the servant of God, however, was the assurance that his cause was righteous, and that in the end, God would reward him with the crown of martyrdom. How earnestly he yearned for this singular grace, we learn from a letter of Fr. William Anderton, the same through whose intervention he had been admitted into the Franciscan Order. Fr. William was then engaged on the missions and succeeded in visiting his imprisoned confrere. "During the entire period of his confinement," he wrote, "he manifested a great desire for martyrdom, and always declared that, drawn especially by this hope, he had crossed over to England."

At length, the long looked-for moment arrived. The crushing defeat which Cromwell's Ironsides inflicted on the king's forces at Naseby had decided the war in favor of the parliamentarians. Hence, the Puritans had free scope to satisfy their vengeance on the Catholics. The judges soon after resumed their regular circuits

and early in August, 1646, came to Lancaster. Among the first to be summoned before them was Fr. Martin. On being asked whether he was a priest, the friar fearlessly replied in the affirmative and also admitted that he was a Franciscan. More was not needed, and without further questioning the judges condemned him to suffer the death of a traitor. On hearing his sentence, Fr. Martin raised his eyes to heaven and with a loud voice exclaimed, "Praise be to God! Thanks be to God!" Meanwhile, the guards approached and conducted him back to prison.

Owing probably to the fact that the prisons were overcrowded, the execution of Fr. Martin and of the two secular priests who had been condemned with him, was fixed for the following morning. At daybreak, therefore, on August 7, the three priests were taken from their dungeon and led out into the streets. Here they were fastened to hurdles and amid the taunts and jeers of a blood-thirsty rabble hurried off to the place of execution. The humility and patience with which the friar bore these insults elicited the secret sympathy of many, so that even Protestants

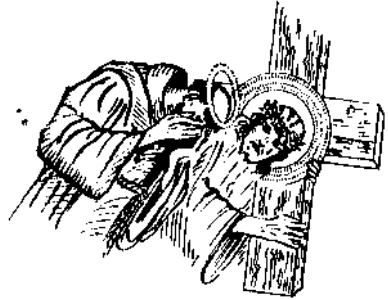
were heard to remark, "If ever there was a true martyr in the Roman Church, this is one."

The first to mount the ladder that rested against the scaffold was Fr. Martin. When the executioner had placed the rope about his neck, the martyr addressed the people. Having told them that he was about to suffer death solely for being a Roman Catholic priest, he began to discourse on the only true and saving faith. Suddenly, however, at a signal from the sheriff, the executioner overturned the ladder. It is related that the rope broke and that the martyr fell unconscious to the ground. But he soon came to and rose to his feet. At the command of the sheriff he re-ascended the ladder, and patiently suffered the executioner to readjust the rope. Then with a sudden jerk the ladder was again thrust aside, and the friar hung suspended between heaven and earth. Immediately he was cut down and the bloody work began.¹² When the executioner seized his heart, the martyr was heard to invoke the name of Jesus.

12 The head of the martyr, we learn from Hope (p. 228), was preserved in the Franciscan friary at Douai till the French Revolution, when the friars were compelled to seek refuge in England. The Franciscan Sisters at Taunton possess one of his arm-bones.

"He praised God in life," Mason concludes, "he called upon God in death, and after death he enjoys God in everlasting happiness."¹³

13 Mason, p. 208. Fr. Mason is the last of this period whose cause of beatification was introduced on December 4, 1886, and was advanced a step farther in 1900. See *Acta Minorum*, Vol. VI, pp. 49 seq., and Ortolani, *De Causis Beatorum et Servorum Dei Ordinis Minorum*, p. 14.



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Sister Agnes' Favorites



Come In, Lord

My dearest Lord, when Thou dost come to visit me, Thou wilt find a very humble home indeed. I am ashamed to ask Thee in. My little hovel is not worthy of Thy Divine Presence. I can say with Thy servant in the Gospel, "*Lord I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof.*" Only the grandest mansion is large enough for Thee, O Lord; but I have none. Only the most costly furniture is beautiful enough for Thee; but I have none. Only the most delicious dishes are fit to set before Thee; but I have none. What return shall I make the Lord for all He hath given me? Lord, I never know how poor I am till I try to find something fit to offer Thee.

But here is what gives me courage. If a poor stable satisfied Thee once, my simple home will now. It is only a lowly little cot with a floor of earth and a roof of straw. But it will be clean at least. The little that is in it will be all for Thee. The little room will be swept and garnished for Thy coming. The flower in the window will bloom for Thee. The little candle will burn for Thee. The fire on the hearth will glow for Thee, and the best of my poor store will be spread for thee. Better than that: At the sound of Thy footstep, my heart will beat for Thee, and when I hear Thy knock I will throw the door wide open as Martha and Mary did, and Thou shalt come in and bless my humble home with Thy sweet presence. Come then, O Lord, for I am waiting!

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Franciscan Saints

SEPTEMBER 9

BLESSED SERAPHINA
SFORZA

Widow, Second Order

Seraphina, descended from the very noble family of the counts of Urbino, became an orphan at an early age. Her maternal uncle, Prince Colonna, undertook to rear the child. During her stay in Rome, the girl's noble disposition unfolded itself like a flower. God and virtue had the strongest attraction for her, and the vanity of the world had no value in her sight.

Scarcely had she arrived at young womanhood when, at the wish of her relatives, she was betrothed to the widowed Prince Alexander Sforza, governor of Pesaro. A difficult task awaited the young wife, but she proved equal to it. The prince had two children by his first marriage, a son and a daughter. Seraphina embraced them with affection as tender as if they were her own

children, and they in turn loved and esteemed their stepmother like their own mother. She also completely won the affection of her husband.

After a few years the prince was obliged to take up arms to assist his brother, the duke of Milan. He believed that he could entrust the government to no one better than to his young wife, for he marveled at her wisdom and skill in the management of the household.

The prince's absence extended over a period of six years. Seraphina governed so perfectly that everyone admired her wise fore-sight and impartiality. She was loved and honored by all for her brilliant virtues and extraordinary generosity. She sought and obtained God's

blessing on her undertakings with abundant almsgiving.

When her husband returned, it was to be expected that she would receive due credit for her success. But God sometimes permits His servants to be rewarded in a very different way. A woeful change had taken place in the prince. He had abandoned himself to a dissolute life, which he had pursued so recklessly that he brought a paramour into his home and reduced Seraphina to the condition of a servant. But she held her peace, endured, and prayed. The very presence of his lawful wife, however, was an unbearable reproach to the profligate; he aimed to take her life. When his attempts failed, he forcibly ejected her from the palace, ordering her to hide herself in the monastery of the Poor Clares. Seraphina actually went there.

Although happy to serve God in the midst of the spouses of Christ, Seraphina nevertheless remained in secular garb so as to make it easier for the prince to return to his duties. She prayed unceasingly for his conversion. The prince strove to force her to take the religious garb; but only when she was assured that it was God's will, did she receive the

SEPTEMBER 2016

habit and take the vows. She was a perfect religious, faithful even in the most trifling ordinances.

Her perfect sacrifice was to secure her husband's conversion. At last he realized what he had done. He came to the convent, and on his knees begged his holy wife for forgiveness. For nine years he lived on, striving to the best of his ability to make amends for his sins and for the scandal he had given. Seraphina lived eighteen years more in the convent, and promoted its temporal and spiritual welfare, especially during the last three years when she was abbess.

On the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, September 8, 1478, she went to receive her heavenly crown. Pope Benedict XIV approved the perpetual veneration paid to her. Her body rests in the cathedral of Pesaro.

A HOLY WOMAN

1. Behold in Blessed Seraphina the model of a saintly housewife. She loves the children though she be not their natural mother, for God entrusts them to her maternal care through the bonds of Matrimony. Every Christian mother should cherish such supernatural love for her children, and not only

the natural attachment for the fruit of her womb. This latter is too often detrimental to the welfare of the child's soul. Every mother must remember that her children belong to God more than they do to her, as the mother of the Machabees said to her sons: It was not I that gave you breath, nor soul, nor life, but the Creator of the world (2 Mach. 7:22, 23). He will also require the souls of the children from their parents. — Have you reared your children for God?

2. Consider how Seraphina expended her energy and wit in attending to the cares of the household. She did so with so much success that she gained the complete confidence of her husband. The care of the house is the particular duty of the wife. Nature provides her with qualities that fit her for this work and heaven assists her in a special way with its grace. The peace and well-being of a home depend in great measure on her devotion and prudent fore-sight in the management of the household. "A wise woman buildeth her house" (Prov. 14:1). A truly Christian woman will leave nothing undone to keep the fair name of Christianity from being criticized on her

account. — Have you perhaps given occasion for such criticism?

3. It was genuine sanctity that supported Seraphina in her afflictions. To suffer and to endure is the proof of virtue in a woman. Generally, it is the long beam of the cross of home life that becomes her portion, whether this is due to the fact that original sin proceeded from Eve, or that God has so ordained it because He has granted women more endurance in suffering. So often we note in the lives of the saints that God leads those women whom He has pre-ordained for sanctity along the road of the cross. But woman also has easier access to the divine graces. She is led to God by the natural disposition to piety with which she is gifted, the knowledge of her weakness urges her to pray fervently, and the honor of her sex, Mary, Mother of Sorrows, and Mother of Grace, is her powerful intercessor. Thus she obtains the supernatural power that works miracles in family circles. Thus did Seraphina convert her husband, who had strayed so far from the path of righteousness, thus she ever remained a highly respected

model in her family, thus she herself finally attained to the crown of eternal glory.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

O God, who didst vouchsafe to give us Blessed Seraphina as an extraordinary example of patience, grant, we earnestly beseech Thee, that we may not only profit by her example, but also be preserved from all adversities through her protection. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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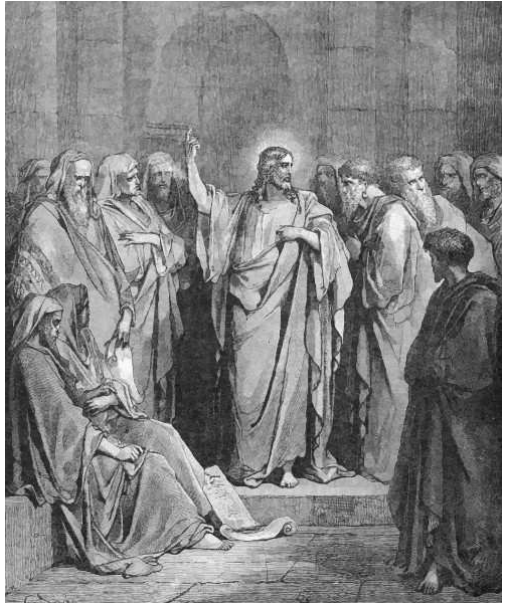
OR,

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE, AND HAPPINESS, OF ATTENDING TO THE CARE OF OUR SALVATION.

BY THE REV. J. FLETCHER, D.D.

“Give me understanding, and I shall live.” — PSALM cxix.

1834.



CONSIDERATION IV.

ON THE ESTEEM OF OUR SALVATION.

WHEN we reflect upon the nature of our belief, — that we are placed in this life, only to fit ourselves for another; and that eternal comforts, or everlasting miseries, must shortly be our portion, — we cannot but be sensible, that, among all our various interests, the interest of our salvation is, by far, the most important; and that to appreciate well the advantages of this blessing, is a piece of wisdom, of all others, the most essential to our happiness. Our happiness, indeed, depends principally upon this useful science; and

upon the convictions, which it operates upon the feelings of our hearts. It was this — this blessed science, — that constituted the real wisdom of the saints; that roused them to great exertions; and that secured for them their crowns of glory. It was this, that impressed their minds with a deep sense of the excellence of virtue; and with a horror of the guilt of sin. The conviction, indeed, of the importance of our salvation is the true secret of its attainment.

Believing, then, as we do, that the business of our salvation is, beyond every other, the most momentous, — is it not singular, that it is precisely this, which we principally neglect; and for

which the far larger portion of us entertain neither solicitude, nor affection? And yet, such is the fact. Absorbed in the interests of the world; or else, borne away by the torrent of its pleasures, we devote our chief care to the present moment, without either seriously reflecting upon the future; or making any prudent provision for its eternal consequences.

I. Fully to comprehend the value of our salvation; or completely to appreciate all the effects, which are appended, either to its attainment, or to its loss, — these are subjects, which far exceed the reach of the human capacity. Whatsoever in this life excites our desires, or animates our zeal; — whatsoever enlivens our joy, or inflames our ambition, — all this is not even so much as a shadow of the blessings, which, — provided we are virtuous, — are prepared for us in the life to come. In like manner, it is just equally the case, that whatsoever in this world excites our fears, or awakens our griefs; — whatsoever fills us with horror, or depresses us with despair, — all the calamities, punishments, and afflictions, which are experienced here, — all these are not so much as the feeble images, which, — if we

are wicked, — await us hereafter in the regions of eternal justice. From the circumstance of this impossibility of appreciating the effects, which are thus attached, both to the attainment of salvation, and to its loss, — so far from inferring, that we are, therefore, the more excusable for paying a less share of our attention to it, — we ought, on the contrary, to conclude, that it even demands, for this very reason, a still higher degree of our care, and assiduity. Our inability to comprehend its importance is the strongest proof of its transcendent value. But, let us trace a few of the plain, and tangible, evidences of its excellence.

II. It is, for example, a fact (as stated in the last Consideration) that the whole order of nature — this magnificent globe, which we inhabit; — the vault of heaven with its splendors; — the sea with its grandeur; — the earth with its fruits, and riches, — have, all of them, been created for no other purpose, but to afford us the season; and to present to us the means, of securing our salvation. Whilst the greatness, therefore, and the benefits, of these stupendous objects should impress our minds with a lively sense, both of the power, and

beneficence, of God, — they ought to convince us, at the same time, how very valuable our souls must be in His eyes; and how dear to Him our eternal happiness. For, if it be true, that means are but proportioned to their *end*; — or, if we measure the value of any object by the value of the mediums, which are employed for its attainment, — we ought, in such case, (seeing, that the omnipotence, and the goodness, of God are thus so strikingly exerted in our behalf,) to infer, that, therefore, among all the various objects of our esteem, there is not any one, that can even remotely be compared to the business of our salvation.

And not only is it true, that the whole order of nature has been thus called into existence for the sake of this important interest, — but it is, alike, the fact, that all the great events, which, at different periods, have taken place in human life, are intimately connected with it. The revolutions, and changes, in kingdoms; the prosperity, and calamities, of nations; all the goods, or evils, which, in ages past, and in our own, have come, either to astonish our reason, or to gratify it; either to wound our feelings, or to satisfy them, — all these, in

the designs of God, have been thus regulated, and ordained, solely for the purposes of our salvation, — either to promote the sanctification of the just; or to punish the disorders of the wicked.

III. But, if we thus trace the importance of our salvation in the order and events of nature, — how much more manifestly may we do this in the order and dispensations of Grace? It is in the order of Grace and religion that we best discover the value of our salvation and the excellence of our souls. In order to feel this, let us just again consider, in the single work of our Redemption, the price, which our salvation has cost; and by what means our eternal happiness has been purchased for us. These, indeed, are mysteries, alike astonishing to angels, as they are incomprehensible to men. For, what is the character of this wonderful dispensation? Why; not only, in it, do we see the omnipotence of God exerting His stupendous power, as He did in the creation of the universe; — not only do we observe His wisdom giving laws to His creatures, as He did once to His chosen people, the Jews, — we see Him Himself, — the second Person of the adorable

Trinity, — come down from His throne of glory; assume the form of a mortal being; and reside amongst us. And then, too, let us mark how He comes. He comes, not as the great monarch, clothed in the robes of majesty, and surrounded by the attributes of power, — He comes, on the contrary, clothed in all the weakness of human nature, and environed with every form of lowliness, and abjection. During the course of His career on earth, He led a life of poverty, suffering, and humiliation: and, ere long, — having instructed us in the ways of peace, — He closed a life of suffering by a death, alike cruel, as it was ignominious. Such is the mystery of our Redemption; and so dear as this, in the eyes of God, is the value of an immortal soul. With these feelings, well imprinted upon our minds, it would be impossible, that we should undervalue our salvation; and impossible, just equally, that we should not labor assiduously to make it ours.

Neither is this all that the divine benevolence has done for us, for the purpose of securing this blessing. For, in order that we may the more effectually apply to ourselves the benefits of our

redemption; it has still farther pleased the mercy, and the wisdom, of its divine Author to establish in our favor a variety of sacred institutions, and holy privileges, — the supports of our weakness; and the stimulants of our piety. Such as these are the Sacraments, — the instruments of grace, and the sources of our sanctification. Such is the Holy Eucharist, — the miracle of love; and the pledge of our future happiness. Such is the Church, — in whose pastors we possess guides; and in whose precepts we enjoy rules, to conduct us securely in the paths of virtue. Such are the Scriptures, &c. In all these dispensations we trace the immense interest, which the divine goodness attaches to the work of our salvation. They should, therefore, engage us to esteem it; and encourage us to pursue it with industry and zeal.

IV. But, again, as if all the foregoing inducements were not enough to awaken in our breasts a sufficient degree of interest for the important blessing, — the wisdom of God, appealing to our very self-love, proposes to us the care of our salvation, as the best, and only real, source of our happiness even in this life. Knowing how much we love ourselves; and how eager

we are for our present comfort, He says to us: — “Only attend to the work of your salvation, and you shall be happy. Attend to your salvation, — and you shall sit down to the feast of life, cheerful, and contented; — no fears shall disturb the day; no terrors distress the night. My very angels, camped round about you, shall cherish and protect you. You shall flourish like the tree that is planted by the stream of running waters; and whatsoever you shall do, shall prosper.” Such as these are the assurances, which, in the series of the sacred pages, God repeatedly makes to us, provided only that we attend carefully to His service.

And then He adds, — again referring to the feelings of our self-love; — “*Not so, the wicked; not so.* If you neglect your salvation, you shall be unhappy. If undervaluing My service, you prefer to it the disorders of sin, you shall taste none of the sweets, and consolations of My friendship: but cares, and apprehensions, and uneasiness, shall pursue, and attend your steps; and you shall be soon, like the dust, which is carried away by the wind from the face of the earth,” &c.

Hence, therefore, seeing that both the mercy and the wisdom of God have done every thing; and employed every expedient, to excite in our minds an esteem, for our salvation, let us not be so imprudent as to risk the loss of the inestimable blessing. Certain it is, that the day will very soon arrive, when we shall bitterly regret the folly of not having always made it the chief object of our care. Our salvation will then appear to us the only object, really deserving of our affection, — “*the ONE thing necessary.*” We shall then feel, — too sensibly feel, — that “it profits nothing to have gained the whole world, if the soul is lost.” In fact, where, or what, is “the profit” of having been rich, and exalted, for a day, if we are condemned to be miserable forever? Or where the satisfaction of having triumphed here in pleasures for a few hours, if we are consigned hereafter to suffer and weep, for endless ages? No; let us consider the subject well. And wisely aware that our salvation is far beyond all our other interests, the most important, — so let us now make it chief object of our esteem and the main stimulant of our industry.

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