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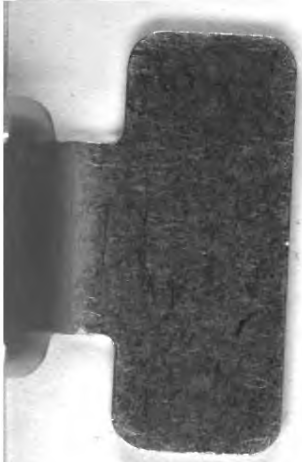
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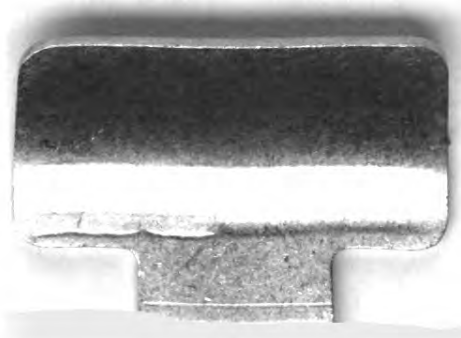
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THE SPIRITUAL LETTERS
OF PÈRE DE CAUSSADE



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**THE SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF
FATHER P. J. de CAUSSADE, S.J.**

THE SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF
FATHER P. J. de CAUSSADE, S.J.

ON THE PRACTICE OF SELF-ABANDONMENT
TO DIVINE PROVIDENCE

A NEW TRANSLATION BY
ALGAR THOROLD

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
The Most Rev. Archbishop GOODIER, S.J.

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FOREWORD

By the MOST REV. ARCHBISHOP GOODIER, S.J. .

MOST students of spiritual literature are intimately acquainted with the doctrine of Père de Caussade ; that abandonment of self into the hands of God so that nothing, not even one's own spiritual state, shall ever disturb one's peace of mind. ' Divine Providence . . . regulates and arranges everything for our greater good, although we usually understand nothing of what it is doing ' ; this is his first principle. ' Let us receive everything from the hand of our good Father, and he will keep us in peace in the midst of the greatest disasters of this world ' ; this is his conclusion. It is very obvious ; it is nothing very new ; it is at the root of the spiritual doctrine of every saint and ascetical writer that has lived. It differs almost in nothing from the ' Little Way ' of S. Theresa of Lisieux ; and yet there is an aspect of it, a setting, an application, which gives Caussade's teaching originality, as it does to the teaching of S. Thérèse. What that teaching is we learn from Caussade's well-known book, *Self-abandonment*, so ably translated by Mr. Thorold ; how original it is we may judge from the fact that though others have gone over the same course yet it has never been superseded.

In the former work we learn, easily and persuasively, the theory of Self-abandonment ; so easily, so persuasively, that its exercise seems the simplest and the most natural thing in the world. In the present volume of letters we see the teacher putting his doctrine into

practice, both for himself and for others ; and at once we discover that though it is not the less attractive, still it is not so easy as it seemed. Even for the author, Père Caussade himself, the way is no mere smooth surface ; it is a relief and an encouragement to find him, in his description of himself (Letter III), and that though he is a Jesuit trained to obey, ' leaving the letter unwritten,' nevertheless disturbed, almost beyond belief, at the order of a superior. But this, perhaps, is really the secret of Caussade's success, and it is revealed in these letters more than in his former book ; he shows himself as a very human being indeed, who has learnt his doctrine of Self-abandonment, not from theory, not from other books, but from the hard necessity of having had to reduce to order his own recalcitrant soul.

As a consequence, and a proof, of having learnt his lesson from experience, it is astonishing to see how well he describes the problems of a soul that is aiming at perfection. Take, for example, the first Letter of the second Book in this collection : Principles and Practices of Self-abandonment. It is one of the most illuminating in the whole series. The Principles are three, their application is manifold. He watches the soul struggling with its natural interests, struggling with its dissatisfaction with itself ; he subdivides the second into just those worries which most beset a soul of good will, its ' impetuous desires,' its sense of imperfection, its blindness to its own faults, its fears about the past ; to each one of these he applies his remedy of self-abandonment, and shows how completely it removes them all and brings peace and progress. Or again, in Letter VI : On Direction in General, the restraining influence he brings to bear on a soul he thoroughly understands proves how well he has learnt the lesson from his own experience.

In all this Caussade is eminently reasonable ; to all

he says we are driven to reply that he speaks with sound common sense, almost as if he were leaving high spirituality aside for its sake. But it is when he speaks of Prayer that he seems to be at his best ; and of this we have an example in Letter VIII : The Prayer of Souls called to a Life of Self-abandonment. Here again he is in no hurry ; he encourages no false enthusiasm ; his prayer is the prayer of simplicity, the ' simple gaze,'—' without using any reasoning ' ; and yet, in dealing with distractions, he will have the soul deal ' gently ' with itself ; we could scarcely have true prayer better described than it is described here :

' The most perfect prayer is the simplest, and the simplest prayer that into which less of our own enters, fewer ideas, fewer imaginations, fewer reasonings, the prayer that is formed of a single sentiment long drawn out.'

Beginning with this Prayer of Simplicity, which in reality is the Second Method of Prayer prescribed by his Master, S. Ignatius Loyola, Caussade easily leads, by the way of Self-abandonment, to the highest union with God. He delights in and encourages what Mr. Thorold has admirably translated as the ' holy disoccupation ' of the soul (Letter XI) ; he lifts the prayer up to living faith and confidence ; he points to the prayer of union that lies ahead. There are obstacles in the way ; he knows them, takes them one by one, just those obstacles that every soul that aspires to prayer meets, but he does not mind them ; he shows us how all goes down before the practice of Self-abandonment. And this is not only in actual prayer ; he extends the same over the much wider field of the state of prayer, the prayerfulness of which the Apostle speaks when he bids his disciples ' Pray always.' In all this one feels how closely he follows S. Francis de Sales, a fact which Caussade himself frequently acknowledges :

‘ Always gently, sweetly and peacefully, as S. Francis de Sales says.’

Not the least of the attractions of Caussade as a guide in the spiritual life is the way he looks at spirituality as a whole. Prayer, occupation, progress, trial, they are all one to him. He meets them with the same weapons, he sums up his teaching in every case with the same words. Thus we find him writing in one place :

‘ Why will we always substitute our own action for that of the Divine worker, who labours ceaselessly in us at the work of our perfection? How much more progress would we make if we made it our principal study not to get in the way of His action, to abandon ourselves to Him and wait ’ ; a summary and guidance which is applicable to every time, every act, every condition of the soul. Or again, for a soul that ‘ seeketh a sign,’ with a kind of spiritual bravery he sums up :

‘ Here are some indications by which you will be able to recognise in the long run the results of the Divine action and the changes produced in the heart. (1) A holy indifference like a sort of stupidity in reference to the things of this world ; (2) A depth of peace such that you no longer worry about anything at the bottom of your soul, not even over your own imperfections and faults, and still less over those of others ; (3) A certain zest for God and the things of God, a sort of hunger and thirst for justice, i.e. for virtue, piety and all perfections.’

Such is the often-repeated ‘ sign ’ of a soul that is in the right way. It rings of Fénelon, of S. Francis de Sales, of de Bérulle, of all that school of French spirituality which had risen up, almost unconsciously, to counter the hard teaching of Jansenism. Caussade, it is clear, was a student of other writers on the spiritual life as well as one who learnt from experience. He

knew the Spanish mystics ; he can often quote S. Theresa in support of his doctrine. He knew his own Jesuit predecessors ; we find him referring to such masters as Lallemant. But above all it would seem that he had in mind to reconcile every school with every other ; to see good in all, and therefore to bring them together,—we have ample proof of this in his book *On Prayer*, also admirably translated by Mr. Thorold. He was living at a time when Jansenism on the one hand, and Quietism on the other, had made all the spiritual masters of France nervous and exacting, his own Jesuit brethren among them. Caussade was convinced that this was folly ; that the way of prayer could never be a way of bickering and harshness ; he set himself, by study and experience, to find the way of peace and his doctrine of Self-abandonment, of simplicity, of joy in the Lord, was the result. In Caussade one sees the best of a movement which in his time had reached its high-water mark.

✠ ALBAN GOODIER, S.J.

THE SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FATHER P. J. de CAUSSADE, S.J.

BOOK I

THE ESTEEM AND LOVE OF SELF-ABANDONMENT

LETTER I

TO SISTER ELIZABETH BOURCIER DE MONTHUREUX

*The happiness and unalterable peace of the Soul who
Abandons herself entirely to God.*

PERPIGNAN, 1732.

MADAME and very dear Sister, You do well to attach yourself strongly and, as it were, uniquely to the excellent practice of a complete self-abandonment to the Will of God. There lies for you the whole of perfection ; it is the easiest road which leads soonest and most surely to a deep and invariable peace ; it is also a sure guarantee of the preservation of that peace in the depth of our soul throughout the most furious tempests. The soul that truly abandons herself to God has nothing to fear from the most violent storms. Far from doing her any hurt, they will infallibly serve not only to increase her merits, but also to establish her more and more firmly in that union of her own

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will with the Divine Will which renders the tranquillity of the soul invariable.

What happiness, what grace, what confidence for the next life, and what unalterable peace for the present one is to be found in having our being in God only, in possessing nothing more than God only, no other support, no other help, no other hope ! What a beautiful letter one of your sisters has just written me on this point ! For a month, she says, she has had but one thought : God only ; I have nothing left but God only, and that thought alone consoled, sustained and encouraged her so powerfully that, instead of regrets, she felt within her a depth of peace and inexplicable joy. It seemed to her that God took the place of director and friend and that He wished Himself to be everything to her.

The more deeply these sentiments penetrate us, the more solid will be our peace ; for the decision definitely taken to seek nothing but God and to will only what He wills, is above all else, that *good will* to which the reward of peace has been promised. How can creatures trouble a soul who has neither desire nor fear in their regard ? Let us force ourselves to reach that point and our peace will be truly imperturbable. Let us imitate the holy Archbishop of Cambrai who said of himself : ‘ I anticipate the most in everything, and in the depth of that most I find my peace through an entire self-abandonment.’

LETTER II

Self-abandonment is the quickest road to reach pure love and perfection.

YOUR letter, my dear Sister, reminds me of that passage in the Gospel which shows us a young man approaching our Lord in order to ask Him the way to reach

eternal life. The good Master makes the immediate reply that he must keep the commandments, and when the young man answers that he has observed them faithfully up to that day, the Saviour says to him : ' If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor and follow me.'

The question you ask me is the same as the question of this young man. You wish me to point out to you the shortest and surest way to reach the perfection which is the plenitude of eternal life. If I did not know you as well as I do, I should reply that above everything, you must keep your rule, since for all Religious, their rule is the only assured path of perfection. But I know that you have been observing it for a long time with the most scrupulous exactitude, and that what you wish to learn from me at this moment is the most suitable practice to raise to high sanctity a Religious who is in the habit of accomplishing faithfully all her duties. And to that question, my dear Sister, I shall give the same reply as the Good Master. If you wish to be perfect, strip yourself of all your own views, of all pretensions, of all self-seeking, of all returns of your mind on yourself, of all that you can call *yours*, and abandon yourself without reserve and once and for all to the direction and good pleasure of God. Self-abandonment ; yes, complete self-abandonment, blind and absolute, that is for souls who are walking in your path the height and *résumé* of perfection, for perfection consists in Pure Love and for you the exercise of pure love consists in self-abandonment.

It is true that even the purest love does not exclude from the soul the desire of her salvation and perfection, but it is equally incontestable that the nearer a soul approaches to perfect purity of love the more she turns her thoughts away from herself in order to fix them on the infinite goodness of God. The Divine Goodness

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does not oblige us to repudiate the reward that it destines for us, but it has surely the right to be loved for itself without any backward glances at our own interests. Such a love which does not exclude, but is independent of, the love of ourselves is what all theologians call pure love, and they all agree that the soul is more perfect in proportion as she habitually governs herself by the motive of that love, stripping herself entirely of all self-seeking, except in so far as her own interests are subordinated to those of God.

Moreover, total self-abandonment, without reserves or limits, does not return on personal interests : it thinks only of God, His good pleasure, His Will, His Glory ; it knows, it desires to know nothing else. Far from making self-interest the motive of her love, a truly abandoned soul accepts and generously embraces all that seems to tend to her own annihilation : obscurity, incertitude, weaknesses, humiliations. All that is pleasant to her as soon as she knows that it pleases her Beloved, because the pleasure and contentment of her Beloved make her own pleasure and contentment. She has no longer any will, any desire, any life of her own, but is altogether lost, engulfed and, as it were, annihilated in the dark and deep abyss of the will of Him whom she loves.

I can tell you that I have known souls who after having crossed hundreds of times this apparently terrifying ditch of complete, unqualified, and limitless self-abandonment into the depths of the impenetrable designs of God could not prevent themselves crying out in transports of joy and holy confidence : O Will of my God, Thou art infinitely holy, just and adorable, but to me yet more lovable and beneficent. If Thou art fully accomplished in me, I must infallibly find in Thee my true contentment in this life and my eternal happiness in the next. How could Thy Infinite Mercy permit Thee to will anything but what

tends to the greater good of Thy poor creatures ? They alone can destroy themselves through the perversity of their own will which can prevent, and too often does prevent, the accomplishment of Thy holiest and most beneficent dispositions. Give me then, my God, the grace to destroy by my entire self-abandonment these foolish obstructions and when that is done, assured of the fulfilment in me of Thy Divine intentions, I shall be equally assured of my salvation and perfection.

LETTER III

TO SISTER MARIE-THERÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

His doctrine applied to himself. The profound peace which he enjoys through self-abandonment in the midst of the worries of business.

WHAT I have always most dreaded has just happened to me. I have not been able to get out of accepting a charge contrary to all my *attraits* and for which I believe myself to have no aptitude. In vain I groaned, prayed, offered to spend the rest of my life in the Noviciate-house of Toulouse, the sacrifice, one of the greatest of my life, had to be made. But see how visibly the action of Divine Providence appears. When I had made, and repeated a hundred times, my sacrifice, God removed from my heart all my old repugnance so that I left the professed House—and you know how much I loved it—with a certain peace and liberty of spirit at which I was myself astonished. But there is more. On my arrival at Perpignan, I found a quantity of business of which I understand nothing, innumerable people to see and conciliate : the Bishop, the Intendant, the King's Lieutenant, Parliament, Staff. You know my horror of all sorts of visits, and above all the visits of the great : I find

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that none of that frightens me ; I hope that God will supply for everything and I feel a confidence in His Divine Providence which keeps me above all these troubles. So I remain calm and in peace in the midst of a thousand worries and complications in which I should have expected, naturally speaking, to be overwhelmed.

It is true that what contributes most to this great peace is the disposition in which it has pleased God to place me of fearing and desiring nothing during the course of this short and miserable life. Thus, when I have done what I think before God I ought to do, the success of the enterprise will be what He chooses : I abandon that question entirely to Him and with my whole heart, thanking Him for everything in advance, desiring only in everything and everywhere His Holy Will, because I am convinced by Faith and by many personal experiences that all comes from God, and that He is powerful enough and a good enough Father to bring out all issues to the best advantage of His dear children. Did He not prove that He loved us better than His life when He laid it down for love of us ? And can we not be assured that having done so much for us He will not forget us ? I beg of you, do not distress yourself about me or what I am doing. Do what I strive to do myself. As soon as I have taken a decision before God and according to His Will, I leave all the care of it to Him and entrust Him with its success. I expect success with confidence, but also with calm and I am willing for it to occur, not in accordance with my own impatient desires, but at the time of Divine Providence which regulates and arranges everything for our greater good, although we usually understand nothing of what it is doing. How can we judge it, poor ignorant creatures that we are, as blind as moles living underground ?

Let us receive everything from the hand of our good

Father, and he will keep us in peace in the midst of the greatest disasters of this world the fashion of which passes away in a flash. Our life will be holy and tranquil in proportion as we trust in God and abandon ourselves to Him. While without that self-abandonment, there is no solid virtue, no sure repose.

You were wrong to be surprised that I did not share the views and plans of N., for apart from the fact that nothing surprises me in this life, you ought to know my habit of always looking at the good side and most favourable aspect of everything, as S. Francis de Sales says. This fortunate habit keeps me out of danger and, in a certain way, prevents me thinking, judging or speaking evil of anyone. I strongly advise you to adopt this method. It will contribute greatly to the preservation of the peace of your soul and the purity of your conscience. Believe me : let us sacrifice all human sentiments and let us console ourselves for everything by self-abandonment and confidence in God only, for He alone can and should take the place of everything else.

LETTER IV

TO THE SAME

The Same Subject.

My dear Sister,—I am touched by your sympathy in my trials, but I am glad to be able to reassure you. It is true that at first I suffered acutely on seeing myself charged with a quantity of business and anxieties contrary to my *attrait* for solitude and silence, but see how Divine Providence has come to my aid. God gives me the grace to remain unattached to all these affairs, so that my spirit remains always free. I abandon their successful issue to His paternal care,

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so that nothing distresses me. Often things go all right and I give thanks to God ; sometimes everything goes wrong, I again bless His Holy Name and offer Him the sacrifice of my efforts. Once this sacrifice has been made, God arranges everything. Already our good Master has prepared several of these agreeable surprises for me. As for leisure, I have more than anywhere else. At the moment visits are rare, because I only pay them out of duty and pure necessity. Our Fathers themselves, who know my tastes, soon finish their business with me and as they are convinced that I do not act as I do out of pride or misanthropy no one disapproves of my behaviour and several are edified by it.

Moreover, I am not as dead as you think ; but God gives me the grace not to bother about disapproval when I am following the path on which He calls me. Our concern is to please Him only ; if He is content that is enough for us, all the rest is a mere nothing. In a few days we shall make our appearance before this great God, this Sovereign Master, this Infinite Being. Of what use then (and for all Eternity) will anything be that was not done for His sake and animated by His Grace and Spirit ?

If these simple truths were a little more familiar to us, what peace of heart and mind should we not enjoy already in our present life ! From how many vain fears, desires and anxieties, both for this life and the next, should we not be delivered ! I will confess to you that since my return to France, I begin to envisage more closely than ever the end of this sad life of ours, and I do so with much peace and tranquillity. How could I feel anything but joy, when I see the end of my exile approaching ?

LETTER V

TO THE SAME

On the Same Subject.

PERPIGNAN, 1741.

I AM experiencing here the constant care of Divine Providence, for no sooner have I sacrificed everything to God, than He discovers a remedy for everything and causes me to find whatever I need. When I find myself without resource, I place all my affairs in the hands of Providence, I hope everything from it, I have recourse to it in everything and for everything ; I thank God ceaselessly for everything, receiving everything from his Divine Hand. And never does He fail us, so long as we put all our confidence in his protection. But what do people do as a rule ? They try to substitute their own blind and impotent providence for the infinitely wise and good providence of God ; they base themselves on their own efforts, and by doing so they place themselves outside the order of Divine Love and lose all the support they would have had in carrying out that order. What folly ! How can we doubt that God understands our interests much better than we do and that his dispositions of events in regard to us are advantageous even when we do not understand them ? Would not a little wisdom be enough to determine us to allow ourselves to be led with docility by His Providence, though we cannot understand all the secret springs which God brings into play, or the particular ends that He has in mind ?

But, you will say, if it is enough to let us be passively guided what becomes of the proverb : ‘ Help yourself and God will help you ’ ? I do not say that we must not act : no doubt we must help ourselves ; to fold our arms and expect everything from Heaven whether

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in the order of nature or that of grace, would be an absurd and sinful quietism. But while we are co-operating with God we must never cease to follow His direction and lean upon Him. To act in this way is to act with assurance and consequently with calm. When one looks upon oneself in all one's actions as the instrument of Divine Providence and aims at nothing but fulfilling God's designs, one acts gently, without trouble or hurry, without disquiet about the future or regret for the past, abandoning oneself to God's fatherly Providence and counting on it more than on all possible human means. In that way, one is always at peace, and God unfailingly directs everything for our good, either temporal or eternal, and sometimes for both.

LETTER VI

TO THE SAME

Self-abandonment softens the Boredom of Solitude.

MY dear Sister,—You are distressing yourself quite unnecessarily over my affairs ; you are persuaded that I regard the isolation in which I live as a misfortune ; but I think quite differently. I bless God daily for this fortunate disposition of Providence. By means of it I learn to die to all things in order to live for God only. I was not so completely buried at —, there many things internal and external supported me and made me feel I was alive ; here and now there is nothing of all that. It is as if I was in a veritable desert, alone with God only. How good that is ! This exterior solitude is combined in my case with a great interior emptiness. Though this state is painful, I thank God for it because I have no doubt that it is salutary for me. It is a death in general to the whole sensible world, even in spiritual matters, it is a sort of

annihilation through which it is necessary to pass in order to rise with Jesus Christ to a new life, a life wholly in God, stripped of everything, deprived of all consolation in which the senses could take part. God wishes me to be deprived of all exterior help and dead to everything so as to live no longer except in Him ; his Holy Will be done, may it be fulfilled in all things and at all times. That is the firm column to which we should always remain immovably attached, for it is the solid and unshakable foundation of all our perfection.

You see, my dear Sister, how little I deserve your compassion, since the cause of your pity is the precise object of my joy. I will confess to you, however, that the great solitude in which I have suddenly found myself here at first appeared agreeable only to the superior part of my soul, but after a short time my whole soul was penetrated by its sweetness. Once more have I learned by experience that we cannot do better, even from the point of view of our temporal interests, than let things go as they will in step with Divine Providence. That is my great *attrait* ; and more than ever I am determined to let myself go to it blindly and without reservations in everything, my dwelling-place, my occupations, my time, in fact, everything. For a long time I have asked of God one grace only which is to have in this world one only desire, to please Him, and one only fear, to offend Him. If He accords me this grace, I am rich for time and for eternity. I wish nothing for you, as for myself, but this self-abandonment alone.

What has one to fear in abandoning oneself entirely to God ? Apart from the peace of heart attached to that state, we also find in it our perfection. If merit consists principally in sacrifice, what can be more meritorious than the complete sacrifice of all the objects of our will, even of those which seem to us the

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most reasonable and holy for the sake of God's Will alone? Let us then have no other care, no other ambition than to unite ourselves to that infinitely merciful Will, confident that it will save us, even when we may think that all is lost.

LETTER VII

Of the Happiness brought by Self-abandonment to a Community of Poor Clares.

My dear Sister,—I have discovered something here which gives me more satisfaction than all imaginable delights. There is in this town of Albi a monastery of Poor Clares of the Great Reform totally cut off from the world who enter Religion without any dowry and live on alms from day to day. The Superior is one of the holiest persons I have known in my life. I felt at once a great interior *attrait* to be in holy relations with them and most of them have admitted that they had the same *attrait* towards me. I believe that God is preparing some great graces for me by means of their prayers. They are very interior souls and practise self-abandonment to God in admirable perfection. When I said to them that on every occasion that should offer, I would endeavour to procure alms for them, they seemed to me almost scandalised and begged me to think only of making them more interior, more detached and more holy by my instructions and my prayers. Nothing can be imagined more admirable than their sisterly union, their candour and their simplicity. Struck by their great austerities I asked them one day whether the hardship of their life did not greatly damage their health, and shorten their days : they replied that they hardly ever had invalids among them, that very few died young, and that

most of them lived till past eighty. They added that their austerities and fasts contributed to fortify their health and to prolong their lives which a too plentiful regime would shorten. Never have I seen more gaiety and holy joy than among these saintly women. But in order to content them, one must speak only of the things of God, for they cannot endure to hear of indifferent matters and news of the world. What, they say, does that matter to us? I feel sure that you will be edified and glad for my sake of this happy discovery, for though I have often lived here, I knew but the name of the Community and looked upon these holy souls as persons dead to everything, buried and completely invisible.

What a grace and consolation for me ! I may add ; what a piece of instruction for my own sanctification ! This is indeed an occasion to praise and bless God for His wonders in the souls of His servants.

LETTER VIII

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-THÉRÈSE DE ROSEN (1734)

Motives for our Self-abandonment on God's side. The Divine Grandeur and Goodness.

My dear Sister,—Do not ask of me any new secret recipes for winning the friendship of God and making rapid progress in virtue ; I only know one which I have put before you several times, the truly infallible efficacy of which my daily renewed experience proves more and more surely : it is self-abandonment to Divine Providence. Allow me once more to recommend it to you and do not grow weary of learning it any more than I shall go weary of teaching it. I would gladly shout out everywhere : Self-abandonment ! self-abandonment ! and again self-abandonment. A

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self-abandonment without limits or reservations, and that for two real reasons.

First because the greatness of God and His Sovereign dominion over us demand that all should bow, should be as it were beaten down and annihilated before His supreme majesty. His infinite greatness is wholly out of proportion with our littleness. It dominates everything, contains everything, swallows up everything in its immensity, or, rather, it is everything for whatever exists and is not God, has received its being from Him by creation, receives it indeed at each instant by conservation (which is an incessantly renewed creation), since the being thus received always remains plunged and lost in His bosom. It follows that God is the Being of all beings ; nothing is or lives or subsists except by Him and in Him. He is He-Who-Is, by whom everything is, in whom everything is and who is All in all things. Other beings compared with nothingness appear to be something, but compared with God they appear to be nothing. Their being and substance are borrowed, while God exists solely of Himself and is no one's debtor but His own. It is, therefore, necessary that since everything necessarily belongs to Him, all should return to Him, and that His Sovereign dominion should be glorified by all the creatures that His hands have made. Creatures deprived of reason glorify Him in their way by following with inviolable exactitude and unwearying docility the movement that He communicates to them, but He rightly expects from His reasonable creatures a glory more worthy of Himself, which results from their voluntary self-abandonment. How indeed can they make a more just and worthy use of their liberty than in giving back to God all they have received from Him and offering Him in advance all they may receive from Him in the future ?

Let us, however, be careful to understand the situation

aright. This homage which God expects from us, He alone can give us the power to pay it by communicating to us the thought, the desire, the movement and the will of doing so. If He should accord us this grace and we profit by it, far from applauding ourselves we should thank Him as for a benefit which crowns the other benefits we have received from Him. The very movement which induces us to pay Him this last thanksgiving is again as much a new grace as the reflection which gives birth to it. Thus, every instant of our lives, each of our actions while increasing our debt towards Him, forms new bonds which make us yet more dependent on His Divine Goodness. At this thought, spirit, heart and soul with all its powers remain lost and annihilated in the profound depth of this Sovereign dominion. This is the point at which we reach the truth and when we place ourselves before God in our natural state which is nothingness and it is here also that we practise perfect self-abandonment. To maintain oneself constantly in this interior disposition is what Scripture calls walking in justice, in the truth ; apart from that state there is nothing but injustice and lies towards God. Injustice, since He is robbed of part of the glory which belongs to Him ; lies because we are flattering ourselves and appropriating what can never belong to us.

The second motive of this unreserved self-abandonment is that God has no sooner obtained from His creature the homage due to His infinite majesty, than He gives free course to His infinite goodness. He wishes his creature to recover by the free gift of His mercy all that she has resigned to Him through her entire self-abandonment, or, rather, He repays her infinitely more than she gave Him, for He answers the gift she made Him of her limited being by the gift of His infinite riches. So that in the depths of this act of self-abandonment where she was to find pure

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nothingness, she finds the infinite. What a bargain from the hands of the Divine Liberality ! What ingenuity on the part of Divine Wisdom ! What a trick the Divine Goodness has played on the soul !

LETTER IX

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

A Further Motive for Self-abandonment to God : His Paternal Providence.

I DO not understand your anxieties, my dear Sister ; why do you take pleasure in tormenting yourself, as you do, over the future, when your faith teaches you that the future is in the hands of a Father who is infinitely good, who loves you more than you love yourself and who understands your interests far better than you ? Have you forgotten that everything that happens is directed by the orders of Divine Providence ? But if we know this how can we hesitate to remain in a state of humble submission, in the most trifling as in the greatest events, to all that God wishes or permits. How blind we are when we desire anything other than what God wishes. He alone knows the dangers which threaten us in the future and the help of which we shall have need. I am firmly convinced that we should all be lost if God gave us all our desires, and that is why, as S. Augustine says, God in His mercy and compassion for our blindness, does not always grant our prayers, and sometimes gives us the contrary of what we ask as being in reality better for us. In truth, I often think that nearly all of us are in this world in the position of poor sick people who in their frenzy or delirium ask for the very thing that would cause their death and who have to be refused out of pure charity and an enlightened pity.

My God, if this truth were once for all well known, with what blind self-abandonment should we not submit ourselves to Thy Divine Providence. What peace and tranquillity of heart we should enjoy in every circumstance, not only regarding external events, but also with reference to our interior states of soul. Even in cases where the painful vicissitudes through which God makes us pass are a punishment for our infidelities, we should say to ourselves that thus has God willed ; i.e. by permitting this suffering, and humbly submit, we should detest our fault and accept its painful and humiliating consequences, as S. Francis de Sales so often advises us.

How many troubles and useless anxieties injurious to our peace of heart and spiritual advancement would not this one principle, rightly understood, dispel ! Shall I never succeed with the help of grace in insinuating into your mind and still more into your heart this great principle of faith, so sweet, so consoling, so loving and so pacifying ? We ought often to pray : My God, may all Thy most holy intentions be accomplished in me and never my own ; may they be accomplished because while infinitely just in themselves, they are also infinitely advantageous for me. I know that Thou canst will only the greatest good of Thy creatures so long as they remain submissive to Thy orders. May my own will never be accomplished except when it is in perfect agreement with Thine, because otherwise it can only be harmful to me. If ever, my God, it should happen through ignorance or passion that I persist in desires contrary to Thine, may I be disappointed and punished, not by Thy justice, but by Thy pity and great mercy.

What ever happens, said S. Francis de Sales, *Vive Jésus !* I shall take sides with Divine Providence even if Human Wisdom tear out her hair with rage. When one is illuminated by heavenly light, one thinks very

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differently from most men, but what a source of peace, what power one finds in this way of thinking and looking at things ! How happy are the Saints, how peacefully they live, and what miserable blind fools we are not to be willing to train ourselves to think as they do, preferring to be entombed in the thick darkness of this accursed human wisdom which makes us so wretched, blind and guilty. Let us study how to give all our care and attention to the task of conforming ourselves in all things to the Holy Will of God in spite of interior revolt. That revolt itself must be accepted in obedience to the Will of God which permits it in order to accustom us to remain at all times and in all circumstances before Him in a state of sacrifice by even our interior silence blended out of respect, adoration, self-annihilation, submission and love, and a self-abandonment full of confidence.

LETTER X

The Same Subject.

MY dear Sister,—I sympathise with you on the continuation of your cross, but I should do so much more if you were not able to profit by it, at least by making, as they say, a virtue of necessity. Remember our great principles : (1) That there is nothing so small or apparently trifling, even the fall of a leaf, that it is not ordained or permitted by God ; (2) That God is sufficiently wise, good, powerful and merciful to turn the most seemingly disastrous events to the good and profit of those who are capable of adoring and humbly accepting all these manifestations of His Divine and adorable Will.

Is there anything more consoling in religion than these two principles ? Particularly when one knows

that the repugnances and revolts of nature far from depriving our submission of merit, merely increase it when we sincerely submit with the higher part of our soul, and further that our half-voluntary intellectual impatience and sadness are but imperfections and faults of pure fragility which do not destroy our submission, but only slightly diminish its merit.

Often, indeed, these imperfections are useful to us, by keeping us humble and preserving us from the danger of losing all through a vain complacency. Remember that great word of Fénelon : ' It is a great grace from God to act not courageously on the grand scale, but in a small and humble manner, for thus we become patient, small and humble all at once.'

As to the grave trouble of which you speak, hang it on your cross like an extra weight with which Divine Providence permits you to burden yourself, and say two *fiats* instead of one. After this, remain in peace in the higher part of your soul whatever the storms and tempests devastating your lower nature. It is as if you were at the bottom of some great mountain where torrents of rain and hail are pouring, while on the summit, the weather is beautiful. Remain on those salutary heights so as to be protected from lightning and other disagreeable accidents.

I think that you look too much on the creaturely side of events ; as for me, thanks to God, I wish to see nothing but Him in all that happens. I rise from everything to Him, so as to depend on Him only. Since it is He who places us in the power of those who crucify us, it is on Him only that we really depend. It is to Him alone, I know, that all the actions of men are due, I will receive all from His hand, have no obligation but to Him, address my thanksgivings to Him alone. If you would remember how little men contribute to events, you would see that Divine Providence itself arranges everything in a singular way in favour of its

servants and disposes everything for the best. God brings into being circumstances and necessities as He pleases. May He be blessed for all, in all and for ever !

I know that my behaviour is thought too simple ; but what does it matter ! I find this holy simplicity so abhorred by the world, so charming that I shall not even dream of correcting myself in the matter. To every one his path : I respect the wise and prudent, but am content myself to be one of those poor simple little ones of whom Jesus Christ and following after Him S. Francis de Sales speak. Let us be perfectly persuaded that God arranges everything for the best. Our fears, our activity and our tendency to worry often make us imagine trials where there are none. Let us follow the leadings of Divine Providence one step at a time ; as soon as we see what is asked of us, we also will desire and nothing further. God knows far better than we, poor blind creatures that we are, what is good for us. Our pains and troubles often come from the granting of our wishes. Let us leave everything to God, and all will go well. Let us abandon everything to Him in general ; that is the only way to provide surely and infallibly for our true interests ; I say : our *true* interests, for we have also false interests leading to our ruin.

My self-abandonment to Divine Providence, as I conceive and recommend it, is not so heroic or so difficult as you think. It is the centre of the solid peace of the soul and there only is found unchangeable repose which the most trying events cannot ruffle. Ah ! how well God pays us for the wretched little sacrifices we make for Him ! Moreover, by the mere habit of making them, one finds that one has no more to make, for one ceases to desire anything at all of one's own accord, one desires everything that is in the Will of the Sovereign Master and according to His Divine Permission. A blessed condition for this life and the next !

LETTER XI

TO THE SISTERS OF THE VISITATION AT NANCY (1732)

The Mutual Wishes of Souls who Seek nothing but God.

MY very dear Sisters,—Your wishes for me are all heavenly. It is evident indeed that they are dictated by your hearts, but what hearts! Hearts wholly spiritual and interior which esteem only Divine things and are moved only by the interests of Eternity.

Profiting by your example I form thousands of wishes for you, all of them of the same kind, and in particular that it may please God to preserve and increase more and more in you : firstly, that love of exterior solitude and silence which forms the spirit of recollection so necessary for the interior life ; secondly, that spirit of peace and charity, of unity, detachment and interior abnegation which preserves in the depths of the heart that sweet tranquillity which is the true happiness of our present life and the basis of our interior conversation ; thirdly, a taste for the presence of God and the prayer of the heart, the two main springs of the interior life ; fourthly, that sincere wish to belong to God without reserve which ceaselessly renews a spirit of fervour ; fifthly, that entire and perfect union of our will with the Will of God which goes so far as to make us find contentment in our spiritual poverty because God wishes it ; in this way we sacrifice the most intimate and delicate part of our self-love. This is an indispensable condition for peace of mind in the case of certain souls who, indifferent to the rest, still suffer too much from their own interior miseries ; here is the means of supplying all that is lacking to us, the great remedy for all our miseries, the treasure of our poverty ; for we cannot be richer than to keep always in our hearts the Will of God as the norm of our own

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in spite of our dearest and most desirable interests. Since we should only desire virtues in so far as they please God, for it is only in so far as they please God that they are virtues, is it not to wish them all to you to wish you this conformity to the Divine Pleasure, so generous, universal and perfect as to cover everything except the offence of God? I congratulate you with all my heart on your delight in celebrating the centenary of the foundation of your house, but still more that it was founded on the poverty of our Lord in His Crib and confidence in Divine Providence.

The virtues of your first holy sisters have built on this rich foundation and with this help have raised the walls of the House; your virtues will preserve and perfect it to the honour and glory of the Divine Master, its only true proprietor.

BOOK II
EXERCISE OF THE VIRTUE OF
SELF-ABANDONMENT

LETTER I

TO SISTER MARY-ANTOINETTE DE MAHUET (1731)

Principles and Practices of Self-abandonment.

MY dear Sister,—The Lord has given me for you something better than you asked for, and which did not occur to you : some general principles of conduct for your whole life and the most simple method of putting them into practice.

1st Principle. The mainspring of the whole spiritual life is good will, that is a sincere desire to be God's, fully and without reserve : you cannot, therefore, renew this holy desire too frequently to strengthen it, and make it constant and efficacious in you.

2nd Principle. This firm desire to belong to God should bring to birth in us a resolution to think of nothing but Him, which may be practised in two ways : firstly, we must try and accustom ourselves not to entertain voluntarily and deliberately thoughts which do not concern God, either directly or indirectly, such as general or particular duties of our state. The best way to drive off useless thoughts is not to combat them openly and still less to allow oneself to be troubled and disquieted by them, but just to let them drop, like a stone into the sea ; little by little the

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habit of letting them drop makes this salutary practice quite easy.

The second way of thinking of nothing but God consists in a sort of general forgetfulness of everything at which one arrives through the habit of letting drop our useless thoughts, so that, for some time, one may pass whole days without thinking, as it seems, of anything at all, as if one had become stupid. Often indeed God places certain souls in this state, which is called emptiness of the spirit or of the intelligence ; it is also called : being in Nothingness (*être dans le rien*). This annihilation of our own spirit disposes wonderfully to receive that of Jesus Christ. This mystical death of the operations of our own activity renders our soul apt for the reception of Divine operations.

This great emptiness of spirit sometimes produces another emptiness which is more painful, emptiness of the will, so that one seems to have no feeling at all for the things of the world or even for God, being equally insensible to everything. Often indeed it is God who produces this second emptiness in certain souls, so that one should not try to get out of this state which disposes us for the reception of the most precious workings of God in us. It is a second mystical death which must precede our happy resurrection to an entirely new life. We must then esteem and cherish this double void, this double self-annihilation so hard to self-love and the spirit of pride and accustom ourselves to this state in an interior spirit of holy joy.

3rd Principle. We must limit our attention to the complete fulfilment of all that is imposed by the Holy Will of God, abandoning everything else to Him, i.e. the care of all temporal and even of our spiritual interests such as our advancement in virtue. This is how this double self-abandonment should be practised.

As for the first point, whenever we feel in our hearts a desire, a fear, or views or ideas concerning our

interests or those of our relations and friends, we should say to God : Lord I offer all that to Thee, I abandon to Thee all these wretched anxieties. May all that pleases Thee, all that Thou wishest, happen. Nevertheless, since occasions do arise on which reason demands that we should think and act either for ourselves or for others, for we must never tempt Providence, this is what we should say in such circumstances : ‘ Lord, if it is expedient that I should act in such or such a way in such or such a situation, I beseech Thee to give me the thought of doing so when the time comes ; in this case I shall do nothing but what Thou deignest to inspire me to do, and I accept in advance the good or bad success of my action.’ Having made this interior act, we must let drop like a stone, all our desires, fears, etc., without bothering ourselves about them, in the persuasion that God will give us at the right time and place, the thought and inspiration to act according to His Holy Will and the impression thereof which He gives us.

As regards the practice of the second kind of self-abandonment, that is, the abandonment of our own advance in perfection, it is the most delicate point [of the process], the point least well practised by spiritual persons, the point at which most faults are committed which trouble and delay us on the road to God. Here is a very simple way of practising it which Jesus Christ Himself communicated to S. Theresa in one of His appearances to her : ‘ My daughter,’ said He, ‘ think of nothing but pleasing Me, loving Me and doing My will and I will take care of all that concerns you either for body or soul.’ In order thoroughly to understand this maxim, we should look on ourself as a man entering the service of a king, a Solomon for example, the greatest, best and wisest of all kings. If such a man had any nobility of sentiment or delicacy of heart, or for the matter of that, any good sense and

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real ability, this is what he would say to his master : ' My Lord, I know you to be a generous and magnificent Prince, as powerful as you are good ; I therefore give myself to you without reserve ; I wish to serve you without knowing what I am to gain by it, every day or every year or even at the end of my career. I promise to think of nothing but your interests, and, as for my own, I abandon them entirely to your discretion or rather to your goodness and liberality.' Often apply your thought to this very imperfect and humble analogy to the great Master whom we serve, and be fully convinced that just as the great king could not bear to see himself surpassed in liberality by one of his servants, our all-powerful and infinitely good God will never allow Himself to be so surpassed by His miserable creatures.

Here is a method of practising this principle and the consequence to draw from the conviction of its truth.

1. I am visited by impetuous desires of acquiring the gift of prayer, humility, gentleness, the love of God : I reply : Let us not think so much about our own interests : my duty is to occupy myself simply and quietly with God, to accomplish His Will in all that He asks of me at the moment. That is my task ; everything else I leave in the care of God, my advancement in His business, as mine is to occupy myself ceaselessly with Him and execute His orders.

2. It occurs to me that I am still so imperfect, so full of defects and miseries, of infidelities and weaknesses ; how long will it be before I am delivered from these things ? I reply at once : By the grace of God I do not love my faults, I am resolved to combat them ; but I shall only be delivered from them when it may please God to deliver me. That is His affair, mine is to hate these faults and to fight them with patience, penitence and humility until it pleases God to give me the victory over them.

3. The thought occurs to me : but I am so blind that I do not even know my faults, yet my duty is to lament them before God and confess them ; I at once reply : I wish to know my faults, I no longer live in voluntary dissipation of mind, I spend a certain time quietly examining my conscience. This is what God demands of me ; He will give me more light and knowledge when He thinks it well to do so ; that is His affair ; I have placed all my spiritual progress in His hands ; it is, therefore, enough for the present, for me to accuse myself of a few daily faults, as God gives me to know them, adding to them a sin of my past life.

4. Again, it will occur to me : Have I ever in my life made a good confession ? Has God pardoned me ? Am I in a good or a bad state ? What progress have I made in prayer and in the ways of God ? I at once reply : God wishes to conceal all that from me, so that I may blindly abandon myself to His mercies ; I submit, and adore His judgements, I do not wish to know what He does not wish to show me and I wish to proceed in the midst of whatever darkness He may plunge me into. It is His business to know the state of my progress, mine to occupy myself with Him alone, to serve Him and love Him as little faultily as I can ; He will take care of all the rest ; I leave it to Him.

5. But I have asked Him so long for certain graces, I make use for that purpose of the intercession of the most powerful Protectors, the Holy Virgin, S. Joseph, the holy Apostles, the whole Court of Heaven ; nothing moves Him. He is the Master, may all that He wills be accomplished in me, I only wish for grace, or merits, or perfection in the degree in which He is pleased to give them to me, His Will alone suffices me, it is the constant rule of my desires for ever.

LETTER II

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL (1731)

A General Plan of the Spiritual Combat.

‘God has left man to his own judgement, life or death, good or evil, are in front of him ; as he chooses, so shall it be done unto him.’ In these words Scripture gives us to understand that man is free and that his salvation depends on the good use he makes of his liberty. It is true that since the Fall, his liberty for good is greatly weakened and strengthened for evil. Nevertheless, with the help of grace which never fails him, it is always in his power to fortify his naturally weak liberty for good and to diminish his unfortunate and too strong liberty for evil.

There are three sorts of goods towards which our enfeebled liberty moves with great pain and difficulty.

1. The good essential to our salvation, the omission of which constitutes a mortal sin.
2. The good commanded by a less grave precept, the omission of which would be a venial fault.
3. The perfect good the neglect of which involves the diminution of our merits.

All the inclinations which weaken in us the resolution of accomplishing our essential obligations, hatred, desire of vengeance, anger, irregular attachments, avarice, envy, etc., are so many principles of spiritual ruin. The same must be said, due proportion being observed, of inclinations which lead us to venial sin and voluntary imperfection, for, as the Holy Spirit says, the man who despises little faults will fall by degrees into grave ones ; and cowardice on a single point of perfection will prevent us ever attaining it.

But it is also true that all the victories that strengthen

our will towards good, are principles of predestination and salvation.

Our constant care should, then, be ceaselessly to fortify our feeble liberty for good, and to conquer our inclination to evil. We have three means for assuring and hastening the success of this enterprise :

The first is to make great sacrifices for God, generously surmounting our repugnances in what costs us most.

The second is to make all the little daily sacrifices, the occasions of which are frequent and continuous with a constant generous and universal fidelity.

The third and great means is prayer ; but a humble simple prayer formed in us by the operation of the Holy Spirit ; for He it is who teaches us to pray, as S. Paul said, who groans and prays in us with cries and ineffable groanings. The Publican is an excellent model : he prayed in silence and in a state of humble compunction. The greatest sinners and the most imperfect souls can pray in this way and thus they will raise themselves by degrees, if they are faithful, from the depth of their misery to the highest sanctity.

LETTER III

TO MADAME DE LESEN (1731)

The First Work of God in the Soul.

I AM not at all surprised at the first effect of meditating on the great truths ; I congratulate you and give thanks to the Lord. You were in need of these lively feelings, and I believe that they will last so as to produce in you that spirit of compunction and humiliation which should be the foundation of your spiritual edifice and the commencement of your spiritual childhood. The trouble accompanying these feelings

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was superfluous, but unless I am mistaken, it was involuntary and perhaps necessary and an effect of Divine Justice. These same feelings, when they return, will in future be gentler and more peaceful.

I had already understood, independently of your letter, that God had bestowed great graces on you ; I had already divined that you had not corresponded sufficiently with them and I understand this more clearly than ever and resume what I see as follows :

1. That your soul is like a great hall, unfurnished or insufficiently furnished.

2. That it will never be fit for the reception of our Sovereign Lord unless He Himself furnishes it and arranges in it the precious furniture suitable for such a guest.

3. That the only way in which He will do this and enrich your soul with His gifts will be during the silence and peace of prayer.

Your duty is, therefore, to keep the hall well swept and clean with the help of grace, and, then, give place to Him who will make it His own business to supply the beautiful furniture with which it is to be enriched, and who wishes to arrange it according to His own taste.

Do not go and upset yourself for nothing in a matter in which you would spoil everything by interference. Let Him do as He likes, consider yourself as a picture which a great master is proposing to paint ; but take courage, for I foresee that it will take some time to grind and powder the colours, and then to place them in position, combine them and shade them. All you have to do is to keep the canvas ready, well-cleaned and fastened on its two motionless pivots, the one self-humiliation pushed to the point of self-annihilation, the other a complete self-abandonment pushed to the point of losing your will altogether in the Will of God.

LETTER IV

TO SISTER MARIE-HENRIETTE DE BOUSMARD
FROM ALBI, 1733

The Exercise of Self-abandonment in General.

YOU are quite right to say what you do, my dear daughter, indeed the great maxim of the Blessed Mother de Chantal was : ‘ Not so many opinions, so much science and writing, but sound practice. As regards souls which have acquired the habit of avoiding deliberate faults and faithfully fulfilling the duties of their state of life, all practical perfection may be reduced to this one principle : the exercise of a continual resignation to all the expressions of the will of God, a complete self-abandonment to all the exterior or interior disposition of His Providence, whether in the present or in the future ; one single *fiat*, or in S. Francis de Sales’ words : Yes, Heavenly Father, I accept everything ; yes, and always yes.’ This phrase said and repeated, without its being necessary that it should be pronounced interiorly, represents in a few words the great and short road of the highest perfection because it tells of a continual union with the holy and adorable Will of God.

There is no mystery about the way to reach that point ; only two things are necessary : firstly, the profound conviction that nothing happens in this world, in our souls or outside them, without the design or permission of God ; now, we ought to submit ourselves no less to what God permits than to what He directly wills ; secondly, the firm belief that through the All-powerful and Paternal Providence of God, all that He wills or permits invariably turns to the advantage of those who practise this submission to His orders. Supported by this double assurance, let us remain firm

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and unshakable in our adhesion to all that it may please God to ordain with regard to us, let us acquiesce in advance, in a spirit of humility, love and sacrifice in all imaginable dispositions of His Providence, let us protest that we wish to be content with whatever satisfies Him. We shall not always be able, no doubt, to feel this contentment in the lower (the sensitive part of our soul), but we shall at least preserve it on the heights of our spirit, on the fine point of our will, as S. Francis de Sales says, and in those circumstances it will be even more meritorious.

LETTER V

On the Means of Acquiring Self-abandonment

You say truly, my dear Sister, and it is indeed the Spirit of God who inspired you to make the remark, that one of the greatest obstacles to the reign of the Divine Spirit in our hearts, is our miserable nature which shrinks before the captivity and death, in exchange for which the holy virtue of self-abandonment gives us liberty and the life of God.

But this very Spirit who has made you perceive so clearly what the evil is, will help you to apply the remedy. Here, in a few words, is what you ought to do in order to attain promptly to pure love and perfect self-abandonment. You must first of all, ardently desire and energetically will it whatever the price you may have to pay. Secondly, you must firmly believe and repeat it to God, that is absolutely impossible for you to acquire by your own strength such perfect dispositions, but, also, that grace makes everything easy, that you hope to receive this grace from His mercy, and you must beg it of Him in and through Jesus Christ; thirdly you must gently and quietly humble yourself, whenever you have withdrawn your-

self from the holy bondage of His Will, without discouragement, but on the contrary protesting to God that you will await with confidence the moment at which it will please Him to give you that decisive grace that will make you wholly die to yourself and live in Him by a new life wholly hidden with Jesus Christ our Lord ; fourthly, if you are docile to the inspirations of God's Spirit, you will take care not to make your advancement on the vivacity and sensible sweetness of your interior impressions. The Divine Spirit will, on the contrary, make you esteem rather His almost imperceptible operations, for the more delicate and profound they are, the more the Divine and so much the more removed from the impressions of the senses. One belongs more totally to God, one tends to Him and to union with Him more completely if it is with all one's powers and the whole extent of one's being, without particularising any special point [such as would cause a distinct feeling of spiritual sweetness]. One should go to Him as every being goes to its centre.

Be sure, however, that you have an enormous journey to travel. There are centuries of work and growth in front of you, but on this point as on all others you should say : My God, Thy holy and lovable intentions shall always be the measure of my desires, even the holiest, the justest, the most apparently perfect. I wish for neither graces nor holiness except at the time determined by and in the precise measure fixed by Thy most Holy Will, no less, no more. Even if all the saints and blessed spirits were to prostrate themselves before Thy throne to beseech from Thee one single degree of grace or glory beyond what Thou hast destined for me, I would sacrifice it, because I prefer to confine myself precisely and simply to what Thou hast been pleased to ordain for me.

I adjure you, and it is my last piece of advice, to keep before you as a rule in your actions, no other

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motive than a very pure love of God and His greater glory. Do not exclude, however, motives of hope and fear, and when inspired to do so by the Spirit within you, do not hesitate to abandon yourself to them, but pure love should dominate all other feelings in your heart. You should desire most ardently your salvation and perfection, but in this very desire you should look rather at the glory of God than at your own happiness. Nothing is more adapted than this sentiment habitually entertained in your heart to cause you to make rapid progress in virtue and amass great merits. The smallest actions animated by pure love are worth more than the greatest performed from other good motives. But do not forget that your progress will be more assured if pure love urges you to renounce yourself in the smallest things. If it did not produce this effect it would not be a true love.

Remain carefully on your guard against the snares which the enemy will lay for you in order to make you abandon this blessed disposition. Seek, and expect, nothing from creatures but forgetfulness and contempt and may the joy of resembling your Divine Model Jesus Christ make this contempt dearer to you than all the glories of the world. Do not let slip any occasion, however trifling, of perfecting this divine resemblance and while faithfully profiting by these light trials, humble yourself because you are not judged worthy to endure something more serious.

LETTER VI

TO SISTER MARIE THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

On Direction in General.

My dear Sister,—I. Do not overload yourself with vocal prayers beyond those of obligation and apply

yourself rather to interior perfection and mental prayers.

2. It is very useful to anticipate possible faults by penances, but it is more fitting to be faithful in expiating them when they have been committed than in multiplying penances beforehand without real necessity.

3. Moderate and supernaturalise your tenderness for persons who are dear to you.

4. Take profit, in order to excite yourself to fervour, from the good examples of others and from conversations with Spirituals, but without showing any disdain for others or abandoning yourself to any feeling of disgust towards them.

5. Do not distress yourself so much at being so frequently at war with your wretched nature ; heaven is worth all these battles. Perhaps they will shortly come to an end and you will achieve a complete victory. After all they will pass, and rest will be eternal. Be at peace and let your humility always be mingled with confidence.

6. You should profit by the infirmities of the body to fortify your soul by a spirit of self-abandonment to the will of God and of union with Jesus Christ.

7. Take pains to die to yourself, to renounce nature, to smother, on all occasions, human vivacity and sensibility. This is the most necessary kind of mortification ; it does no harm to the health and it has more power than corporal mortification to increase merit and realise the designs of God, who wishes us to belong solely to Him without reserve.

8. Try to profit with peaceful fidelity by all the various states through which our Lord may wish you to pass for His glory and your own perfection. Turn all that happens in the direction of Divine Love and a simple self-abandonment to the paternal guidance of God's adorable Providence.

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9. Our zeal for our own advancement and for that of those committed to our charge should be ardent and active, but never restless, troubled and without confidence.

10. Endeavour to become more and more interior, aspiring to the full perfection of your holy state by your perfect regularity. Humble yourself ceaselessly before God that He may make you victorious over yourself. You need very great help so that your sensibility and too human and natural delicacy of feeling may be completely extinguished in your heart before death, for these defects are born of your character and temperament. It is true that this fact is some excuse for your faults and excites the compassion of God for His poor spouse ; nevertheless, you must always go on fighting so that if your miserable pride and self-love are not completely destroyed before your last hour comes, death should at least find you fighting them in the endeavour to destroy them. Your chief arms in this combat should be Divine Love, an infinite gratitude for the graces of God with complete confidence and profound mistrust of yourself—all this peacefully and without discouragement. You will find ever-increasing strength in Holy Communion, in prayer, patience, obedience, mortification, and principally in interior self-renunciation.

11. Illnesses and infirmities accepted in complete submission to the Will of God with humble thanksgiving and in union with Jesus Christ are very useful to expiate the past and to weaken the ' old man ' in us ; they help us to die spiritually to everything before our natural death, which by finishing off our transitory troubles will make us enter (we must hope) into the enjoyment of eternal goods. When God Himself sends us this sort of penance, being at the time unable to mortify oneself externally, we must make up by interior mortification, applying ourselves more and

more to the destruction of self-love and the pride, sensitiveness and tendency to criticise which are its evil fruits. Try, in fine, to become humble and simple like a little child, from love and so as to imitate our Lord in a spirit of peace and recollection. If God finds this humility in us, He will Himself cause His work in us to advance. Let us persevere and be faithful to Grace for the greater glory of God and for His pure love. Everything depends on truly loving, in heart and deed, the God of goodness.

12. As this earthly pilgrimage advances, let us force ourselves to grow in solid fervour according to the perfection of our holy state and the particular designs of God on our souls. When He gives us special tastes in devotion, special sensibilities, let us profit by them to attach ourselves more firmly to Him beyond all His gifts. But in times of dryness, let us always keep the same gait, humbly recalling our indigence, and also estimating that perhaps God wishes to prove the solidity of our love for Him by these salutary trials.

13. Let us be truly humble and occupied in the correction of our faults, and we shall not think much about those of other people. Let us see Jesus Christ in all our neighbours, and we shall not find it hard to excuse them, to endure and cherish them. His example engages us to this : what patience He had with his coarse, ignorant disciples ! Let us turn our vivacity on to the task of glorifying God in ourselves and in those whose confidence He gives us. Let us live hidden in Jesus Christ, dead to all creatures and to ourselves ; unless we do so, Jesus Christ will not deign to live in us in the sense of absorbing all our human life into His own, as He claims to do. For the rest, let us charitably endure ourselves as it is our duty to endure others, humbling and punishing ourselves as promptly as possible for our faults. And when we pray for ourselves, let us also pray for our brother sinners.

LETTER VII

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL (1731)

The Same Subject.

My dear Sister and Daughter in our Lord, the peace of Jesus Christ be ever with you.

1. I thank God for all the good sentiments with which He continues to inspire you. As long as you preserve your good intention of belonging to God without reserve in complete and total self-abandonment to His good pleasure, fear neither dryness, obscurity, temptation nor desertion : all will turn to your greater spiritual advancement.

2. Your fear of deception as to the peace which you enjoy in the midst of your interior pains is very vain. From what you unconsciously tell me on the subject, I understand that this peace is very real ; it is the basis of everything and a great grace that you must try to preserve at any cost. The devil will direct all his attacks and tricks towards making you lose it or at least weaken or disturb it ; but do you remain firm in faith and confidence in your self-abandonment. Take care not to engage yourself by vow to anything. . . .

3. A complete separation from creatures in your mind and heart is a great favour which leads infallibly to pure love and Divine Union.

4. The secret presentiment of death being near may come from God or the devil. If this presentiment merely detaches you more effectively from everything without troubling you or leading you to discouragement and mistrust, it comes from God and you should preserve it : if not, reject it ; for everything that comes from God has good effects, and it is solely by their effects that spirits can be discerned.

All the repugnances of which you tell me are intended to detach you absolutely from all human support so that you should rest on God only ; your interior exercises on that point are very good. But I am surprised that you have not yet learned that when God permits this obscurity every good sentiment disappears like the sun at night. All you have to do is to remain firm and in repose, awaiting the return of the sun and the breaking of day, when everything will be as visible as before.

I permit you to write to me four times a year, and whenever, after having implored the assistance of God, you judge it to be necessary. And if I agree with you I will be very exact in employment.

LETTER VIII

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-THÉRÈSE DE ROSEN (1731)

*The Prayer of Souls called to a Life of Self-abandonment.
Some wise Advice on Prayers.*

1. APPLY yourself to prayer with a simple gaze at your subject, i.e. apprehending the object by faith without using any reasoning.

2. I advise you to dwell as long as you can on what humiliates and annihilates you ; the more you feel yourself penetrated by your misery and reduced to nothing by it when you come out of prayer, the more will you be disposed to receive God's gifts.

3. You should pay no attention to distractions, but when you become aware of them, recall very gently your mind and above all your heart to faith in the presence of God and to the zest of your holy repose in His presence. If you cannot succeed in doing this, you have only to resign yourself. This cross of distractions is often more meritorious than prayer itself,

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for it unites our will with God's Will, in which lies all our good.

4. The feelings with which one leaves prayer are the proof of its efficacy. A solid faith is worth incomparably more than a sensible faith. Guided by the former the soul makes more rapid progress, and walks more surely.

5. Assist at Holy Mass with great recollection, and abandon yourself to a boundless confidence in the Divine Goodness, resting on the merits of Jesus Christ as Victim.

The simpler and the clearer your feelings are of all thought and reasoning, the better they will be.

6. The path of dryness and aridity is far preferable to the path of consolation, though much more painful. This is the only path on which you can acquire the solidity of virtue ; on the other the most apparently perfect dispositions are liable to be betrayed by the slightest suggestion of aridity or temptation. And it is God's custom to place souls in this state of trial after a certain period of sweetness and consolation.

7. When it pleases the Divine Goodness to make a soul walk by the path of pure love, fear does not make the slightest impression on her. Just as fear brings love, so love drives away fear, says S. Augustine, commenting on S. John. The director of a soul in this state should second this design of God and lead her only by love and confidence. Should some circumstance present itself in which fear is necessary in order to avoid evil, God will take care to give her the necessary inspiration. Let her continue always to love without bothering about anything else, and above all let her avoid disquiet and trouble. This temptation is more to be feared than any other for souls who walk in this way. They should always be counselled to keep their interior peace at all costs, and to reject as a messenger from Hell anything that tends to trouble or disturb it.

For the rest, the most perfect prayer is the simplest, and the simplest is the prayer into which less of our own enters, fewer ideas, fewer imaginations, fewer reasonings, the prayer that is formed of a single sentiment long drawn out.

The more the sentiments inspired by Grace dwell in the soul, the more she will be penetrated by them and the easier it will be for her to act under their influence. The sentiment of Divine Love which super-eminently contains all the others should form her most habitual food. When that sentiment dominates all her affections, she will experience an ardour and a sort of enchantment which will make her run in the road of sanctity.

LETTER IX

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-THÉRÈSE DE ROSEN (1731)

The Same Subject : the Danger of Illusion in the Prayer of Recollection.

My dear Sister,—Keep ever close to the great interior Director who alone can give light and strength in all our needs. Pay no heed to books when He is speaking in your soul. Attach yourself principally to holy repose in His Divine Presence and never leave it. Do not break this sacred silence save when God sends you an *attrait* for holy and profitable conversation. When it is over, return to your fortress and sanctuary which is no other than recollection and interior silence, in the presence and sight of the Beloved. In Him alone, in this simple and sweet repose in God, you will find all light, courage, force, sweetness, patience, humility, resignation, peace and repose of heart.

I wish you all of this in the highest perfection.

Do not be afraid of darkness and aridity in prayer. When one can unite oneself to God and His holy will,

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accepting all that He wishes, one is in comfort, one has everything. That is the most perfect prayer and the purest love, according to S. Theresa.

You have done wisely to ask the Reverend Father . . . for some explanations on the subject to which you refer. I have such respect for his views that I should think myself in error if I held opinions opposed to his. I have always thought, as he does, that no one can or ought to push themselves forward into the prayer of recollection without being called to it ; and that the soul cannot merit this grace by her good works, or attain to it by all her efforts. I have merely added, with Father Surin and the authors who treat of it, that one can indirectly and from a distance dispose oneself to receive this great gift from Heaven, by removing the obstacles to its reception by a great purity of heart, of spirit, of intention, which alone carries the soul a great distance ; that, after that, one can and should dispose oneself immediately for its reception by short and frequent pauses as keeping oneself on the watch (*aux écoutes*) for its approach and making way for the interior spirit.

When you have read this to the Reverend Father, or sent him this letter if you cannot see him immediately, I beg you to tell him that I think he is obliged in conscience to disabuse, as on my part, people whom he judges to be deceived, and that in my ignorance of where the blow should fall, I discharge this duty on to his shoulders.

But in order to proceed with all the necessary discretion and prudence, I beg him before taking action to reflect on two points : (1) He should assure himself of the existence of the abuse by personal knowledge of the interiors of the people in question, for a mere report by a third person does not throw much light on so secret and interior a condition. It may be said that we know these people to be very imperfect, we see them commit

many faults which scandalise us. I reply to that, and my reply comprises the second reflection I would beg him to make, the experience of direction teaches us that God frequently hides great interior virtues known to Him alone under very imperfect exteriors. Consequently, I do not think that one can make a definite judgement that such persons are deceived with regard to this sort of prayer, the more so that it frequently happens that their imperfections and faults are considerably maximised and exaggerated by the want of charity of others, and sometimes from even worse motives. I remember here what S. Theresa said, speaking of herself, that in her own case this sort of prayer was for long considered suspicious by the enlightened people whom she consulted, and liable to be a diabolical illusion, because they could not reconcile in their minds such a gift of prayer with her conduct at that time, i.e. her eagerness to visit the Parlour, to know people, to see and be seen, and keep up worldly connections and relations, thus wasting much time and neglecting her interior, for such according to her own account was the way she was living at that time. 'And this,' she adds, 'was the reason why all who knew me thought that my prayer was nothing but illusion. But afterwards, I found certain directors who had learned by experience (they said) that God sometimes gives this prayer : (1) to great sinners from the first moment of their conversion so that they might be more promptly and completely converted ; (2) to very imperfect people so as to correct the better and more quickly their defects. But they add, and I think very soundly and justly, that the preservation of this gift of prayer compatibly with considerable defects or imperfections, habitual or constant and known to be such, unless the soul makes efforts to correct herself, is very difficult and of infinitely rare occurrence.'

LETTER X

The Same Subject.

THIS is what I should reply with regard to the person in question : her prayer of recollection seems to me to proceed rather from her head than her heart. This is the inverse of what ought to be, for in order that this kind of prayer should bear fruit, it is necessary that the heart should be more applied to it than the intelligence. It is, in fact, a prayer wholly of love : the heart reposing sweetly in God, loves Him without distinguishing clearly the object of its love, or how this love is produced in it. The reality of the prayer is clearly shown by a certain ardour which is continually experienced in the heart, by a constant tendency towards the Divine Centre of our being which continues without any clear intellectual perception, and by the overpowering attraction to which the soul yields without possibility of distraction. From this comes the great facility of this kind of prayer, which is a sweet repose for the heart and which continues without effort almost as long as one wishes.¹

¹ But note the wise advice of Baron von Hügel : ‘ *The Ceaseless Interdependence of Soul and Body*. The more any state of soul—any *psychosis*—is mental, still more is spiritual, the less, as a rule, is the neural accompaniment, the neural limitation, and the neural cost of this state perceived at the time by the experiencing soul. Yet such accompaniment, limitation and cost are certainly present, even in the most genuine and highest of man’s spiritual actions or states ; indeed the neural cost appears, roughly, to rise in proportion as the action, at the time, fails to bring with it any sense of cost at all. Fénelon is admirably awake to this important fact, when he warns Madame de Montberon not to indulge, beyond a certain limited time, in the prayer of quiet—a prayer which greatly helped and refreshed her ; and this because of the neural cost of such effortless-seeming prayer.’ *The Life of Prayer*, pp. 33, 34, by Baron Friedrich von Hügel (Dent.).—Translator’s Note.

If, therefore, the person of whom you speak feels in the course of her prayer a very great application of mind, it is a sign that her recollection is not yet what it should be. What is the remedy? This, I think :

1. When one feels oneself seized by this great recollection, one should turn one's interior gaze, i.e. one's reflection and action on the heart, so as, as it were, to taste and feel this sweet repose (this sweetness is a charm which turns all the soul's attention on to her heart and at the moment causes one to *feel* that one loves): while the mind without effort and almost without any voluntary application is enchanted by the sentiment on which the heart is feeding.

2. If, in spite of this, this excessive application of mind should continue you should forbid the subject to give more than two hours in all to her prayer daily, and you should instruct her not deliberately to seek recollection during her studies and at other times, but only to let herself go to it when God draws her to it, always remembering to turn her interior attention on her heart, in order to enjoy at leisure the sweetness of interior calm and repose.

3. You should tell her always to give a short time to the examination of her prayer, its beginning, progress and completion. She should enquire (1) how her recollection began ; (2) whether it formed in her distinct sentiments and thoughts, or whether this gentle sleep was so deep that she remembers nothing about it (which is the best) ; (3) in what state she is on emerging from this condition ; perhaps in a state of great recollection with a great desire to do well, to attach herself to God only for His good pleasure.

Let us thoroughly persuade ourselves that God can be found everywhere without effort, because He is always present to those who seek Him with their whole heart, though He may not always cause His Divine Presence to be felt. For instance, when you happen to be

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entirely disoccupied with created things so that you seem to be thinking of nothing and desiring nothing, you should know that then your soul is unconsciously occupied with God and in God. Here is the reason of this. God being that hidden and invisible object towards which all the desires of a pure heart unconsciously tend, the moment that these desires are not turned upon creatures, they remain in their natural centre which is God, and by being fixed there, they grow little by little so as sometimes to make their presence felt very keenly, producing as it were, bright flames of love. Thus, the true presence of God is, to speak exactly, nothing but a sort of forgetfulness of creatures with a secret desire of finding God. It is in this that consists interior and exterior Divine Silence, so precious, so desirable and so profitable ; the true earthly paradise, where souls who love God enjoy already an advance of heavenly joy.

LETTER XI

TO MÈRE LOUISE FRANÇOISE DE ROSEN (1735)

The Exercise of Self-abandonment in Different States of the Soul.

My dear Sister,—The Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ ! If we are attentive and docile to the interior spirit, we shall be so surely guarded that we shall rarely make a false step. I approve, however, the wise precaution of sometimes explaining one's state to the ministers of Jesus Christ, through a holy distrust of oneself. God has so blessed such humility in you that I feel almost inclined to reply to you in one word : All is well, continue. Nevertheless, for your consolation I shall add what God shall inspire me to add as I reread your letter.

‘I do not care,’ you say, ‘to talk or write or read much.’ What a beautiful confession! It alone indicates a mind whose interior is ordinarily well occupied; a great Spiritual has said of such persons that they have immense occupations without labour. Another calls this happy disposition, holy leisure or holy disoccupation, for it seems that doing nothing means doing all things, and saying nothing, saying everything.

1. I find nothing but good in the three dispositions of soul which you experience alternatively: firstly, your disposition of faith, secondly, the disposition of your tastes and sentiments, thirdly, your disposition in the midst of disturbances and troubles, but the degrees of their goodness are different. The first is the simplest and surest, and favours least self-love. The second is more agreeable and demands a great detachment from all private tastes and sentiments, even Divine, so as to attach yourself to God pure and alone, as Fénelon says. The third is painful and often very crucifying, but it is also the best, because all that mortifies the interior makes it purer and disposes it for a closer union with the God of all purity and holiness.

2. Thanks to his goodness, you behave very well in all these three dispositions of soul; you have only to go on as you are doing, but you explain yourself in a way that would distress those without experience of this state of prayer. You say that you do nothing, and yet you are always doing something or you would be in a state of pure idleness; but your soul acts so gently that you do not perceive your interior acts of consent and adherence to the impressions of the Holy Spirit. The stronger these impressions are, the less you should act; you should merely follow what is drawing you and allow yourself to be drawn on, as you rightly say.

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3. Your manner of behaving in times of storm and upset, enchants me. Submission, total self-abandonment without reserve, being content with lack of contentment when God wills it. In those conditions one advances more in one day than in a hundred filled with sweetness and consolations. O my God ! This is indeed the right and solid line to take. Teach it to every one and repeat it often to poor Sister N. Properly speaking, this is all she needs at present : the constant practice of this maxim would make a saint of her and soften all her interior sufferings ; a little more and with the practice of this point alone, you would see her shortly quite different, as if she had been made over again and transformed.

4. Your total, continual and universal self-abandonment to God through a sentiment of confidence and union with Jesus Christ, always doing the Will of His Father is the most Divine and surest method of success in everything ; try to communicate it to every one, particularly to the dear Sister of whom I have just spoken.

5. The grace and the light which make you fight and smother the feelings of nature on all the occasions of which you speak, deserve to be carefully preserved. Your attention and fidelity in corresponding with these graces, even on the most trifling occasions are able to increase them still more ; but do not wish ever to be delivered from your sensitiveness to your primary movements of soul ; they are useful for the preservation of interior humility which is the foundation and guardian of all virtues.

6. As for your habitual faults, you should know that from the moment that our imperfections sincerely displease us and that we are sincerely resolved to combat them without reserve, there is no affection towards them in our heart and consequently nothing that can oppose our union with God. What we have

to do then is first of all to work with all our strength at diminishing the number of these faults and imperfections, and when we fall into them by fragility, surprise or otherwise, to rise immediately with courage and to return to God with the same confidence as if nothing had happened, after having humiliated ourselves in His presence and begged His pardon, without any spite against ourselves, or trouble or disquiet. In such a case humility supplies for the lack of fidelity and often repairs our fault with advantage to ourselves. Finally, if there is some little reparation to be made to our neighbour, let us never fail in this duty, but take the opportunity offered to conquer generously our pride and human respect.

7. When you experience involuntary disorderly movements, give yourself time before grace extinguishes them to feel completely to what excesses pride and passion would carry you without its help. In this way, you will be able to acquire by personal experience the complete knowledge of that depth of perversity into which we should fall, if God did not keep us back. It is by this practical knowledge, these reiterated feelings, these frequent personal experiences that all the saints have acquired that profound humility of heart, that complete contempt and holy hatred of themselves of which we find so many proofs in the history of their lives and which were the most solid supports of their perfection.

8. As for the feeling of external trouble and temptation, all that you tell me shows me that the Holy Spirit has in this respect regulated so well your thoughts, your sentiments, your interior and exterior behaviour, that I have nothing to add. Evidently, if it is certain that the unsought signs of esteem and friendship which we receive are a cross to us instead of a matter of complacency, the distress and disgust that they cause us is an antidote to their poison. There can be nothing

but great merit in suffering patiently in conformity with the orders of God and the arrangements of Providence, and in accordance with the example of Jesus Christ, suspicious, false judgements, envy and jealousy without explaining matters or defending oneself further than is required for the edification of our neighbour. If when we see ourselves exposed to various criticisms and unjust prejudices, we persevere in our line of conduct without change, following the guidance of Providence step by step, we are truly living by faith, in a *tête-à-tête* with God only in the midst of the quarrels and confusion of creatures. In such a disposition of soul, external things cannot reach our interior life, and the peace which we enjoy can be troubled neither by their favours nor their contempt. This is what is called living the interior life, and a very interior life it is. Until this independence of soul has been acquired the most apparently brilliant virtues are in reality very fragile, superficial and liable to corruption by self-love, or to be upset by the slightest breath of inconstancy and contradiction.

9. Be well on your guard against all illusions, which however specious they may be incline you to follow your own ideas and prefer yourself before others. A self-sufficient and critical spirit seems to many but a trifle, but we cannot deny that such a spirit is greatly opposed to religious simplicity and that it prevents many souls from entering on the interior life. For, indeed, we cannot enter the path of that life unless the Holy Spirit who never gives himself save to the humble-minded and the simple, introduce us to it.

10. Your profound, delicate, simple and almost imperceptible method of resisting all sorts of temptations is a pure grace of God ; attempt no other. That simple return to God is worth infinitely more than all other kinds of acts. It cannot very well be explained, God alone teaches it and gives it to the soul in the

school of the Holy Spirit, which is carried on in the depths of the heart. The peaceful doubts that we experience after temptation are the fruit of chaste fear which should never be eliminated ; as for the restless sort of doubt which is born of self-love it should be expelled and despised.

Moreover, nothing in the world is easier to recognise than the abuses and illusions to which the prayer of faith and simple recollection is liable ; we have but to apply the infallible test of Jesus Christ : the tree is known by its fruits. All prayer, then, which produces the reformation of the heart and of conduct, the flight from vice, the practice of the evangelical virtues and the duties of one's state, is a good prayer. Contrariwise, any prayer which does not give these fruits or produces opposed fruits, is a bad tree and a bad prayer, even if accompanied by ravishments, ecstasies and miracles. Faith, charity and humility are the roads that lead to God ; whatever causes us to walk in those paths is profitable to us, whatever makes us stray from them is hurtful. There is the sure, infallible rule, and one that can be brought home to all, for the prevention and reformation of every abuse or illusion.

I cordially salute your dear sister ; tell her, please, from me that she is always to continue to allow herself to be led by the interior spirit and to remain, as she is, in complete self-abandonment in the hands of God, equally pleased with His gifts and His deprivations, and with the apparent nothingness in which He leaves her when He pleases. There lies all the perfection and the true progress of a faithful soul. Ah ! How pleased God is to speak unceasingly to His spouses of that holy self-abandonment which can alone unite them solidly to Him.

LETTER XII

TO SISTER CATHERINE-ANGELICA DE SERRE

Exercise of Self-abandonment through the Peace of the Soul.

MY very dear Sister,—The peace of Jesus Christ be always with us and within us, since God dwells and works freely only in peaceful hearts.

I rejoice in and I congratulate you on the peace which the Lord makes you find in an entire conformity to all the commands and arrangements of his amiable providence. This peace, as you know, is the basis of the interior life, and that for several reasons, firstly, because it is the health and strength of the soul, trouble being to the soul what fever is to the body, a principle of languor and weakness. Secondly, because agitation and trouble in our interior prevent us from hearing the gentle voice and delicate inspirations of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing is necessary in order to remain in this peace, which will, I trust, ever increase, except never to depart from the total self-abandonment and absolute resignation of which I have just spoken. You will arrive at this state of mind without difficulty if you never lose sight of the great and consoling truth that nothing happens in this world but by the order of God or at least by His Divine permission, and that all that He wills or permits turns infallibly to the advantage of submissive and resigned souls. Even that which most upsets our spiritual plans turns into something which is better for us. Remain firmly attached to this great principle and the most violent storms will be unable to disturb the *fond* of your soul, although they may agitate your sensibility which is as it were its surface.

When, in the course of prayer, you experience certain attractions, such as a sweet repose of soul and

heart in God, receive these gifts with humility and thanksgiving, but without becoming attached to them. If you loved these consolations for their own sake, you would oblige God to deprive you of them, for when he calls us to prayer, it is not in order to flatter our self-love and give us an occasion for self-complacency, but to dispose us to do His Holy Will and to teach us an ever increasing conformity to that Will in all things.

When distractions and dryness follow these consolations, you know how you should endure them : that is, in peace, submission and self-abandonment according to God's good pleasure in permitting them. You know also that the only harmful distractions are those of the will ; it follows that those which displease you do not impede the prayer of the heart and the desire. Never force yourself to fight obstinate distractions, it is a safer and better policy to let them drop, as one lets drop the various absurdities and extravagances that in spite of ourselves pass through our mind or imagination.

What has already happened will often happen again. What God may have refused you during prayer, He will give you when it is over, so as to make you realise that it is the pure effect of His Grace and not the fruit of your own labour and industry. Nothing is more useful for keeping us in a sense of our dependence on grace and of abjection in our own eyes ; this is the source of true humility of heart and mind.

During the course of the day, try to keep yourself united to God either by frequent aspirations and elevations towards Him, or by the simple gaze of pure faith, or, still better, by a certain repose of the *fond* of your soul and of all your being in God accompanied by a complete disengagement of all the exterior objects of this world. It belongs to God Himself to show you which of these three methods you should adopt to unite yourself with Him by the movement, the attraction

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and the facility which He will give you ; for this union with God depends on the various states of prayer to which grace raises souls. Each of these states has its particular *attrait* ; one must recognise one's own and follow it simply and faithfully ; without trouble, disquiet or excitement, always gently, sweetly and peacefully as S. Francis of Sales says.

LETTER XIII

TO SISTER CHARLOTTE-ELIZABETH BOURCIER DE
MONTHUREUX (1731)

The Same Subject.

WHAT you tell me about the peace and tranquillity of your interior has given me much pleasure. You should remember all your life that one of the principal causes of the small progress made by certain good souls, is that the devil continually fills their interior with disquiet, perplexities and troubles, which render them incapable of serious, gentle and constant application to the practice of virtue. The great principle of the interior life lies in peace of the heart, it must be preserved with such care that the moment it is in danger everything else should be abandoned for its re-establishment, just as when the house is on fire, one leaves everything in order to extinguish it. Read from time to time on this important subject, the treatise on the peace of the soul which is at the end of the little book called *The Spiritual Combat*, which the ancients called very rightly, 'The Path of Paradise,' to make us understand that this blessed peace of the soul is the high road to Heaven. And the reason of this is that peace and tranquillity of spirit alone give the soul great force to achieve all that God wills while trouble and disquiet turn the soul into a weak languishing invalid.

In that state, one feels neither zest nor *attrait* for virtue, but contrariwise, disgust and discouragement by which the devil never fails to profit. This is why he makes use of all his ruses to rob us of this peace on a thousand specious pretexts ; now on pretence of examination of conscience or of sorrow for our sins, now on the ground that we are abusing grace and that our total lack of advance is our own fault, in short that God is about to abandon us, and by means of a hundred other dodges against which few are able to defend themselves. This is why the masters of the spiritual life give this great principle for distinguishing the true inspirations of God from those which come from the devil, namely, that the former are always gentle and peaceful and lead us to confidence and humility while the latter are lively, unquiet and turbulent, leading to discouragement and suspicion, or even to presumption and the following of our own will. We must, therefore, firmly reject all that does not bear this mark of peace, submission, gentleness and confidence, the impressions as it were of God's seal ; this point is of great importance for the whole of our life.

You ask me for some principles for the fixation of our thoughts during the day ; to this I reply as follows :

1. That it is better to advance towards God and virtue by the sentiments of the heart than by the thoughts of the mind, and it is important to feed the heart and make the mind fast : i.e. to desire God, to sigh after him and aspire to His Holy Love, to an intimate union with Him without the diversion of so many thoughts and mental reflections which often dry up the heart and become a sort of dissipation, a pure amusement of the intelligence, a series of vain complacencies in our own thoughts and speculations. It is far better to be occupied with the care to belong to God without reserve, with the desire of interior life, of a profound humility, of fervour, of the gift of prayer,

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of the love of God, of the true spirit of Jesus Christ and of the practice of the virtues that He taught by His virtues and His Divine examples, etc., than to make a thousand useless reflections on these very subjects. When one feels none of these desires, the sole desire to possess them, the affection of the heart alone suffices to keep a soul recollected and united to God.

Once more : the simple tendency of the heart towards God, or towards certain virtues, in order to please Him, causes us to advance more than all our grand thoughts and reflections.

This is called tending towards God by zest, *attrait* or feeling ; and this method is sweeter, surer and more efficacious than all the most beautiful illuminations in the world, unless these illuminations are given by a special favour of God and through a pure effusion of His Grace, and even so they are combined with a certain zest and interior *attrait* which touches and charms the heart, for otherwise no advance can usually be made.

2. God often places souls in a certain emptiness of mind of which we have spoken ; in these circumstances, it would indeed be useless to attempt distinct thoughts, since it is God who removes them ; it would even be injurious to make efforts to think or reflect much in such a case, from which I conclude that the best for all is to remain in peace before God, cordially acquiescing in what He does at his good pleasure, whether He bestows or takes away, confining ourselves to preserving in the depth of the soul, the sincere desire of belonging to God without reserve, of loving Him ardently, and of being intimately united to Him, or, as has been said, the desire of His desires.

3. Since God gives lights or thoughts when He pleases, during or outside the time of prayer, when we feel that such lights or thoughts are sweetly and gently coming to us, we pause as long as we experience zest,

attrait or repose, prepared to see them disappear at God's pleasure without ever making any effort to retain them ; to do so would be to wish to make them our own property and would be in contradiction to that continual dependence in which God wishes to keep the souls He calls to the interior life. And it is precisely in order to keep them in that perpetual dependence, that at certain times he bestows and takes away, in an almost continuous alternation, such favours, causing in the interior of such souls, perpetual variations. It is by such continual changes and vicissitudes that God exercises them Himself in that perfect submission of mind and heart in which true perfection consists ; more or less as a wise and strong-minded mother, who in order to break a child's self-will and make him perfectly supple and docile, alternately gives and deprives him of what he likes best, caresses him, scolds him, flatters him, threatens him, and in less than an hour, will make him do or abstain from doing, a hundred different things. That is exactly the interior guidance that God gives these beloved souls whom He wishes Himself to train to pure and solid virtue.

Oh, if we only understood this loving guidance of God, how submissive we should be, what peace we should enjoy in the midst of all the spiritual vicissitudes and changes of our interior state ! From which follows the consequence of which I have often spoken, that in certain situations the most efficacious method of interior advance is a simple acquiescence in all that God wills. I cling to all thou givest me, Lord, I will all that Thou willest, I resign myself to all.

This is what we call willing all and willing nothing, nothing of our own initiative and everything by resignation ; it may be also called walking before God in the greatest simplicity. This path in a certain sense is not wearisome, because this simple adhesion to all

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that is willed by God comes of itself through zest, *attrait* and at length by the habit we have formed of it.

You are surprised to find that after having generously made certain sacrifices to God, temptation on that very point comes back more violently, so much so as to distress you. It is expedient that that should happen in order to anticipate the vain complacencies of self-love, which would spoil everything. Be content that God has induced you by His grace to make these sacrifices to Him, and resist the temptation to retract what you have already offered Him. In this way God wishes to keep you humble : for the mind is naturally so disposed to swell with pride on every occasion, to praise itself with reference to everything, and to appropriate to itself all good and all virtue by its vain complacency, that without the help of these repeated trials to our misery and weakness we should flatter ourselves that we had a great share in the victory and should thus lose all the fruit that we might have gained. For by thus abandoning truth and our own nothingness, we should be walking in the path of vanity and falsehood so opposed to God who is essential Truth.

Thus the actual and almost continual experience of our weakness becomes the guardian of the virtues that Grace makes us practise. From this it follows that in proportion as we advance God enlightens us with more and more vivid sentiments of our own misery and poverty, to preserve in us, in that way, the treasures of graces and virtues which our enemies would snatch from us ; if God did not bury it in the abyss of our clear knowledge and vivid experience of our own misery. This will make you understand why it is that the holiest people are always the humblest and have the lowest opinion of themselves. It is because by our quick tendency to vanity we force God to hide from us the small amount of good that we do by His grace, all the spiritual advancement and the virtue with

which, unbeknown to us, He enriches us. This is a very touching proof both of the excess of our misery and of the wisdom and goodness of our God, reduced, as it were, to hiding from us His greatest benefits, for fear that we should love them by appropriating them to ourselves in our vain and barely perceptible complacency. On this is based that great maxim that our own misery rightly known and felt is worth more than an angelic virtue of which we unjustly take the credit to ourselves. If this principle is deeply engraved in the soul, it keeps us ever at peace in the midst of the keenest perceptions of our own misery, for we look on these perceptions as great graces from God, as indeed they are.

LETTER XIV

TO SISTER ANNE-MARGUERITE BOUDET DE LA BELLIERE
(1734)

Exercise of Self-abandonment in Time of Consolation.

MY dear Sister,—What you tell me about the extraordinary circumstances which accompanied your vocation is more useful than you think : for a director, who sees in a vocation an act of Providence, has the right to judge that when God calls a soul in a special way He has particular designs on her and desires to find in her a devotion proportionate to the predilection which He has shown her.

I thank God for this first grace, and still more for the second which consists in making you recognise and feel this singular favour. I conclude from both that you belong to the fortunate band of those from whom God expects a special fidelity, and who would risk much if they did not reply to the advances of the heavenly Bridegroom, thus wounding the jealousy of His Divine Love.

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It is certain that we must expect constant vicissitudes in the interior life. Such is the law to which God has subjected all transitory things in this life, and so universal is this law that a permanent state by that very fact would become suspicious. What then must you do now that it pleases God to overwhelm you with lights and graces ?

1. You must expect and prepare yourself against brusque absences of the Spouse, as during His absence you will have to sustain yourself by the hope of His return.

2. You must not let yourself go too much to this zest and sweetness, for fear of becoming attached to it. You should adopt the same moderation and sobriety in regard to this heavenly banquet as a mortified person at an earthly feast.

3. Your present method of prayer comes much more from Grace than from yourself. You should, therefore, let Grace act and remain in an attitude of humble docility, calmly and simply keeping your interior gaze fixed on God and your own nothingness. God will then work great things in your soul without your knowing what is happening or the method of His operations. Beware of all curiosity on the subject, be content to know and feel the Divine operation ; trust yourself to Him who is working in you and abandon yourself totally to Him, that He may form you and shape you interiorly as He pleases. Is it not enough for you that you should be according to His taste and liking ?

4. Have no other fear in these happy moments but that of attaching yourself rather to His gifts and graces than to the Giver. Do not esteem or savour these graces except in so far as they inflame with Divine Love and help you to acquire the solid virtues that please the Divine Lover : self-abnegation, humility, patience, gentleness, obedience, charity and the endurance of your neighbour. Be sure that the devil is

not the author of these favours, and that he will never be able to deceive you so long as you make your zest and sweetness serve towards the acquisition of the solid virtues which the Faith and the Gospel teach and prescribe to us. Let God act ; place no obstacles through your natural activity to His holy operation, and be faithful to Him in the slightest things, on pain of exciting and even irritating His Divine jealousy.

5. The simplest ideas and those which lead to a spirit of holy childhood and filial confidence are always the best in prayer. How agreeable to God and how all-powerful with Him are prayers that are at the same time simple, familiar and respectful. How I wish for you the continuation of this simple and humble gift of prayer, which is the great treasure of the spiritual life !

6. You say that you do not understand how you have passed from finding your state so antipathetic to so perfect a love for it. The explanation of this, my dear Sister, is that by various interior operations, your soul has been, so to say, recast in the same way as an old tin or silver pot is recast, so as to become new, beautiful and shining. There will be much more recast in your soul, if you are well detached from consolation, faithful to Grace, and wholly resigned to the good pleasure of God, in aridity, pain and desolation.

7. I agree with you in thinking that God wishes you little by little to die to everything, to live only in Him, for Him and by Him : i.e. to have neither thoughts, desires, designs, pretensions, affections, joys, fears, hopes nor love save for God alone. But you will have to suffer cruel agonies before arriving at this entire detachment, which is called, and truly is a mystical death. You must commence your preparation from now on as virgins and the rest of the faithful used to prepare themselves for martyrdom ; for it is indeed a martyrdom which is born of love and tends to its

consummation. But be of good cheer. God will support you and in order to do so, He will give you from time to time leisure to breathe, by foretastes of heaven and delicious sweetness which He will cast into your soul like a heavenly manna to feed and strengthen it while crossing the desert.

8. Oh, blessed weight of attraction that ceaselessly calls you into your interior ! How holy is the home and blessed the retreat which the heavenly Spouse has built for Himself there, whither He often calls you and where lovers can speak heart to heart in the deepest silence, without noise of words and confusion of distracting thoughts ! There, happy soul, should be your continual abode ; and when you feel that you have strayed a little from it, try gently to return and keep as speedily as possible your Divine rendezvous. On this point fidelity is specially necessary for you.

9. As regards your extreme weakness and misery in times of aridity and of the Heavenly Spouse's absence, do not be surprised at it, or beyond measure troubled or afflicted by it. That happens to all good souls ; and God acts thus in order to make us feel by a hundred personal experiences what we are without Him, so that we may refer to Him only all the glory for the good that we do by His grace, without attributing to ourselves anything but the evil we do.

10. You would hardly believe how important it is during the beginning of a soul's entrance on the path of holy recollection, to deny oneself not only all vain joy and natural satisfaction, curiosity and useless words, but also long conversations even on pious subjects. Such are frequently a ruse of the devil intended to feed our pride, self-love and vain self-esteem, to draw us out of ourselves little by little and lead us to forget God, even when we are speaking of Him and of our interior. The danger involved can only be escaped when we have acquired by constant effort the habit of

the true interior life and are accustomed to speak rather from the heart than from the head.

11. Preserve carefully, then, this zest for solitude and silence. The desire thereof is sufficient for you at present, the time will come for you to put it into practice.

12. It is certain also that the habit of writing even the most innocent letters, is an obstacle to perfection particularly in youth. One of your preceding directors has already given you this advice, and you have profited by obedience to him. This little sacrifice was very pleasing to God and surely has obtained for you the grace to make another which I judge to be necessary. Not that I see in the relations you have preserved the faintest shadow of sin ; what I do see is, firstly, that we should always be trying to make continual progress on the path of detachment, and, secondly, that the special graces given you by God, give Him the right to expect a quite special fidelity. This is my advice after having considered everything before God and in the interests of your soul : I would like you simply to lay the situation before this person : say that you have a director whose advice you wish to follow and who maintains that you should make a little sacrifice of even the most innocent correspondence ; that this is his definite wish and decision, although he knows perfectly well that no danger exists on either side, although you have told him that the particular correspondence is carried on with a good man, a good religious, a relative of your own ; that in spite of all this, the director is inflexible and maintains his veto, under pain of refusing you his direction, and that you neither dare nor wish to disobey him. I think that such a declaration made with gentle firmness will suffice to give your soul complete liberty.

13. I know well that wretched self-love of which you speak, the natural fruit of which is the instinctive and

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indeliberate research of our little comforts and conveniences. This love is so profoundly rooted in us, that only the operation of Divine Love (its contrary) is able to make it less sensitive. For the present it will be enough for you to suffer from it and humiliate yourself on account of it before God.

The prayer which He gives you is a Divine fire which insensibly burns up all your bad inclinations as if they were straw. So, have confidence in God and wait patiently till the poor straw is wholly consumed.

LETTER XV

TO MOTHER LOUISE-FRANÇOISE DE ROSEN

The Same Subject.

My dear Sister,—I see nothing in your state of soul as you manifest it to me in your letter to cause you any anxiety.

1. That feeling of gratitude, of joy, of self-annihilation which keeps you united to God without dissipation of mind for several days at a time, is an operation of God similar to many others that you have experienced. You have only to accept this gift with humble thanksgiving and I have but to congratulate you on the grace which God has given you.

2. It is certain that there is a language of the heart which God alone understands in which we speak to Him by our desires only and other interior movements as we speak to men in articulate language with our voices. This language is what is called the prayer of the heart, all interior and purely spiritual. The Holy Spirit is then keeping school in the interior, in the depths of the soul ; He listens to her, speaks to her, instructs her, moves her this way and that, and shapes her to His taste. These are operations of Spirit on

spirit in which the subject herself understands, it seems, hardly anything, but from which she issues with certain impressions which have totally renovated her. Here again we have but to receive the gift of God with simplicity, and since it pleases Him to communicate with the soul secretly and as it were incognito, she on her part must scrupulously abstain from counter-acting His designs by fussy inquiries and indiscreet curiosity.

3. Your impression and sentiment about the happiness of the saints are founded on truth, since it is of faith that the essence of their supreme joy is but the tide of the very happiness of God ebbing and flowing into their souls, according to the capacity of their hearts and proportionally to their merits. When God pleases, He causes us to experience a tiny sample of this joy on earth in order to draw the soul to Himself by giving her a disgust for everything else ; for this is the good effect produced by these transitory impressions and why we are permitted to esteem and savour them with modesty and interior sobriety.

4. The comparison of the stone which is carved and polished by hammer and chisel is quite right. We have but to let ourselves be carved and shaped and take care not to destroy by contrary sentiments and actions the form and shape impressed on his work by the Divine Mason.

LETTER XVI

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-DE ROSEN (1734)

The Same Subject.

My dear Sister,—I have read your letter with much consolation and spiritual joy. I have blessed God from the bottom of my heart for being willing to glorify Himself in your weakness and poverty of spirit. We

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celebrate to-day the feast of S. Agatha, in whose 'prayer' we say to God that it pleases Him to choose the feeblest material so as to make His power shine forth. I applied this thought to you.

1. Your great *attrait* for simplicity is a grace the effect of which can only be to make closer your union with God, for simplicity tends to unity. You must preserve this, firstly, by a simple and loving gaze at God in pure faith, whether this gaze is perceptible to you by its sweetness as at present or becomes almost imperceptible, remaining only in the depth of the soul or at the height and fine point of the spirit, secondly, by keeping your interior senses in a profound silence, thirdly, by only repeating sensible acts based on reflection in so far as God gives you the thought, *attrait* and movement necessary to do so.

2. This indistinct knowledge or rather this lively sentiment of the immensity of God is an enriching operation of Grace. It produces and leaves in the soul very salutary effects which no one can explain in detail and on which we should not speculate too much, or even dwell too much, unless God Himself inclines us to do so. Let these impressions pass through your mind, and do not be disturbed when in accordance with God's pleasure, they disappear. Thus is the soul preserved from the danger of becoming attached to the gifts of God rather than to God Himself, in this way ruining all the operations of grace by referring to herself the happy effects they produce.

3. God dwells, says Scripture, in darkness inaccessible to every human spirit, but when He translates a soul into that darkness, it becomes luminous. So the soul sees all while seeing nothing, she hears all while hearing nothing, she knows all while knowing nothing. This is called learned ignorance and in S. Denys' words the darkness of the rays of Faith. All we need to know about this is that it is an operation of grace and that

we should allow ourselves to be put into that state with joy, and plunge into it and lose ourselves in it for as long as it pleases God.

4. This *attrait* and zest for prayer, this deep calm, this silence of wonder and love which says everything without saying anything, is merely a more marked effect of the prayer of recollection. But to find oneself in a certain state of inaction, as if one were a pure potentiality or a vile instrument awaiting the hand of the Master-builder, is another operation of grace. In this state you have only to act as you are inspired by the Holy Spirit, either to remain in a state of peaceful, silent and resigned waiting, or, as says the holy King David, like a maid-servant to keep your eyes fixed on your mistress to see and accomplish her orders at the slightest sign ; if she says nothing, to remain in that position and interior sentiment of submission and self-abandonment ; if grace demands from you express and formal acts, to perform them gently following step by step the motive-power which is given you, and to cease as soon as that power ceases, returning to your state of silent expectation.

5. This spirit of total self-abandonment accompanied by a fervent and reiterated prayer to fulfil all the demands of the Holy Will of God, frequently announces a coming transition to painful and crucifying interior states. You can only prepare yourself for these in a general way before God, by a complete mistrust of yourself and a great confidence in Him and a universal self-abandonment to all that He may send you without entering into detail, unless by a particular manifestation of God. I will merely say in passing that if owing to the lack of tyrants, there are no more martyrs who shed their blood for the Faith, Jesus Christ does not fail to have plenty of martyrs of grace. Bodily torments are advantageously replaced by the various interior crucifixions which occur in souls to purify them more and

more, so that they may be made capable of an ever greater and more intimate union with the God of all purity and holiness. The sentiment of confusion and self-annihilation is a solid effect of the Spirit of God : all the graces which He gives us should always bring with them humility, and one should regard as suspicious all impressions which do not tend in that direction or which leave the slightest smoke behind them of pride, presumption and vain self-esteem.

6. I am not surprised that when one has once thoroughly experienced the sweetness, efficacy and purity of Divine operations, one feels a kind of horror for one's own workings, almost always hurried, turbulent, unquiet and followed by a thousand vain returns on oneself. It is no evil to remain in inaction when one does not believe oneself to be moved by the Spirit of God, granted the presence of one of these two conditions : that such inaction should not last long or that it should take the form of a peaceful expectation which is no idleness, for it consists in an interior and loving gaze on God with faith, hope and desire for His holy operation, all of which dispositions are so many acts and movements of the spirit and heart which are the essence of true interior prayer. We must not be forever taking the bloom off spiritual matters by our curiosity ; we should walk generously (*bonnement*) with God, as S. Francis of Sales says. To do otherwise is to act contrary to the holy simplicity of fresh and innocent souls. All that happens or is done by love of God, says in another passage, your blessed Father is gentle and sweet like His holy love ; whereas trouble, disquietude, and hurry are the signs of self-seeking nature and a restless, breathless and turbulent self-love.

7. I understand that you have always had an *attrait* for the knowledge and love of God in and through Jesus Christ. A simple view or consideration of His mysteries accompanied by holy reflections is already a good way of

prayer. When all the views of the mind and affections of the heart unite themselves in one all-containing centre, I mean His Divinity, the prayer becomes still simpler, better and more Divine ; but you must not imagine that your prayer will always be like that, it is not a permanent state, but a passing grace. When it leaves us we should return to the simple contemplation of the mystery accompanying it with a few movements of the heart, gentle and peaceful, effortless and without too much curiosity.

8. Guard yourself in the time of prayer against reflections on yourself and your way of praying ; for unless one watches oneself closely one often abandons a simple gaze at God for the contemplation of oneself, entering into and reflecting on oneself by a pure movement of self-love, which never willing wholly to abandon itself, naturally falls back on itself. When you feel the Divine repose approaching, do not think about its sweetness, but of God alone in whose bosom your soul should rather than her own comfort seek love and the infused virtues which are infused into her during this blessed slumber. Moreover, these are the worthiest dispositions for the recitation of the Divine office or hearing Mass, but you must be ready to be weaned from them so that you may eat the bread of the strong after the milk of spiritual childhood. Let us bless God in anticipation.

9. It is certain that the emptier of all creatures the self-annihilated soul becomes, the greater the capacity she acquires for Divine love and the more abundant will be the infusion she will receive. At such times one seems to drink long draughts of love, with an insatiable thirst and delicious satisfaction. Let us, in such moments, be content to drink at the source without importunate agitation. Formal acts of love would be greatly out of place when the heart is felt to be wholly plunged in love. God grant that by means of this

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repeated plunging into love, your heart may become intoxicated, and all on fire with its pure and Divine flames. In order to attain to this, you should, for your part, think only of two things ; first, to separate yourself more and more in heart and mind from all creation, and secondly, to allow God, who alone can effect such results in souls, to do His part. You may, however, and indeed you ought when you feel moved and urged to it, always desire and ask more love for God ; but this will come about almost without thought, indeed, you will scarcely be able to prevent yourself doing so.

10. God does His work as He pleases, and often produces marvels through the feeblest instruments. Do not, then, keep aloof from souls whom He inspires to address themselves to you : say simply what you think, saying what God gives you to say, and be sure that He will bless your simplicity and the humility of these dear souls. To help others, when God sends them to us, whatever means he may take of doing so, is not to push in where one is not wanted, but is to show to God our love and gratitude. Even if you appear to meet with opposition, remain firm and accept everything for the glory of the great Master.

LETTER XVII

TO MOTHER MARIE-ANNE SOPHIE DE ROTTEMBOURG
(1738)

Docility to Interior Impressions of the Divine Spirit ; Peaceful Expectation.

REVEREND Mother,—What you tell me of the interior *attrait* of many of your daughters for holy recollection and the manner that you adopt in order to remove the specious and well-disguised obstacles by means of which the devil tries to turn them from their purpose,

can only come from the Holy Spirit. I have nothing to add. Follow gently and little by little the lights which God gives you. What a consolation and joy it is for me to learn that all those good Sisters whom I know best and in whom I take a special interest, are precisely those who have most *attrait* and desire for the interior life. I beg you to congratulate them from me on the gift of God and salute them all and particularly your dear Sister, Marie-Anne Thérèse de Vioménil. How delighted I am that she has been confirmed in her office. The seven whom you name and with which you have formed a holy league for the renewal of the interior spirit in your community will little by little make proselytes and the spirit of the whole house will soon be renewed.

As for yourself, profit by your experiences never to abandon on any rational ground the simple way of pure faith, into which God has introduced you. Do not forget that in this way the operations of God are almost imperceptible. The work of grace is accomplished in the most intimate part of your interior, in the part of the soul's depths which is furthest from the senses and consequently from sensible experience. To strengthen your steps in this way remember (1) that this way is what Jesus Christ was referring to, when He said that we should adore the Heavenly Father in spirit and in truth, (2) that in Louis Lallemant's words, the sensible side of grace is but the dregs and (3) that Mother de Chantal has well said that the simpler, deeper and more imperceptible the operations of God, the more spiritual, solid, pure and perfect they are.

A *peaceful spirit* with oneself and others is one of the greatest gifts of God. Follow that spirit and all His inspirations : He will work wonders in your neighbour and yourself. When one has learnt how to remain in peace in one's interior, God keep His divine school in

the soul where He teaches everything without noise of words to attentive peaceful and docile souls in such a way that directors have nothing to say but : Listen attentively to the voice of God's Spirit, or better still : follow faithfully the interior impression of His grace. This is what S. John said to the first Christians : ' You need not any man to teach you, for you have a Divine unction from the Holy Spirit which dwelleth in you and teacheth you of all things.' The great means of advance, rapid and safe, in the way of perfection is to follow with perfect docility this Divine unction when we perceive it ; to wait peacefully and confidentially for it when its impression is less distinct.

Why will we always substitute our own action for that of the Divine worker, who labours ceaselessly in us at the work of our perfection ? How much more progress would we make if we made it our principal study not to get in the way of His action, to abandon ourselves to Him and wait. Scripture often recommends us to *wait for the Lord*, and there is no more useful secret for our sanctification. There is nothing to which souls sufficiently exercised in the active life and the accomplishment of the Divine precepts should more carefully apply themselves than to these occasions of peaceful waiting. Such application is the means of acquiring the spirit of prayer, holy recollection and the most intimate union with God. The hands of God who is infinitely liberal, are always full of graces, and He longs to pour them upon us. All we have to do to receive these graces abundantly is to keep our heart ready and remain continually in an attitude of waiting. But the aridity and boredom of doing so fatigues impatient and hurried souls. These trials repel those who merely have an eye on their own interests instead of letting themselves be led by that pure love which consists in the conformation always and in everything of our will to the Will of God. There is no treasure on

earth comparable to that conformity. But souls pursue some chimerical perfection or other, and lose sight of the unique standard of true perfection which is the Divine Will : that infinitely wise and gentle will, which if we take it for our guide will cause us to find close at hand and at every moment what we are seeking everywhere else laboriously and in vain.

LETTER XVIII

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

We should Moderate our Desires and Fears.

A HEALTHY fear is one that causes neither trouble, disquietude nor discouragement. When it produces contrary effects we should drive it away, for in that case it surely comes from the devil or our self-love. With regard to our most legitimate desires and holiest plans, we should always remain before God in an attitude of peaceful expectation, submissive and resigned to all that He may will. Why is this? (1) Because the desires of God should be the only standard of our own desires. To submit ourselves and continually to adhere to all the interior or exterior circumstances in which one may find oneself by the dispositions of the Divine Providence which extends to everything, which regulates all down to the fall of a leaf from a tree or a hair from our head ; this is the surest way of arriving at perfection.

(2) Because the renunciation of our own will is a very important condition of our sanctification.

Nothing is more calculated to make us acquire this renunciation than the delays which prevent the execution of our good designs, and this is why God sometimes postpones their accomplishment for whole years. Faith, self-abandonment, confidence are then indeed

necessary. An experience which occurs sometimes, makes the trial much more painful : it is the failure to find any of these virtues we aim at in ourselves because we are deprived of the power of making sensible acts of them. What can we do in this case? We must sustain ourselves by the simple light of pure faith and by having frequent interior recourse to God to implore His assistance, humbly confessing our impotence and misery. In that way we shall enter into the designs of God who only appears to abandon us to ourselves in order to make us well understand what we really are. What a great favour (and important virtue) it is to have learnt by our personal and frequent experience the full extent of our weakness, our misery, our poverty and of our constant need that God should sustain us, should animate, influence and hold us up by the interior effects of His Grace.

The intimate impression that God has given you of a great desire to be stripped of your own will so as no longer to have any will but His is one of the most precious graces ; in order to preserve and increase it, you must give your heart and soul up to it for as long and as often as you can, particularly during prayer. I wish you could pass your whole life in this sentiment alone, adhering in a deep interior silence to the operation of the Spirit of God ; this whole state should be without violence or effort, gentle, tranquil, peaceful, for God only dwells in peace and His pleasure is only in peaceful hearts.

LETTER XIX

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-THERÈSE DE ROSEN

To Tend towards Simplicity.

MY dear Sister,—It is only a few days since I replied at some length to your last letter but one. If you find that

God does not give me much that is useful to you, you should conclude that He does not consider my assistance necessary for you or that He wishes to provide Himself for your needs. How well He can do without us when He chooses ! One word that He whispers in the ear of the soul instructs her better than all the discourses of men. The slightest breath of grace pushes along our little boat more vigorously and brings it more quickly and safely to port than all our oars and sails and rudders. I am delighted that you are beginning to find the proof of this, and I hope that every day you will discover new and far more touching proofs of it. Remain as you are ; an interior silence based on respect and submission humbly preserved in the presence of God when He does not bid us act, sanctifies our activity, mitigates our restlessness, pacifies our troubles, and that almost instantaneously. Attach yourself to this unity and simplicity : a multiplicity [of thoughts] brings trouble and confusion into the mind, dissipates our powers which go off wandering without our perceiving it. The multiplication of desires afflicts the soul, says the Holy Spirit. Here is a method which I recommend to you for the unification of all your desires. Soak yourself well in this truth : I have only been created and put into this world to serve God, to love Him and please Him ; that is my task here below ; what will He do with me in this world and the next ? To what grade of perfection and glory will He raise me ? That is for Him to see to. It is His affair ; so to say, His task. Each to his own task with his thoughts on nothing else ; please God that I may think as gladly and well about mine, as He does about His ! I am, in Him and through Him, all yours, my dear Sister.

LETTER XX

TO SISTER ANNE-MARGUERITE BOUDET DE LA BELLIÈRE

The Same Subject.

My dear Sister,—The manner in which you receive little trials is infinitely pleasing to God, and I do not hesitate to give you the assurance that by the generous renunciation, which you make for the love of God, of sweetness and interior consolation, you abundantly merit them, when the time of consolation comes. The little that you tell me you have remembered of what I said to you is the essential ; that suffices you. God sees the heart and asks nothing but that. Perfection does not consist in a multitude of acts, even interior acts ; on the contrary, the further we advance the more it pleases God to place us in a state in which we cannot produce a great number, inviting us to remain before Him in silence and a humble recollection. Follow this *attrait* of grace. Be content to renew from time to time a simple act of faith and love, accompanied by complete self-abandonment and filial confidence. In all the various changes you go through say constantly to Him from the bottom of your heart : My God, you wish this, I wish it also. . . . I refuse nothing from your fatherly hand ; I accept all, I submit to everything. In this sole act continued or rather become habitual consists the whole of our perfection. This is what maintains peace in the depth of the heart and the centre of the soul, even when one is agitated by various troubles and contrary movements. The more you can maintain yourself in this holy interior simplicity, the more will you advance, or to speak more correctly, the more will God Himself make you advance.

Do not, however, expect to be able to measure your rate of progress ; it is impossible to do so for the reason

that it depends far less on your own acts than on God's operations in your soul, and since these are wholly spiritual they are for that very reason almost imperceptible.

Here, however, are some indications by which you will be able to recognise in the long run the results of the Divine action and the changes produced in your heart. (1) A holy indifference like a sort of stupidity in reference to the things of this world ; (2) A depth of peace such that you no longer worry about anything at the bottom of your soul, not even over your own imperfections and faults, and still less over those of others ; (3) A certain zest for God and the things of God, a sort of hunger and thirst for justice, i.e. for virtue, piety and all perfection. This hunger which is very keenly felt is, however, exempt from hurry and anxiety ; it leads us to wish all that God wishes and nothing more, to bless Him in our spiritual poverty as in our spiritual abundance.

Always remember that great word of Jesus Christ : ' Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.' Take the greatest care never to injure in the slightest way this holy simplicity, so little known, so little esteemed, and yet so precious in the eyes of God. Grow more and more upright and simple in your thoughts, words and feelings, in all your actions and behaviour. There are some who aim at the opposite of this, and even affect it through vanity. How far are these from the kingdom of God, lacking indeed its very foundation, humility !

As long as you approach and leave the time of prayer with your spirit tranquil, recollected and well-disposed, you will always retain some fruit, one way or another ; moreover, it is just when you think God furthest from you that He is nearest. Do not multiply your acts in prayer ; make few, very gently, in the greatest repose of mind and heart, and the greatest peace that you can.

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During the day, do not force yourself to make so many different acts and still less to feel fervour and devotion in them ; remain courageously, humbly and gently at peace, tranquil and fully resigned in your emptiness of spirit and will. It is just this emptiness of spirit which leads to pure love and union with God.

LETTER XXI

TO MOTHER LOUISE-FRANÇOISE DE ROSEN

The Diverse ' Attraits ' of Grace.

My dear Sister,—The dispositions about which you consult me are not rare among the souls whom God calls, as He does you, to union with Himself by a loving self-abandonment. Sometimes, you tell me, you feel yourself drawn to adore the Divine Majesty with a humility mingled with love and with very distinct acts full of zest which occur somehow of themselves, and produce a contentment completely filling the soul. At other times, you are drawn to remain in a great repose, with a very simple view of God as present, without being able to form distinct acts except with a great effort, even during Holy Mass ; and that you then feel yourself obliged to take a book and do violence to yourself in order to come out of this state of apparent inaction which disturbs you ; such are the principal features of the two states which you describe in your letter and on which you wish me to give you my opinion. This is what I think :

First of all, it is certain that both these dispositions are a gift from Heaven, but the second seems to me the better. Primarily, because it is the simpler, the more profound, the more spiritual, the more removed from the senses and consequently the more worthy of God, who is a pure spirit and to be adored in spirit and in

truth. In the second place, because it is an exercise of pure faith, which gives less contentment and reassurance to the soul and which contains, therefore, more sacrifice and pure self-abandonment to God. Thirdly, because in the second case it is the Holy Spirit who is acting with the good will and consent of the soul, whereas in the first case, which belongs rather to ordinary affective prayer, it is the soul which is acting together with the grace of God. You well understand that where there is more of God's action and less of the creature's, the operations are necessarily more perfect.

It follows from this that there is in the second state no serious danger of your losing your time nor any reason to think that you do not fulfil the precept to hear Mass. You may accept this decision without the slightest scruple. If you care to hear my advice on the way to behave when experiencing these diverse *attraits*, I will give it you. Firstly, wherever the second *attrait* makes itself felt strongly and absorbs you as it were in spite of yourself, you should gently let yourself go ; to do otherwise would be to reject the inspiration and the secret operations which the Holy Spirit wishes to accomplish in you, and that in order to act on your own judgement through self-love in order to feel more content and reassured. But we should seek in everything, not our own contentment however spiritual, but purely the contentment of God.

When this *attrait* is not so strong nor so pressing, you should nevertheless encourage it, remaining yourself in a profound silence, so as to leave more room for the operations of the Holy Spirit. I advise this at least during a long period of prayer. For when you have very little time as at the short morning and evening visits to the Blessed Sacrament, it would be better to encourage and cultivate the first *attrait* of which you speak. You may then make your formal and conscious acts of the adoration and love of God. But I would

remind you of the counsel given by S. Francis of Sales to a person walking in your path : I would prefer that these express and conscious acts should be performed without much sensible feeling or effort, so that they should flow, strained, as it were distilled, through the apex of the spirit [*par la fine pointe de l'esprit*], as the same Saint says ; for it is a received principle that our simplest operations, those most elevated above the senses and the most profound, are the most spiritual and consequently the most perfect.

To pray according to your first disposition is to pray by formal successive and conscious acts ; to pray according to the second is to pray by acts which are practical, although in no way indicated or perceived, except confusedly. Or to put it another way, it is to pray by a simple though actual disposition : now this simple and actual disposition of the heart contains everything and says everything to God, without doing so expressly. The various names given to this way of prayer will make you understand this perfectly : it is called the prayer of loving attention to God ; the prayer of simple looking at God [*l'oraison de simple regard*] ; the prayer of simple recollection in God ; the prayer of self-renunciation and self-abandonment to God [*l'oraison de remise et d'abandon à Dieu*], which is born of the love of God and always causes a still greater love of God to be born in the soul. You see by this that this second disposition is worth more than the first ; you must, therefore, make it your principal exercise, without, however, neglecting the former at certain times as I have said above. Entirely yours in our Lord.

LETTER XXII

TO SISTER CATHERINE-ANGÉLIQUE DE SERRE (WHEN A
POSTULANT), 1731

*Self-abandonment in the Trials to which a Vocation is
Exposed.*

ALL that you have said and written makes me know that God is truly calling you to Religion and in particular to the Order of the Visitation. Your interior *attrait* for this institute and the reasons you give leave me no doubt of this double vocation : for just as there is a vocation to Religion in general, so there is a vocation to this or that community. All you have to do is to be faithful to God, and thus assure your predestination.

Now, fidelity demands three things of you. Before everything you must endeavour in spite of all interior or exterior oppositions to preserve in your heart this *attrait* of God, with the sincere desire to follow it at such time as He who gives it you, shall provide the means of consecrating yourself to His service in reality, as you do in advance in heart and spirit.

Your second duty is to hope against hope, as was said of Abraham : i.e. to believe firmly that since God is all-powerful and nothing can resist Him, He will be able in His own time to conquer all the obstacles and oppositions set up by men. All spirits and hearts are in His hands and He inclines them as He wills without costing Him more than the single word : I wish it. By that word alone : *fiat*, did He bring the creation out of nothing. So when the time comes, He will only have to say : *fiat*, and all the obstacles to your vocation will be annihilated. Meanwhile He permits these obstacles, to try your patience and your faith in Him and your firm hope in His powerful help. Do not

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distress yourself, but continue to hope strongly in God, accept all the trials He sends repeating ceaselessly to Him : I accept everything, I sacrifice my own interests so as to have no other to obey you and please you in all things.

Your third duty is a great fidelity to all your ordinary duties of piety : prayers, readings, meditations, masses, confessions, communions, examinations of conscience, interior recollection, frequent elevations of the heart to God, without ever giving up the smallest of these exercises, through chagrin, trouble, disgust, boredom or aridity, or for any other reason whatever. These troubles are necessary in order to accustom you to detach yourself from everything and keep yourself united to God, who alone should be your light, support, consolation and strength. It is apparently in order to make you practise this meritorious self-abandonment, that God has permitted that you should be forbidden to go to the Visitation, so that receiving no consolation except immediately from Him, you should attach yourself purely and solely to Him. If this order were to do serious injury to your soul, be assured that God would not allow it to subsist long. He will be able to remove the obstacle when He wills to do so ; so continue gently to repose without the least anxiety in the arms of His Providence, like a little child on its mother's bosom.

LETTER XXIII

TO THE SAME

The Same Subject.

THE increase of your desire to consecrate yourself to God is a new grace from His mercy. To suffer all the anguish of not being able to accomplish these ardent desires if supported with resignation, is to correspond

well with grace and to merit their increase. The interior suffering that one endures in order to maintain this state of resignation is a sort of martyrdom which will have its reward sooner or later. God will accomplish the pious design with which He inspires you ; these delays occur in order to test your fidelity. If, in the meanwhile, you advance in age, you should not grieve over this, since you already have the better part of what you wish for, which is the lively desire of consecrating yourself to God. This desire is worth more before God than the actual sacrifice [of yourself] ; it is indeed a double sacrifice, since you are already offered to Him in spirit and in heart, and are offering to Him in addition your most ardent desires by patiently waiting the time destined by His Providence for their fulfilment. Perhaps the latter sacrifice has a greater value than the former, inasmuch as in the latter there is the greater abnegation of your own will. So remain in great peace and tranquillity in the presence of Him who sees the depths of the heart, and who accepts all your good desires as their accomplishment. He needs none of the gifts that you can offer Him, but He loves the heart which is prepared for all sacrifices.

The fear of death and the judgement is good, provided it does not go so far as to trouble and disturb you ; if it did so it would be an illusion of the devil. After all, why should you be troubled ? Because you have not yet done what you have not been able to do ? Does God demand the impossible ? Because you have not yet done anything for Heaven ? Beware here ; the point is a very delicate one, for it looks as if there were a desire to acquire merits in order to trust in them. That is not true confidence which can only be founded on the mercy of God and the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. Any other confidence would be vain and presumptuous, being based on our own nothingness and I know not what wretched good works that are

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worthless in the eyes of God. Without counting in any way on ourselves, we must try to accomplish all that He asks of us and hope only in His goodness and the merits of Jesus Christ His Son.

You are right in saying that more virtue is required to save one's soul in the world than in religion, from which I draw the obvious conclusion that one needs a stronger, a more clearly marked vocation to remain in the world than to consecrate oneself to God in the religious state ; nevertheless there are special graces for the time during which in spite of oneself one remains in the world. In that case God is as it were obliged to sustain us. Try to conform your thoughts, sentiments and exercises to those of that holy state, but let all be done in peace and tranquillity of spirit, with humble resignation and perfect confidence in the paternal goodness and power of the Heavenly bridegroom you have chosen and who looks on you as His beloved spouse.

LETTER XXIV

TO THE SAME

The Same Subject.

You are right to consider the design with which God has inspired you as one of the greatest of graces. The attraction to His service is one of the surest marks of God's predestination of a soul. On that depends not only her eternal salvation, but also her temporal happiness, for experience teaches us that it is only in the service of God that we can find happiness in this world. Moreover, the malignity of the world is so great that it is very difficult to serve God perfectly outside the Religious State. In the world it cost so much to belong truly to God, that one often loses courage and gives up one's best intentions. We should, therefore,

ceaselessly thank the Lord for such a grace as He has gratuitously granted you in preference to so many other souls who lose themselves in the world, while living a life of crosses and miseries.

In the second place, you must trust in the goodness of God, and firmly hope that in His own good time He will bring to success that with which He inspires you. His Providence has secret and infallible methods to bring about successfully, in spite of all obstacles, things which appear altogether impossible. God often permits that His designs should be crossed, so as to show the better His power and convince us certainly that He is the absolute master of all events, and that just as without Him we can do nothing, so with His help we can accomplish what appears impossible in our eyes.

Thirdly, you must resign yourself entirely to all that God wills, often saying that you wish to depend entirely on Him and have no other will than His. Thus, when something happens which seems contrary to your holiest desires, make first of all the sacrifice of them and remain in peace. For nothing is so contrary to the Spirit of God and the impressions of grace as interior troubles which produce a hurried aspiration for even the best and holiest things. This indiscreet ardour, this too great vivacity, must be moderated by making all possible efforts to attach yourself in everything to the unchangeable Will of God alone, renouncing your own will however holy and reasonable it may seem.

There is, indeed, no solid virtue or true sanctity save in a full acquiescence in God's Will. If you sometimes feel a repugnance to submit to what God wishes, you should at once have recourse to Him by interior prayer, and beg Him to conform your will to His in everything, by giving you the strength to surmount your repugnance and the self-love which seeks its own satisfaction in the holiest things. Nevertheless, as the Divine order demands that we should do all that we can for the

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success of the good desires with which He inspires us, you should act as follows : (1) frequent the sacraments as often and as well as you can ; (2) live in a great purity of conscience, so as to avoid the slightest faults which might drive God from you ; (3) do some spiritual reading every day at your leisure and with serious attention to take the place of your meditation when you cannot make it ; (4) in the course of the day raise as often as you can your heart and mind to God, particularly when you are experiencing pain, boredom, sadness, a disgust of spiritual things in order to offer these sufferings to Him as continual sacrifices. In this way, you will constantly obtain new graces and inspirations from heaven to which it is infinitely important for you to be faithful, for to such fidelity God usually attaches great gifts and in particular the gift of perseverance.

LETTER XXV

TO THE SAME

On the Same Subject.

THIS sort of martyrdom which you are enduring, will be very agreeable to God if you suffer it with patience and a great resignation ; for all perfection consists in a complete conformity to the Will of God in everything ; that is to say that we must never will anything but what God wills. It is of faith that God wills everything that happens to us except sin, for apart from sin, nothing happens in this world but by the secret orders of His Providence. Taking that for granted I do not understand how you can be suffering so much from the postponement of your sacrifice, since God who puts these obstacles in your way, actually only demands of you the desire of making this sacrifice to Him at the

time and place which He will indicate, by Himself giving you the means to accomplish it easily. But note that, since in everything we try to content our self-will, the impossibility of achieving our desires may distress our self-love, lose our interior peace, and cause all manner of troubles. Such an experience is an evident sign that we are seeking rather to satisfy our self-love than God, to do our own will rather than that of God. For if we were seeking only that Divine Will, we should be rendered always content and tranquil by this sole thought : God actually desires from me only what depends on myself, i.e. to be willing to make my sacrifice to Him, and to be in conformity with His Will ; this desire should be peaceful, tranquil and submissive to all the orders of His Divine Providence. But suppose I never arrive at accomplishing my holy desires ? Well, that very fact will convince me that God does not wish me to and I shall be content with doing His Holy Will, for it will then be evident that God has only asked the desire of making my sacrifice and not the sacrifice itself. Thus He acted in the case of Abraham, whose resolution to obey God was as generously recompensed as if he had really sacrificed his son Isaac. It has been the same with so many holy men and women who have had a most true and burning desire to give up their lives by martyrdom without ever finding the means to do so. God has not permitted or willed it and He is content with the sacrifice of desire which before Him has the same value as the actual concrete sacrifice. But if I am thus obliged to stay in the world what will happen to me ? These are vain fears and alarms which the devil injects into your mind so as to destroy your peace of heart. You must abandon yourself entirely to God and trust in Him. He is powerful enough to sustain us in the world and good enough to be willing to do so, when He destines us by His Providence to remain there.

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You cannot then practise better recollection and abnegation than by renouncing your own will in everything, and particularly in the matter of your too ardent and lively desires, however holy they may be ; for this immoderate ardour and feeling of disturbance and hurry indicate much imperfection and self-love. These defects are even more clearly manifested in the disturbance of soul to which one abandons oneself, after having fallen into some fault or other, impatience or chagrin—for these disturbances and troubles do not come from the love of God which always produces peace, but from a rebellious self-love and a secret pride mortified at the soul's imperfection. A soul that has a little humility instead of troubling herself uselessly and even dangerously after her faults, humbles herself gently and quietly and without disquietude before God ; she conceives sorrow for her faults without trouble and asks their pardon of God without disquietude ; she even thanks God for saving her from falling into graver ones.

LETTER XXVI

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

Self-abandonment in Regard to One's Employments and Undertakings.

My dear Sister,—How is it that you cannot understand once for all that everything succeeds if God wishes it, because He can make the opposition and difficulties raised by men against it, subserve His own designs ? Believe me, if the thing is really for your greater advantage, men may do what they choose, it will succeed ; but on the other hand can God do better than prevent its success, if it is disadvantageous to you ? God alone knows the future and all the consequences which will flow from it ;

as for us we are poor blind creatures who may well be afraid of all sorts of dangers in those very events which appear to us in the most favourable light. Can we then do more wisely than refer everything to God's care? Can our future be in greater safety than in the adorable hands of that adorable Master, that good and tender Father who loves us much more than we love ourselves? Where shall we find a safer refuge than in the maternal bosom of His loving Providence? That is where ones heart should rest as in its beatific centre. Outside that centre, there is neither peace nor real repose, nothing but excitement, bitterness, anxieties of heart, sorrows in our present life and dangers for our eternal salvation.

LETTER XXVII

TO SISTER MARIE-ANNE-SOPHIE DE ROTTEMBOURG (1738)

Self-abandonment in the Acceptance of Charges.

MAY the peace of Jesus Christ reign always in your heart and may the most Holy Will of God be ever accomplished in you and by you.

I was already aware, Reverend Mother, of your election, and I at once rejoiced in God, because I have no doubt that it will be for the contentment of all your community and for its spiritual profit.

As long as you maintain your present dispositions, your charge, however apt it may seem to you to lead to dissipation of spirit, will do you no harm, for I remember having read that what is dissipating is not our employments or charges, but the excitement, disturbance and trouble which arise from our natural activity and our desire to succeed in everything before the eyes of men. The celebrated M. de Renty used to say that it was long since he had found any difference

between being in prayer in his oratory or actively working and moving about for the love of God and the service of his neighbour. We might say the same if we were as detached as he was from all the seekings of self-love.

You did wrong, then, to oppose so much the employment which Providence intended for you. May God forgive you, but do not repeat that line of conduct. To desire nothing and to refuse nothing was the maxim of S. Francis of Sales : I order you to make it your own. The new experience which you are certainly going to make of the visible help of Heaven will make you inexcusable, if in all the future, you are not established in a self-abandonment and confidence without reserves or limits.

Sister N. has been unfaithful in the same way, but she has less excuse than you for she did not give way to the representations made to her. Kindly tell her that I was but little edified by her conduct. The hope of preserving her recollection caused her to lose the opportunity of practising many virtues. If she had submitted [to the will of the Community] with more simplicity, she could have exercised at once her obedience, her charity and her zeal. Not to speak of renunciation which she would have practised in a high degree in surmounting her repugnance and offering herself to the service of the Community in the post offered her. The incapacity that she believed she saw in herself should have decided her acceptance, for the Community's loss through that incapacity was no business of hers since she had in no way sought after the post, while for herself nothing but merit could have resulted. How many little acts of humility, patience, endurance, self-denial, constraint, vigilance and charity might not have been the result of her incapacity ! But she lacked the courage to face these sacrifices and yielded to self-love believing herself to be following the

counsels of humility. Let her now at least profoundly humble herself before God : may she learn how to become very small in her own eyes, and omit nothing in order to repair the disedification she has given to her sisters.

LETTER XXVIII

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

The Same Subject.

ANYTHING and everything that curbs the urgency of our passions and keeps them in abeyance is a notable grace of God. Surrender yourself, therefore, to those influences which guide you to that blessed peace. Allow nothing that comes in the guise of desire or hope or fear or sadness or joy or voluntary dejection to have easy access either to your mind or your heart. So shall the peace of God gradually make your secret soul its dwelling place. The less perceptible that peace is, the more precious it will be, coming, as it does, from God alone.

When we have no wish to meddle in an affair that is none of ours, a delightful solitude is always at hand. But when we are prompted by Divine Providence, difficulty and anxiety are to be preferred to that solitude. Certainly the former position is pleasanter and more comforting ; yet since it is harder, the latter is more meritorious, assuming it to be God's command that drives us to it, against our inclination.

To conclude : while there are various ways that lead to God each of us must keep strictly to his own, unenvious of the rest. Have no will but God's will : all earthly delights and all hope of eternal happiness are compressed into that brief phrase. In every case let us regard our eagerness, especially our good works, with distrust. Let us endure patiently all God sends.

Finally, having done all that within reason we can, and should, do according to the light God has given us, let us live in tranquil peace, wholly surrendered to his adorable will.

LETTER XXIX

TO THE SAME SISTER

The Same Subject Applied to the Writer Himself.

DEAR Sister,—So you want to know when I am coming back? That I do not know myself. I can not know it nor do I wish to know it. Each day and every day I surrender myself utterly and in all things to Divine Providence. So far as you are able, do the same. There is no better thing than this.

How I wish, dear Sister, that you might taste of that secret manna which with the truly faithful serves instead of more elaborate fare. Let us desire none but God: then will He grant us all our desires. Let us abandon ourselves wholly and blindly to His will: so shall we be freed from all our burdens. Plainly then, when all is said and done, there are few things we need do in order to walk steadily in the ways of salvation and perfection. Plainly, too, it is enough if without taking overmuch thought either as to the past or to the future, in the present we look trustfully upon God as a kind Father who leads us by the hand.

God forbid me to take even the slightest step to emerge from my present utter ignorance, surrendered to God, with neither burdens nor cares like a little child in the bosom of its good and tender-hearted mother, to want everything and yet to want nothing—everything that God wills, nothing that He does not will. In this self-abandonment I find peace and a profound tranquillity—both of heart and mind that

rids me alike of vain thoughts, restless cravings and all anxiety for the future.

Every circumstance, every place and every post in which God has set me have had so much mingled good and evil attendant upon them that when I find myself so situated again in no case can I be sure of choosing the good from the evil. God alone knows what is best for us : he loves us more than we love ourselves : can we then do better than leave all our desires and all our decisions to him ? Can we then forget that for us the great and important matter in this world is eternal salvation ? Granted success in this one fundamental, we have achieved everything, and there is nothing about which we need be apprehensive.

Lastly, as to any pleasure I may wish to make mine : there is surely none sweeter than to be like the bird on the bough and to know as little security in my life. Such uncertainty leads to a greater self-abandonment and in that abandonment lies my tranquillity. Relieved of the need to direct myself I am left convinced that I shall unerringly reach my journey's end. For God's arm shall support me as I keep step with His Divine Providence. In which of His creatures is to be found the perfection and the friendship that could give me as comforting a conviction ?

LETTER XXX

TO THE SAME

Self-abandonment in Illness.

YOUR incurable sickness would make me compassionate indeed, did I not realise so clearly that it is storing up a great treasure for you in eternity. Whether it be regarded as martyrdom or as purgatory, it is the inexhaustible source of every kind of sacrifice and of

unceasing acts of self-abandonment. I assure you that all such sufferings, borne as you bear them with neither murmuring nor complaint, are calculated to sanctify you. Had you been content to show the patience of all good Christians, there would have been much merit in it. Yet, in spite of what you say, you are doing more than that. Neither the involuntary revolt of the flesh nor those passing moments of impatience that have escaped despite yourself, hinder you in your secret heart from living in union with God. As your life can fairly be called one of wearisome hardship and of painful crucifixion, equally it follows that it can serve as your purgatory in this world and can deliver you from the purgatory to come, or at least shorten your term there.

Here you have the reason why I dare not beseech God for your deliverance from an evil of which the end must swiftly come and for which through all eternity you will need to give Him thanks as for a notable gift of His grace.

One thing only I can ask of Him on your behalf : that His love shall be made even more abounding and with it those virtues of submission, of penitence and of complete self-abandonment which add to the merit of your sufferings.

To dwell but little on the thought of death is one of God's graces. As for your sufferings and your external trials, endure them as you have endured your physical ills. God asks no more of you than that : a *fiat* said once each day in regard to your exterior sufferings, must effect your salvation and even your perfection. Everything that books and spiritual directors have to tell you can be condensed into one short word : *fiat*. At every season and in every circumstance just—*fiat* ! In respect to that penitent and crucified life to which it has pleased Providence to reduce you, in especial—*fiat* ! Tobias in his blindness, Job on his dunghill and

many other saints, both men and women, who too have known the racking of anguish—all these have achieved no more. Admittedly they achieved it with fewer faults as well as more perfection and more love. Let us strive to emulate their virtues, even as we share their tribulations : then most surely a day shall come when we shall share also their triumph.

LETTER XXXI

TO SISTER MARIE-ANTOINETTE DE MAHUET (1735)

The Same Subject.

DEAR Sister,—Although your illness may not be very serious, I feel sure that you behave like many generous souls who, in their least infirmities, allow the worst to come to the worst, that they may have the opportunity of making God still greater sacrifices.

A very usual question is this : before you can make an offering of your life to God, must you not feel prepared, whereas you feel so unprepared. To such fears I urge you to make the answer of those generous souls I am discussing.

Ready, or unready, prepared, or unprepared, I am always ready, always prepared to do the Will of God. On this subject your blessed Father S. Francis of Sales made a remark that was as notable as it is comforting to all manner of men : take the case, he said, of the worst sinner in the world who with his dying breath makes ungrudging offering of his life to God by the complete surrender of himself to God's Divine purpose and his beneficent Providence. No matter how great that sinner's crimes, God would in no case condemn him. I, too, believe this, since such an offering is a perfect act of love, able, like baptism or martyrdom, of itself to wipe away all sins. Let us then frequently

perform these acts of love by restoring to God's custody all that he has lent us since he could not give it to us in our own right. And since in the language of Jesus Christ we must once more become as children, let us emulate those little ones whose father, as part of their training, asks them to return one or more of the toys and the sweets which he has given them. Only silliness or selfishness will prevent us from saying to him : dear Father, take what you want—they're all yours. Actually the child gives what is not his to give. Yet his father's heart is moved by these small indications of a lovable disposition. He calls the little one his dear and beloved child, he kisses it ; from that time onward, towards that child he is even more generous than before. When He gives us the opportunity of making an offering to Himself, this is the attitude God in His kindness adopts towards us.

LETTER XXXII

TO SISTER MARIE-THERÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

Help for One's Neighbour and Oneself.

DEAR Sister,—There is a great grace in witnessing the ill-behaviour of others with neither harshness, nor indignation, nor impatience, nor even with agitation. If for some good reason you comment on it, curb both your emotion and your tongue that nothing displeasing to God escape you. Further, say nothing at all except your motive be good. On all occasions bear yourself with meek humility, and, when alone, regret those faults that tend to creep into such conversations. Beseech God constantly to give you abundance both of charity and circumspection, and so be at peace. Make yours the blessedness of desiring to be wholly God's ; in your prayers let there be faith, trust and self-aban-

donment. Above all abase yourself humbly before His Divine Majesty. It is for Him to finish the work He has begun in you : there is none other that can accomplish it. Yet remember that many sacrifices are necessary before God possesses our hearts with His pure love. Let us long for that happiness, let us beg for it unweariedly ; let us buy it with unstinted sacrifice ; nor count its cost too dear, however high it be. As it is love alone that can keep our hearts alive, so it is only in God's that the heart can find the nourishment to glut its hungry need. Let then this Divine love come to us ; let it possess our hearts ; let it uphold them ; let it wrap them round ; let it transform them into itself ! Let us abandon ourselves unreservedly to God ; let our thought concern itself only with following the way which God through all eternity has marked out for us and which we now are treading. Argument about predestination can be endless, and such argument merely serves to make our salvation the more remote. This one thing is certain : there is no better means of making the predestination of our salvation sure than the ceaseless performance in the present of God's Will.

LETTER XXXIII

TO THE SAME

Help for Oneself.

DEAR Sister,—We have to submit ourselves to God in all things and for all things, whether it be the station and the circumstances in which He has placed us, the good and ill fortune which He has allotted us, even the character, intelligence, disposition, temperament and tendencies with which he has equipped us. Practise patience in your own affairs and perfect submission to the Will of God. When you have made such patience

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yours, you will enjoy that great peace which nothing can disturb, into which no self-dissatisfaction can enter, and from which you will draw the same sweet help as you must give to others. This matter is more important than you think : just now there is nothing, possibly, more essential to your sanctification. Never lose sight of it, then, but constantly perform acts of submission to God's blessed Will, and acts of charity, strength and sweetness for yourself even more than for others.

Before this is possible you will need to put great constraint upon yourself.

A soul to which God has revealed its shortcomings is far more of a burden to itself than its neighbour can be. For, however near he be, that neighbour is not always by our side, while in no case is he within us. We are our own burden, on the other hand ; we cannot escape ourselves for a single moment, nor lose ourselves from sight and feeling, nor cease from trailing everywhere we go our imperfections and our failings. The supreme manifestation of God's infinite goodness lies in the fact that the sorrow and the shame these failings cause us cure us of them, always provided that the shame does not become vexation and that the sorrow is inspired by love of God and not by self-love. Sorrow born of self-love is full of perturbation and bitterness : far from healing our soul's wounds it serves only to pour poison into them. On the contrary, sorrow springing from love of God is serene and full of abandonment. While it abhors the fault, it delights in the humiliation which is its sequel : as a consequence it gives all the credit to the humiliation, thus making loss itself an opportunity for gain.

No longer, then, torment yourself on account of your failings and of the imperfection of your works. Make God an offering of the sorrow that imperfection brings you, and allow His merciful Providence to redeem these small infidelities by small afflictions and troubles of

every kind. Let patience be your one weapon ; after a fall pick yourself up as speedily as possible, lamenting the tumble only with meek and tranquil humility. God wills it thus. Moreover, by such unwearied patience, you render Him more glory and yourself make more progress than you could ever do by the most violent effort.

LETTER XXXIV

TO THE SAME

*Preparation for the Sacraments, Prayers, Reading ;
Instruction for Behaviour.*

THE best and most useful preparation for the Sacraments—believe me, dear Sister—is peace of soul, trust and surrender to God combined with the desire for union with Jesus Christ. The devil, however, seeks to put you on the wrong scent ; he omits nothing that may disturb your interior peace, since he is well aware that this Divine peace, once established in the soul, will make everything easy for us and, metaphorically, we shall fly rather than walk the ways of perfection. So let us not be disconcerted by the pretexts he will make use of, however plausible these be. Rather, let us go to God humbly yet, as S. Francis de Sales says, with the simplicity and confidence known to an upright heart that sincerely seeks God.

As for prayer, you will not have forgotten what I have so often enjoined on you : never allow yourself to be discouraged or troubled by your distractions. Only endeavour that your withdrawals shall be so constant throughout the day that, if need be, these alone shall serve you instead of prayer. So only you never omit to pray whenever prayer is possible.

Apply yourself particularly to reading the letters of

S. Francis de Sales : you will find them so pertinent to your case and your present circumstances that reading them, it will seem to you that the great Saint had written them from Heaven and that the Holy Spirit had dictated them especially for yourself.

Would you like to know what I in particular am asking of God for you? They are things so easily achieved that their very easiness will delight you :

1. Outward moderation that shall notably assist you in subduing step by step the impetuosity of your passions with the result that your words and your deeds shall be neither headstrong nor hasty, but gentle as they would be were you of a placid disposition ;

2. Interior gentleness, both towards yourself and your fellows in a degree that shall forbid the manifestation exteriorly of anything the reverse of that quality, or that, should you forget yourself momentarily, will enable you to make amends and at once to retrieve the ground lost ;

3. Complete self-abandonment to Divine Providence for success in all your aims, not excepting that of your advancement in virtue—such success to be desired only to the extent that God wills it for you and with the invaluable declaration : I desire only what God desires ;

4. A peace of soul that nothing—not even your shortcomings or your sins—may perturb and that shall constrain you to go back to God in a state of humiliation at once tranquil and sweet, as though you had not had the misfortune to offend against His Divine goodness, or as though you were certain of forgiveness. Act simply on this advice, and you will see how God will help you.



LETTER XXXV

TO A WOMAN IN THE WORLD

Behaviour When Spending Time in the Country.

THIS is what you must do throughout your stay in the country. The obedience you give to my directions will bless this time of rest and ensure you all its benefits.

1. Go to the Blessed Sacrament as often as it is thought fit for you to go ;

2. Each morning offer up to God with the pleasures of the day the trials both exterior and interior with which it shall please his goodness to season them, and at intervals repeat the words : ‘ For all things and in all things may God be blessed. Lord may your Holy Will be done ! ’

3. Now that you are busied with others, spend more time in nourishing your soul with good reading. To make this nourishment the more beneficial, let this be your method of taking it. Begin by entering the presence of God and by begging his help. Read softly and slowly, a word at a time, that you may interpret your subject with your soul rather than with your intelligence. At the end of each paragraph containing a finished thought, pause for as long as it would take you to say an *Our Father*, or for even a little longer, to appreciate what you have read or to rest yourself and to gain interior tranquillity before God. Should this rest and tranquillity last longer, so much the better ; but when you notice that your attention is wandering, go back to your reading, constantly making similar pauses as you continue ;

4. If you find the above method useful to your soul, there is nothing to prevent you adopting it during the time set aside for meditation ;

5. Busy yourself during the day with such useful

work as obedience has entrusted to you and as is in the plan of Divine Providence ;

6. Be at pains to cast out all vain and useless thoughts, as soon as you are aware of them ; yet do this peacefully, without effort or violence ;

7. Cast out in particular all unquiet thoughts, relinquishing to Divine Providence everything tending to preoccupy you ;

8. When you lift your heart to God say not once but many times : ‘ Lord, deliver me from those many seemingly good reflections that encourage my intellectual conceit and the pernicious trust I have in myself. Fill my mind with your Divine Spirit ; transform and renew all my soul’s resources with your Holy Spirit and its blessed operations.’ Repeat on other occasions : ‘ When will it please you, O God, to teach me the great secret of remaining interiorly at rest and in silence, that in my soul you may effect those many changes of which you know I stand in need ? Lord, I long for them with all my heart, and I implore you for them most urgently, through Jesus Christ your Son, in order that gradually you may establish within me the kingdom of your ineffable peace, of your grace, and of your blessed love. Since in this you desire the co-operation of your poor and unworthy creatures, helped by you I wish to prepare myself for it, by faithfulness in all the little exercises to which I have been directed. I hope that you will bless me and will assist my blind submission ; and I offer you in advance the intellectual difficulties and the emotional rebelliousness permitted by you in order to test me. To this test I resign myself and of those difficulties and rebelliousness I henceforth make you a sacrifice.

LETTER XXXVI

TO SISTER M. ANTOINETTE DE MAHUET (1742)

Life and Death—Consolations and Ordeals.

I AM back again at Albi with its mild climate and its friendly folk whose only fault from the point of view of a lover of solitude like myself is that they are too friendly. The many invitations which I receive will become a real cross to me while God will doubtless send me others to moderate the delight I know in seeing for the fourth time a country-side I have always greatly loved. God be blessed for all things ! He scatters His crosses on every side ; I, however, have made all my sacrifices—have accepted and made offering in advance of all the trials it shall please Him to send me. This attitude adopted well beforehand, makes such trials far milder when they materialise and much less considerable than the imagination pictured them. Nevertheless I am delighted to be where God would have me as the direct result of His loving Providence that for ever leads me by the hand. His fatherly care, of which I perceive myself to be the constant subject, still further strengthens my trust.

Though my health is consistently good, I am conscious that the swiftly passing years bring us nearer to that eternity to which we all must come. Admittedly this reflection is distasteful to our humanity. Yet, do we but regard it as beneficial, it becomes pleasant rather than otherwise, much as a disagreeable medicine gradually loses its repulsiveness as we grow aware of its efficacy. A few days back one of my friends remarked to me that in growing old like myself he found that time seemed to pass incredibly fast, that weeks appeared to him now as short as days in the past, and months as weeks, and years as months.

In point of fact, alas ! what do a few years more or a few years less amount to when we are to exist as long as God himself? Those who have preceded us by twenty or thirty or even a hundred years and those who in twenty or thirty years must come to join us will neither have lost nor have gained ground in that vast eternity ; to all of us it will seem that we are equally upon its brink. How greatly this thought mitigates the tribulations of this short and miserable life, turning them to account by reason of the patience with which we bear them ! What is a little longer or a little shorter stretch of life, a few more or a few less tribulations, in comparison with the eternal life awaiting us to which we walk—we run—without a pause and which already is within hand's reach ? Particularly in my own case who perceive myself upon the bank, with embarkation immediately ahead of me. It is time, then, I must say with S. Francis de Sales and Fr. Surin, to make ready my little provisions for eternity. Now, crosses lovingly borne and great sacrifices made to God's Will are the best such provisions. Nothing will comfort us so much in death as our humble submission to the various plans of Divine Providence, despite the insidious promptings of self-love that so often come under the most spiritual guises and with most plausible pretexts.

Be not then surprised, dear Sister, at the compulsion God puts upon you to practise this self-abandonment. The vicissitudes that He allots you of good fortune and of bad, of health and of sickness, are well calculated to keep you wholly dependent upon Him and to constrain you to perform the most meritorious acts of trust. Our troubles, rightly used, become greatly lessened and proportionately profitable. Worthy endurance of them is a great sacrifice comparable to that of those noble Christians who of old confessed their faith at the stake ; since life's sufferings and the

sorrows of circumstance provide the martyrdoms of Providence, even as the tortures of tyrants provided martyrdoms for faith and religion. No less true, I agree, is your own comparison : our life is like the wanderings of the Israelites through the desert with their countless tribulations and well-merited punishments at the hands of Divine justice. Let us emulate the righteous Jews in recognising God's equity in the punishment He imposes upon us ; let us look upon our afflictions, whether general or particular, as God's work and not man's injustice. God, S. Augustine said, would permit no evil that His power and His goodness could not avail to turn to the great advantage of His elect. Let us, then, make use of present ills to avoid those that are everlasting and to deserve the rewards promised to faith and to patience. The time will come and that shortly, when we shall say with David : ' We have rejoiced for the days in which thou hast humbled us : for the years in which we have seen evils.'

LETTER XXXVII

TO THE SAME

The Same Subject.

NANCY, 21 February, 1735.

DEAR Sister,—In the sacristy I saw a notice of the death of dear Sister Anne-Catherine de Preudhomme.¹

¹ The Sister came of a noble Louvain family, and took her vows in the convent of the Visitation Sante-Marie de Nancy, in 1666, at the age of twenty-one. Her most notable quality was self-abandonment to Divine Providence : her submission to the Will of God was perfect, her *fiat* constant whatever befell. At every opportunity she would say : ' My Divine king, my great sovereign, it is you who will, or will not, this thing. For me that is

I have not the smallest regret for the death of one whose lot is rather a matter for envy.

In the presence of death terror and trust must mingle, though the latter should predominate. Sister ——'s need is self-abandonment. On this subject I refer her to B. Paula's letter. The latter no longer worries she tells me, as she used, over graces needful in life and still more needful at death, because she has found reassurance in God : the very word father gives her both trust and self-abandonment. Even though you have no sense of it, still you must make that fact itself a reason for self-abandonment to God. Such unfelt abandonment shall be the more worth-while in so far as it embraces a great sacrifice.

B. Paula's letter provides me with spiritual reading. When I had answered it, it seemed to me that I had more clearly understood and appreciated a number of interior things that are essentially delicate and profound. I am no more in love with the pursuit of alleviations of spiritual than of those of physical poverty and wretchedness. This arises from overmuch tenderness towards oneself. I long for strong and courageous souls able to endure the apparent absences of the heavenly Spouse—those absences that are never more than apparent and that are designed to detach

enough : bless you for all things and in all things.' Her great trust in God endowed her with many graces. She made her last illness one long act of faith and adoration, of trust and contrition, of union with Jesus Christ crucified, of love for God and surrender to his paternal goodness. Throughout, she appeared peaceful and joyous and full of thanksgiving. The union with God she maintained until she drew her last breath, dying tranquilly at last from sheer weakness. Ninety when she died, to her end she kept the mental faculties she had always cultivated in life. (Extract from the life of this dear Sister, by Mother L. F. de Rosen.)

us from sensibility, even from spiritual sensibility. For God's gifts are not God. He alone is all ; He alone is worth all ; He alone must be all for us.

Excessive fears spring only from lack of trust and self-abandonment. That is why I have referred Sister N. to the case of B. Paula. Like yourself, God is so intent upon her in her poverty that He gives me nothing for the rest of you. Yet I hope that you will draw some profit from a long letter written this morning to a certain correspondent whom I asked to copy it and return the original to me for someone else—it was none other than Sister — whom God put into my mind. My warm greetings in God to all the Sisters and to Sister Marie-Anne-Thérèse in particular ; my especial respects to your honoured Mother L. F. de Rosen.

BOOK III
OBSTACLES TO SELF-ABANDONMENT

LETTER I

TO SISTER M. THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

Vain Feelings.—Recurring Infidelities.

DEAR Sister and beloved daughter in our Lord, the peace of Jesus Christ be for ever with you.

You should know that before He cures you of vanity, God wishes you to realise the utter repulsiveness of this accursed passion and to be altogether convinced of your own helplessness to cure it, to the end that all the glory of that cure shall be His alone. In this matter you have but two things to do :

1. To look peacefully at this hideous interior repulsiveness.

2. As peacefully to hope and expect of God alone the moment ordained for your cure. You will be tranquil only when you learn how to distinguish what is God's from what is the self's, and to separate what belongs to Him and what is your own.

You ask : Why can not you teach me that secret ? As to that, you do not know what you are asking. Certainly I can teach it to you forthwith ; yet you can practise it interiorly only on condition that you shall be peacefully conscious of your own pitifulness. I specify *peacefully* so that grace may have its opportunity of working.

Bear in mind the saying of S. Francis de Sales : You do not put on perfection as you put on a dress. In this the secret you ask of me is to be found for the seeking. Impress it thoroughly upon yourself that your longing may sink slowly into your soul : Everything good in you originates in God ; everything evil, spoilt, and corrupt originates in yourself. Set aside, then, insignificance and sin, evil habits and inclinations, abysmal weakness and wretchedness. These are your portion ; these originate in, and unquestionably belong to, you. Everything else—the body and its senses, the soul and its energies, the modicum of good you have performed—are God's portion. It so manifestly belongs to Him that you realise you cannot claim one whit of it as yours, nor feel one grain of complacency, without being guilty of theft and larceny against God.

At frequent intervals repeat interiorly : ' Lord, have pity upon me ; with You all things are possible.' There is nothing better or more simple than this ; nothing more is needed to call forth His powerful help. Hold steadily to these practices and interior inclinations. God will do the rest without your perceiving it.

I am inwardly convinced that, failing some great unfaithfulness on your part, by His blessed works God will effect many things in you. Regard this as certain ; do nothing willingly to obstruct it. Should you perceive that unhappily you have done so, humble yourself without delay ; return to God and to your true self, showing always complete trust in Divine goodness.

3. A keen consciousness of your pitifulness and of your unending need of God's help, is a great grace that tends to every kind of good and especially to the exaltation of that humility and self-obliteration before God in which He rejoices.

4. You do not understand as I do the effects and the workings of grace in your soul. If you were aware

of them you would be greatly content. Your weakness and lack of virtue as yet leave you in no state to endure such knowledge. This fruit of grace needs to remain hidden, as if buried in the deep pit of your wretchedness and beneath the keenest comprehension of your weakness. It is upon this dung-heap that God rears the fruits of His grace. For our own wretchedness is so abysmal that we compel God to conceal His gifts from us and the interior riches with which He embellishes us. Otherwise, the smallest breath of vanity or complacency, however imperceptible, would rot and destroy these flowers and fruits. Once you are in a state to wear and enjoy them without danger, God will cause your eyes to open. Your only endeavour, then, shall be to praise and bless Him, forgetting yourself and rendering all the glory of your deliverance to your Divine Liberator. Meantime, follow the present guidance of His Holy Spirit, and do not terrify your heart. Be sure that there is no sin in all you are experiencing at this time, since you endure it with so much grief and you would know such happiness could you extirpate these wretched results of your sensibility. Uphold yourself in this blessed longing ; offer up your prayers ; be patient in your petitions ; above all humiliate yourself before God : He it is who will complete the work He has begun in you ; there is none other able to perform it. Recognise that this is the graceful sacrifice God asks of you before filling your heart with the ineffable delight of His pure love. You will know peace only when His merciful purpose has been fulfilled ; for without love your heart can not live. Pray therefore that its hunger be glutted by the unique love of God, and that He and only He may delight and possess, kindle and enrapture our hearts.

5. The abyss of wretchedness and corruption into which, it would seem, God takes delight in seeing you

thrust deep, is, believe me, a supreme grace. For it is the basis of all distrust of self and of utter trust in God. For these two are the poles of the interior life. Certainly it is the grace I myself most prefer and most often find in developed souls. However horrifying, therefore, the thoughts you have of yourself, they are nevertheless true and deserved ; for if God left you to yourself you would be a mass of sin, a monster of iniquity. He, however, reveals this great truth only to a very few, since there are not many capable of sustaining it as they ought—in peace, that is, in trust in God alone, and with neither perturbation nor discouragement.

6. The one cure for repeated unfaithfulness is to lament it, to be peacefully humble over it, and to turn again to God as soon as may be. Until we die life's difficulties and humiliations will be with us because of our besetting ingratitude and unfaithfulness. Yet provided that this is the result of our body's weakness and not of the willingness of our spirit, all is well. For God recognises our weakness ; he is aware of our wretchedness and our powerlessness to shun all unfaithfulness. He perceives, further, that it is for our good to be reduced to that pitiful state since, failing it, we should be unable to resist the assaults of presumptuous pride and of secret trust in ourselves. Guard against discouragement, even though you witness the failure of your repeated resolutions to serve God. Take advantage of this recurring experience to explore ever more thoroughly the deep pit of your nothingness and of your corruption. From it learn utter distrust of yourself and complete reliance on God. Often repeat these words : I shall do nothing, Lord, unless you allow me to do it. Enlightened by disastrous experience my sole reliance is upon your all-powerful grace. The more unworthy of it I find myself, the greater my hope, since my unworthiness makes your mercy the more apparent. Your trust in God can never be pushed too

far. Infinite goodness and mercy should induce trust as infinite.

7. One of self-love's subtle and unperceived illusions is to seek to discover the stage reached in your mystical dying, under pretext of getting to know what it must do to make that death in you still more thorough. In this life you will never make this discovery, nor is it to your advantage to do so. For even in the case of a soul that has completely died to the self, there is the risk of the self's revival if this discovery be made. This, because self-love's satisfaction at such an assurance would be so excessive that it would revive, and enter upon a new life more subtle and more difficult to destroy than the old. O God! how insidious is self-love! Twisting like a snake, only too often it succeeds in preserving its life in the face of mortal threats. There is no illusion more deceptive than this. Go in dread of this accursed self-love, remembering that, despite every effort of yours, it will die finally and irretrievably only in the last moment of your life.

8. That perception of God's holiness which without too great constraint upon yourself you contrive to preserve amid so much bewilderment and trouble is, believe me, a great grace, more valuable and more sure than the consolation preceding it. My only wish is that you may persist in it. Offer no resistance, therefore, but allow the self to be abased, humiliated and destroyed. There is nothing more calculated to purify the soul, nor can you bring to Holy Communion a frame of mind more harmonious with that state of obliteration to which Jesus Christ is reduced in that mystery. He will be unable to repulse you when you come into his presence with abysmal wretchedness and in humility verging on self-annihilation.

If, having asked for grace, you have neither the impulse nor the ability to live interiorly, you must

remain silent and at peace. Discouragement, so far from being evidence of pure intention, is a dangerous temptation ; for progress is to be desired only to give pleasure to God and not to the self. Your need, then, is to be content invariably with what God wishes or allows, inasmuch as His Will alone must be the standard and the definite boundary of our desires, however holy they be. Again the notion that you will reach some particular state must not be entertained, otherwise you will become self-satisfied. That would be a great misfortune. The surest sign of our advancement is the conviction of our wretchedness. Then shall we be as rich as we think ourselves poor ; our interior humiliation will increase, and with it our distrust of ourselves and our readiness to depend upon God alone. God has begun to make you this gift : be not anxious, therefore, nor discouraged. Say to yourself daily : to-day I am going to make a start.

I very much approve of the practice you have adopted of consistently curbing your feelings and of awarding blame and censure even in circumstances in which you believe you had good cause to excuse yourself. You offer up, you tell me, the good opinion which you wish others to have of you ; you keep silent, although, until now, you would have thought it more edifying to defend yourself against unjust remarks. Here is my comment : endure in silence very kind of censure and unjust accusation, on no pretext whatsoever allowing even a single word to escape you in your defence. This accords with the spirit of the Gospel and with the example set by Jesus Christ and all the Saints. Your belief in the reverse of this is simple illusion. Keep steadily then to your new and blessed line of conduct. You are right in saying that we are burdened with a mass of corruption inescapable in our humanity, that resembles a muddy and noisome pool which, when disturbed, gives off an

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intolerable stench. In this there is a truth that does not vary and God has granted you a great grace in giving you so lively a perception of it. That holy hatred and complete self-distrust of which humility is largely made up, will gradually spring from that perception.

LETTER II¹

The Failings of Beginners.

I AM not surprised at the peacefulness of the person you mention. It comes of the humility which she has shown in overcoming her repugnance to open her heart, and as a sequel to the advice with which God then unfailingly inspires in those who speak in His name. Make her realise fully that God has begun to try her thus in order to chastise and cure in her a subtle streak of hidden pride that she has long harboured unwittingly. The greater her perturbation of spirit, the more manifest is made the extent of her vanity which becomes disconcerted and rebellious at the least humiliation, interior though it be. She must seek, then, to rid herself step by step of that secret complacency which lurks in the innermost recesses of her heart, no matter whether this has to do with human qualities or with virtues she possesses or thinks

¹ This letter was addressed in 1731 by Fr. de Caussade to Sister Marie-Anne-Thérèse de Rosen, in relation to a person in retreat. There are grounds for believing that its subject was Mme or Mlle de Lesen whom God had brought to himself by putting her to the test of losing her wealth. She made a vow to become a nun, but for a considerable time was kept in the world in which she led a devout life. In 1731 and 1732 she made retreats in the convent of the Visitation de Nancy, where her directress was Sister-Marie-Anne-Thérèse de Rosen. Not long afterwards—in 1733—she entered the house of the Annonciades de Saint-Mihiel.

to possess. For, unless care be taken, this gives occasion for vain self-gratification ; and while you do not confess it to yourself, you imagine yourself superior to others in many respects. A subtle self-love is nourished by these spiritual vanities even as worldly pride is fed by physical charms. Just as the proud worldling delights in giving all her thoughts to her beauty or in gazing at it in the mirror, so the spiritually vain person rejoices interiorly in all the natural or supernatural gifts she flatters herself to have received from heaven. The cure for this diabolical evil—it was the sin of the revolting angels—lies in :

1. Imitation of those modest women who never look at themselves in the mirror or who drive from their minds every vain thought of their beauty or attractive externals ;

2. Constraint constantly imposed upon self-love to scrutinise closely all its failings, weaknesses and miseries, to appreciate the abjection they induce, and to make scorn its daily fare ;

3. Consideration of what we have been, are, and would become, did God withdraw his support from us. Neglect to cultivate this humiliating line of thought sees God constrained, out of His paternal goodness, to adopt other means of destroying the secret vanity of souls he wishes to lead to lofty perfection : He sanctions temptations or even lapses that throw them into abysmal confusion and heal them of such puffed-up pride of mind and heart. When God prepares this bitter remedy for us we must submit humbly with neither vexation nor voluntary agitation ;

4. Refusal to believe that by dint of thought we can lessen our difficulties ; instead we must lie restfully upon the bosom of God's mercy, allowing the storm to pass overhead without strife or interior perturbation : otherwise the evil is then accentuated instead of diminished ;

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5. Refusal to petition for deliverance from our difficulties, since they have been ordained by a kindly decree of Providence ; rather we must become wholly resigned and patient both with ourselves and others.

6. Substitution for intellectual pride of the need to become childlike through the practice of great simplicity, frankness, ingenuousness and open-heartedness towards those who direct us.

TO SISTER CHARLOTTE-ELIZABETH BOURCIER DE
LETTER III

MONTHUREUX (1735)

Interior Troubles Voluntarily Entertained ; Weakness.

DEAR Sister,—For some days I have had so many letters to write both in this country and to France that I have not been able to read your long report. I shall not disguise from you that to me it seemed to serve very little purpose. For God has granted me the grace of a thorough knowledge of your state without need on my part to read what you have written. Nevertheless I have read the significant paragraph specially marked by you and it merely confirms me in the conviction I have long held about you. Allow me, then, dear Sister, to stress the direction I have consistently given you. Up till now you have greatly benefited by following it ; why then let yourself be diverted from it by the devil's fallacies ? I do not write at a venture but from complete certainty. Please then believe me, and prove to me by your docility that the trust with which you have honoured me is not a mockery.

If your intentions are truly good, if you are sincerely and energetically resolved to belong to God, you must make every effort to live in a state of peace that the

message of the angels may not be falsified—peace to men of good will. You must expect, however, that Satan will make every effort to prevent you from attaining that wished-for peace. I am convinced that unfortunately he has met with only too much success recently. At present your soul's greatest failing is its perturbation, inquietude and interior agitation. Thanks to God, its ills are not incurable ; yet so long as they remain uncured, they can only be as disastrous to you as they have been grievous. Interior agitation deprives the soul of the ability to listen to and obey the voice of the Divine Spirit ; to receive the delightful impress of His grace, and to busy itself with pious exercises and exterior duties. A sick and agitated mind is in the same case as a fever-weakened body that can perform no serious work until healed of its complaint. As there is an analogy between the diseases of both, so, too, there are likenesses between the remedies to be applied.

Physical health can be restored only by a threefold prescription : rest, good food and obedience to the doctor's orders. The like threefold prescription will bring back peace and health to a soul troubled and sick almost to death. The first requirement for its cure is docility. This docility must be childlike, unquestioning, and founded upon the principle that God, who has appointed ministers in His stead for our guides, cannot permit them to lead astray those souls who, in His presence, abandon themselves blindly to their guidance. Above all base your virtue upon renunciation of your judgement and upon a humble and warmhearted readiness to accept and perform everything your director deems pleasing to God. If you are animated with the spirit of obedience, you will never allow yourself to be set back by any thought contrary to the direction you have received. Equally you will take good care not to yield to the inclination to

question and examine everything. Yet if, despite yourself, thoughts antagonistic to obedience creep into your mind, you will cast them from you ; or still better, you will condemn them as dangerous temptations.

The second treatment for your spiritual sickness is tranquillity and peace of soul. For the attainment of these you must first and foremost long for them and earnestly petition God for them. Secondly, you must bend all your energies towards their acquisition. I will now answer the question you will probably put as to how you are to set about this.

In the first place take care never to harbour voluntarily in your heart any thought calculated to grieve, disquiet or dishearten it. From one point of view, such thoughts are more dangerous than impure temptations. Your need, then, is to allow them to pass by unhindered, despising them and letting them fall like a stone into the sea. You must resist them by concentrating your attention upon counteracting reflections, and especially upon aspirations designed to this end, upon interior sighs and groans with acts of humility to go with them.

Yet while we are to put energy and warmheartedness into our struggle, mildness, tranquillity and peace are as necessary. For unquiet grieving and vexatious restlessness will make the remedy worse than the disease. In the second place you are to avoid purely human ardour, eagerness and activity in all your efforts, whether exterior or interior. On the contrary you must make it your habit to walk and talk, to pray and read, softly and slowly, putting no strain upon yourself in anything, even though it be resistance to the most frightful temptations. Remember that the best repudiation of such temptations is the grief that they bring you. As long as your free will feels only horror and detestation for the ends which those temptations hold out to the imagination, plainly it will give no

consent to them. Remain, then, in peace in the midst of such temptations, no less than in spiritual ordeals.

We come now to the remedy for the weakness evinced by a troubled soul as the result of the fever that afflicts it. For such a soul a strengthening diet is necessary ; in other words :

1. Let good books be read and this reading be done in a low voice with frequent pauses, less to bring to it the reflections of the intelligence than to allow the mind to digest what it reads. This apt saying of Fénelon's should not be forgotten : ' Words we read are but the leavings, while the relish we have in them is the juice upon which our soul is fed and fattened.' We need to do with this spiritual food what the greedy and the sensual do with the *ragouts*, sweetmeats and liqueurs, which even after they have swallowed they still taste and savour.

2. Talk only of useful and edifying subjects with those most capable of drawing us to God by their pious conversation ; at all times shun the pursuit of consolation through vain talk with fellow human beings. This is one of the essentials for those passing through spiritual ordeals. God, who sends us these for our good, wishes us to endure them without seeking consolations other than His own, and ordains that He Himself shall determine the juncture at which these consolations shall be bestowed upon us.

3. Each according to his ability and inclination, must devote himself to interior prayer, and this with neither strife nor violence ; each must bear himself modestly in God's holy presence, turning to Him from time to time with some interior act of adoration, repentance, trust and love. If such an act cannot be performed, be content with the earnest wish to perform it ; for, in good as in evil, the desire with God is equivalent to the deed. Bossuet said somewhere notably : ' In God's sight desire is what the spoken

word is in man's. For as with the spoken word we talk with, petition, and thank our fellows, so in God's case all these are achieved by the mere desires of our hearts. These desires speak to and solicit Him far more eloquently than any words or even any interior act, in the strict sense of the term.' From this it follows that to Him for whom our souls are an open book, a cry repressed in the depths of the soul is worth as much as a cry raised to heaven.

4. You must set yourself to pray with compliant sweetness and loving tenderness both at morning thanksgiving and at all times throughout the day. Pray either by a constant turning of your heart to God or by gazing interiorly upon His Divine presence. To gain greater fluency in prayer, in the morning you can anticipate the various situations, interior and exterior, in which you will probably find yourself during the day, and then set yourself this question : at that juncture or in this or that situation what shall I say to God, what act shall I perform ? If, when the time comes, you are prevented from carrying out these good intentions, be content to cling to them as far as may be and to explain your powerlessness to God.

Finally, this good food of the soul lies in willing at all times and in all places what God wills ; or, to put it otherwise, to obey every command of Divine Providence in every imaginable state of soul, interior and exterior, whether in health, sickness, aridity, distraction, weariness or temptation ; in all these saying with the whole heart : Truly, O God, I long for all things, I accept all things, to You I make offering of all things or at least I desire to do so. In this I beg your grace ; help me and strengthen my weakness. In bitter temptation you must cry to Him : O God, keep me now from all sin. This holy abjection, and interior humiliation and humbling of my pride I gladly accept as much as, and for as long as, it pleases You.

The weakest and most troubled soul adopting the methods just outlined cannot fail to make its own once more its lost peace and joy.

LETTER IV

TO THE SAME (1755)

The Same Subject.

IF my letter has grieved you dear Sister, I shall say, like S. Paul, that I am glad not of the grief but of the good effect it has had. It is good to perceive oneself blameable in many matters, not to reproach oneself for them with harsh bitterness and feverish anxiety, but to humble oneself sweetly and peacefully, showing neither vexation nor hardness against oneself. You appear to lack docility, you say, only because you state honestly your doubts and fears. The trouble is not that, dear Sister, but the fact that you cling too fast to these doubts and fears. You concentrate upon them too much, instead of ignoring them and casting yourself upon God in utter self-abandonment, as I have consistently exhorted you for so long past. Only through this holy and happy self-abandonment can you ever enjoy an enduring peace full of perfect trust in God through Jesus Christ.

Yet once again, what have you to bear in mind in this self-surrender especially after so many plain signs of God's great mercy to you? You seek for conscious support in yourself and in your works and conscience, as if they provided more assurance and stronger support than God's mercy and Jesus Christ's merits, and under the assumption that these cannot lead you astray. I pray God to enlighten you and to change your heart at last in this matter so vitally important to you.

To get back to your letter. I should be surprised, you say, and disconcerted, were you able to disclose to me all you see and feel. People in your state, whom I know no better than you, are constantly saying precisely this to me. My answer to you and those others is this : A lively perception of our failings and imperfections is the grace which befits that state—a very precious grace. And the reason ? (1) Because such intimate perception of our wretchedness maintains us in humility, at times it avails to inspire us with a wholesome horror and holy fear of ourselves ; (2) because this state, outwardly so wretched and so hopeless, makes way for a heroic self-abandonment to the arms of God.

When we have reached the lowest depths of our nothingness, we can have no kind of trust in ourselves, nor in any way rely upon our works ; for in these are to be found only wretchedness, self-love, and corruption. Such complete distrust and utter scorn of the self is the one source from which originate those delightful consolations of souls wholly surrendered to God—their unalterable peace, their blessed joy and their unshakable trust in none but God. Ah, would that you knew the gift of God, the reward and the merit and the power and the peace, the blessed assurances of salvation that are hidden in this abandonment ; then would you soon be rid of all your fears and anxieties ! You imagine yourself lost as soon as you think of surrendering yourself, notwithstanding that there is no more certain path to salvation than that which leads through complete and perfect self-abandonment. I have never met a soul more obdurate than yours in refusing to make this surrender to God. Yet you will have to come to it, if only at death ; for no one, unless by express revelation, can be assured of his eternal salvation or can be free of fear until his dying moment. It is utterly

necessary then to abandon yourself to God's great mercy.

But, you will say, I could believe myself warranted in practising this self-abandonment and ridding myself of my fears only if, living a saintly life, I had performed many good works. You delude yourself, dear Sister. Such a remark on your part can be prompted only by your unhappy self-love that would completely rely on itself, whereas your duty is to put your trust in God alone and in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ. You have never had as firm a wish as you should have to perceive this fundamental truth. You consistently stop to examine your doubts and fears instead of disregarding them in order to cast yourself blindly into God's hands and headlong upon His bosom. In other words, you wish in every case to be given a firm guarantee to make your self-abandonment easier. Assuredly in this there is no true self-surrender to God arising from utter trust in Him alone, but merely an unconfessed desire for the self to be assured before that surrender is made to His infinite goodness. So does a law-breaker act who before he throws himself upon the king's mercy requires his pardon to be guaranteed ! Is this a call then to depend upon God and to base all our hope upon him ? It is for you to draw your own conclusions. In any event there remains that self-abandonment through filial trust to which God has called you for so long past. Yet you turn your back on both these, preferring the crucifying tyranny of slavish fear. I am stressing this point strongly, because I have been taught by experience that it is in regard to it that souls in the state of your own offer up their last resistance to grace and make the final leap that frees them from the self—a leap that is as difficult as it is necessary. I seem to have met with no one who has offered as much resistance as yourself. This arises from an extreme self-love, a great and hidden

presumption and a reliance upon yourself that you may never have suspected. For make no mistake about it, as soon as this complete surrender to God is mentioned, you are aware of a certain interior upheaval, a feeling that all is lost or that you have been asked to close your eyes and hurl yourself into a deep pit. The truth is nothing of the kind ; in fact it is the exact opposite. For the greatest certainty in this life of spiritual safety is to be found in this utter self-abandonment which, in the words of Fénelon, lies in a persistence that draws the self to despair and discovers hope in God alone. Such language may at first sight seem fantastically strong ; give it your earnest consideration.

Now God has given you two kinds of grace to bring you to this full self-abandonment : (1) strong inducements to tempt you to put full confidence in His great mercy and goodness ; (2) surpassing understanding and penetrating awareness of your wretchedness, weakness, perversity and general failure to achieve goodness. In effect He says to you : Know that in your present state you neither ought, nor can, in any wise help yourself, nor be helped by anything coming from that pit of corruption which is yourself. By self-abandonment, by renunciation of all recourse to the self and by fixing all your thought upon Me, do you then leave all your burdens to Me !

What of the question of my salvation, you ask ? Can it be that you still do not know the surest guarantee of that, too, is by dwelling only on God, to place the whole burden of that also upon him ? This, much as a man whom a great king has honoured with his confidence would trust himself entirely to him for his advancement, content to think only of his master's service and interests. Surely you can see that only by such generous methods would he advance his own cause far better than other less disinterested men who

spend their time in a calculating pursuit of their own gains?

Yet is it not a duty to commune with and be watchful over the self? Why yes, upon your entrance into God's service when your need is for detachment from the world, withdrawal from exterior things and correction of bad habits previously formed. But afterwards you are to forget the self and think only of God. In your case your one desire is to remain buried in the self—to put it in this way—and in what you imagine to be your spiritual interests. To deprive you of this last wretched recourse to self-love, God ordains that you find in yourself only a hot-bed of doubts, and fears, griefs and uncertainties, disquietude and defeat. Such is God's way of saying to you : Do but forget yourself and you shall find in Me peace, tranquillity, interior joy and a firm assurance of your salvation. I and I alone am the God of salvation, you in yourself can effect only your perdition.

You may argue further that in this self-forgetfulness you will not even perceive your faults and imperfections, much less correct them. Error, illusion and ignorance are never so clearly perceived as in the clear sight or presence of God. These are like a sun shining interiorly, that, freeing us from the dread of perpetual self-examination, at a stroke reveals to us all we need to know. Equally it serves to consume gradually, as a fire consumes straw, our every fault and imperfection.

What next? No other than the state to which you should have long since come, and of which God has given, and continues to give, frequent experience to me. Because the wretchedness and corruption of the human heart is a bottomless pit, the deeper it is penetrated by God's light of wisdom, the more melancholy and humiliating discoveries are made in it. Yet these discoveries, so far from saddening the soul, by strengthening its interior humility bring it the consola-

tion it knows to be the firm foundation of every spiritual edifice. Instead of shaking and undermining its blessed joy, these discoveries inspire it with resolute trust. A trust that the soul now feels can be placed in God alone ; a trust that, to quote the Scriptures, has never been confounded. I have known, and know to-day, souls following this way to be astonished when they behold their trust in God increase proportionately with their increasing perception of their poverty, weakness and misery. The explanation is that the keener this consciousness of our wretchedness and corruption becomes, the greater grows the self-distrust of those souls possessing it and the greater their corresponding trust in God. Thereupon God makes them aware that such complete distrust in the self combined with that utter trust in Him which is born of self-abandonment are the two great props of the spiritual life. So much so that as long as you remain in this state, there is no risk whatever to your salvation.

Surrender, then, all things to God and in Him you shall find all things more abundantly. So shall you rid yourself once for all of that wretched retrospection, fear, perturbation and anxiety : all the torments, to be brief, to which those calculating souls are condemned who would love God only out of love for themselves and who seek their salvation and perfection less to please God and to glorify Him than to serve their own interest and eternal welfare.

Yet, you will say, God ordains that we should yearn for salvation and eternal happiness. Undoubtedly ; but that yearning must accord with His desire and decree. Now—and it is important that you should know this—this is God's decree : God created us only, and could create us only, to serve His own glory and to fulfil His own purpose ; for His nature and His sovereignty demanded this. Yet, since also He is

infinitely merciful, He willed that His creature should gain his own ends and his eternal welfare by accomplishing God's Will. Precisely the opposite is true of that unhappy self-love which seeks itself in all it does : first and foremost we would serve our own spiritual and eternal interests ; thus preoccupied, we relegate to second place that which has to do with the glory of God.

When this is true of souls whom He has heaped with graces and by whom He would be loved with a pure and disinterested love, God's jealousy is aroused. To bring them back within the limits of His plan, He threatens them and afflicts them interiorly. He wills that such secret tribulation shall overthrow that accumulated self-love which does them so much harm. He wishes to induce them by degrees to think less of themselves and their own interests and instead, by resigning to Him the care and the manner of their salvation, to come to dwell in Him tranquilly. The noble words Jesus Christ has addressed to various saintly souls are relevant here : ' My daughter, think of Me and I will think of you : make My glory your concern and leave Me to make your welfare and eternal happiness My concern.'

What are we about when we are forever preoccupied with ourselves ? We might well be saying : Ah, Lord, what do your words mean ? I should be lost did I not constantly think of my interior needs and did I not as constantly ask how I stand with you and what is to become of me. These must be my ceaseless preoccupation. I can only think occasionally of those things that tend to your glory and gratification. Later I hope to give more time to them. That must be when I have seen the last of my faults disappear and have had it revealed to me that I run no risk in studying your interests uninterruptedly. Until then, I cannot make up my mind to do it. For I should believe myself

lost and do you not wish above all things else for me to ensure the safety of my soul?—In the Holy Scriptures the Divine Saviour has answered clearly and precisely brides of His who use such language : He that loveth his life shall lose it : and he that hateth his life in this world keepeth it unto life eternal.

Indeed, I know no souls with more horror of sin, more strength to practise good and to make great sacrifices to God than those who, in order to be for ever engrossed in God, seem never to think of themselves, relying upon Him for their salvation and all things else. It is precisely this spiritual state that most nearly ensures salvation. I infer from this that not merely scruples but excessive fear, grievous doubt, interior vexation and bitterness of heart derive only from that mercenary love which is concerned more with its individual interest than with God's glory or His Will, or than a singlehearted wish to please Him in all the things more excellent. Since God is the supreme good, love of Him must take precedence of the love we owe ourselves. As too, He has promised to love all who love Him and to love them the more their love for Him, we can be sure that in exerting all our strength to love Him for Himself, in that pure love we shall discover again and more abundantly all that we seem to have sacrificed to him. Thus, utter self-abandonment to God in love and in trust involves not perdition, but the gain of all things.

The spectacle of this confused mass of frailty, wretchedness, unworthiness and every kind of corruption must in no way disconcert us. That is why I say emphatically that it does us good service ; for no soul I have met with, gifted with this acute and humiliating perception, has failed to discover in this a singular grace of God ; or, aided by true self-knowledge, to find that lasting humility of heart upon which all perfection is based. I have known, and know, many

saintly souls whose only riches is a profound knowledge of their wretchedness, and whose greatest contentment is, metaphorically speaking, to see themselves engulfed. Only then are we possessed of truth and, therefore, of God who is the supreme Truth. Do you know that almost the whole of the interior life is embraced in going your ways before Him with your head bowed and your mood one in which self is obliterated? It is merely a question of learning how to do this in submissive peace and trusting self-abandonment. This, then, is my word to you: Do but live so and you will have achieved everything; all the rest God will perform, though what He accomplishes you may well neither see nor feel.

You go in fear of your spiritual state. Yet I bless God for it on your behalf. There is only one change I would wish for you; that to your self-obliteration may be added, as I have said, submissive peace and trusting self-abandonment. Given that, I shall have no further fear for you despite those backslidings which you tell me of, causing you to retrogress. God prevents serious backslidings and permits minor lapses in order to keep you humble. S. Francis de Sales showed heroic courage in consistently picking himself up again after a fall and never losing heart. God be blessed in all things and for all things!

LETTER V

TO SISTER DE LESEN

Love of Reproach.

NANCY, 1735.

THE affection you have for your dear relative does not surprise me. I realise that you owe it to her on several counts. Nevertheless, as on your own confession this affection is also a source of grief to you and an obstacle

to your complete attachment to God, some difficulties must necessarily arise. God's demands upon you if you are to sanctify it and to lift it above the merely human are : (1) that you do not dwell too much and too devotedly upon this woman you love ; for there should be moderation in all things ; (2) that you make to God the sacrifice and surrender of any sickness or affliction she may suffer, to the end that at all times and in all places He may deal with both you and her according to His blessed Will and adorable good pleasure. Realise that in so surrendering her to the Will and the care of Divine Providence you do her no less than yourself the greatest service open to you in that you entrust her to the hands of an infinitely good and infinitely mighty God.

By all means make use of your reason in your difficulties. But, as a learned and saintly Christian has said pertinently, no great reliance must be placed upon so thoroughly weak a thing as reason whose strength is chiefly exerted in resisting good and whose weakness is most manifest when it is a question of vanquishing evil. In religion and the grace that comes of humble prayer is our true strength. The grief, despondency and interior rebelliousness prompted by the tenderness that we feel when life's various mischances befall those near to us can be made the occasion of great virtue and merit, do we but rise through faith above our human feelings and learn to sacrifice these and all things else to the blessed and admirable Will of God. For do we not know that nothing can happen in this world without His decree, and that He has arranged everything for the greatest good of those who have submitted themselves to Him or who at least yearn to make this blessed submission theirs ? Would we were as well aware of the value and the virtue of it ! When it is combined with obedience to the Divine precepts, it offers the widest and most

infallible way to salvation. Most men would find it all that is necessary for their sanctification and for the alleviation of all life's troubles. A wise pagan echoed Christian thought when he said : ' Patience makes the inevitable tolerable.'

It is no easy matter for a tender-hearted person to relinquish what the world calls delicate and generous sentiments, to rid himself of too excessive a preoccupation with his family's honour or too great a concern for its interests or too keen a sensibility concerning those near and dear. Much pondering and strife is needed as well as much prayer. (1) We must ponder upon the uselessness of our anxiety and our sensibility and upon the harm they do us, spiritually and physically alike ; (2) We must strive to spend less time and less eagerness upon these, making sacrificial offerings of them to God whatever heartbreak we may feel at the greatness of this sacrifice, and remembering always that it is a question of necessity and that, provided all is well in the one essential, with the rest it shall be as it pleases God. All these subordinate affairs are transitory trifles, come and gone again never to return. Copy the example of people in the world who in matters of supreme importance affecting honour, life, worldly goods—their all in short—think day and night only of the one great issue, ignoring everything else because to their mind everything else is negligible. As Jesus Christ has said, Let us who are the children of light be instructed how to act by the children of darkness.

Do not forget that our saving seclusion and solitude are not exterior things such as can be enjoyed even in the world ; but an interior seclusion of both mind and heart : of mind in the expulsion of unnecessary thoughts and cares and in the attempt to make God its one concern ; of heart in lamentation and constant humble-heartedness in God's sight as in the search for

gradual self-detachment from all creatures and subsequent attachment to the Creator alone. He is the sole truth ; all other things have reality only in as far as they are in contact with God's existence. It follows that purely temporal affairs—business or preferment, joys or sufferings—are no more than illusory trifles and spectral shadows of this base world.

LETTER VI

TO SISTER MARIE-MARGUERITE BOUDET DE LA BELLIERE

Attachments Involving too much Sensibility.

DEAR daughter in our Lord,—I cannot bless God sufficiently for the desire He has given you to be unreservedly His, and for the courage with which He has inspired you to make Him numerous small sacrifices and to show moderation in your most innocent attachments. How greatly, dear Sister, has God enlightened you in this matter : do but be faithful to that enlightenment and the dangers you will avoid will be many indeed ! There are unhappily only too many to be found who hinder all advancement in the piety they profess by falling into this particular snare. Claiming that there is no sin in the attachments they have formed, they surrender themselves to these without further scruple, and thus insuperably obstruct God's graces and communications. How can His pure love fill and kindle their hearts, as it deserves to do, the while those hearts are preoccupied by vain diversions and given up to the pitiable love of a mere creature ? You know how this snare threatened disaster to S. Teresa : after such an example, surely you cannot be too much upon your guard. Persist, then, in detaching yourself still further, and I promise you that as your detachment increases, so propor-

tionately shall your attachment to God, to prayer and recollection, and to the practice of every kind of virtue. For, when a heart is empty, God fills it and straightway all things we do are done easily and gladly, because they are done with love, which, as you know, both makes all hard things easy and all bitter things sweet.

LETTER VII

The Same Subject.

DEAR Sister,—Let me in all sincerity disclose a fear I have on the subject of yourself. In my opinion your too frequent contacts with your many relatives and others in the world are a stumbling-block to your advancement. Be careful that in wanting to do good to others you do not do harm to yourself. Though, because of my calling, I am more compelled than you to keep these contacts with the world, I must yet confess that I find it for my soul's good to limit them as much as possible. During my stay here I have paid none but necessary visits ; while, so far as I am able, I discourage calls upon myself. I speak of God, salvation and eternity to all those who come to see me, this being a rule prescribed by S. Ignatius as one he himself used with consistently happy results. If they appreciate this kind of talk they will profit by it, and their visit will not have been a waste of time. If they do not appreciate it, they will stop calling, or at least call less often, leaving me more time to give to my duties as priest. Our hope to make some progress in virtue will be in vain as long as our minds are filled with worldly talk and our hearts preoccupied with temporal interests. Recollection is the interior life's first need. I cannot urge you too strongly to limit your contacts and to adopt S. Ignatius's method in those you think you should keep.

This rule befits no one better than a nun whose vocation vows her to seclusion. Far from being astonished at it people will be edified by the faithfulness with which she subordinates her behaviour to it. If, on the other hand, she is seen too often in the world, people will be scandalised ; while, in these vain contacts with men, she will lose every grace that could have been hers through contact with God.

LETTER VIII

TO SISTER MARIE-HENRIETTE DE BOUSMARD

Active Natures.

I WOULD, dear Sister, that you thoroughly understood all the harm your excessively active nature can, and inevitably will, do to yourself, unless you have made it wholly subordinate to the guidance and dominance of grace. This is an example of a failing that the world mistakes for a virtue and that is none the less disastrous to the advancement of a soul upon the way of holiness. Human activity is the enemy of self-abandonment, without which, as I have so often told you, no true perfection is possible. It hinders, spoils, or prevents every operation of grace, and substitutes, in the soul possessed by it, the impulse of its own intelligence for that of the Holy Ghost. Indeed there is no doubt that the active person's impetuous pursuit of good works originates only in a secret reserve of trust in the self and in an unthinking hardihood inclining us to believe that we are doing, or are able to do, a very great deal.

How much more modest and restrained we should be if we were for ever conscious of the undoubted truth that of ourselves we are nothing, as of ourselves we are impotent in all good and relatively, all-powerful in evil ! If we are to be cured and are to eradicate this

plague-spot that breeds imperfections and even sins, much time will be needed and many means must be adopted.

I especially recommend the following : (1) Let us become convinced, as the result of past and present experience, that such activity brings us only to impotence and wretchedness, so that in the end our distrust of our own efforts is such that we view them with a kind of horror. (2) Let us restrain untoward exterior activity by performing all our actions with neither eagerness nor precipitancy but with the mildness and the gentleness advised by S. Francis de Sales. (3) Let us make this true also of our spiritual exercises, on every occasion curbing the initial eagerness that prompts us to this good work or that, and undertaking it only through God's Holy Ghost and at the tranquil prompting of grace. (4) Let us, in prayer and interior dealings with God, endeavour to put away from us all sense-inspired eagerness and that imaginative human fervour found in beginners. To do so, follow the precept of S. Francis de Sales, behaving in such a way that every interior act be strained and filtered through the apex of the soul, and that we ourselves scarcely know we pray and perform these acts. So far from being less profitable because of this, these acts, on the other hand, permeate our soul—and our interior life generally—the more thoroughly and agreeably. (5) On occasions when we perceive, however vaguely, that some interior work is in progress, we must remain the quieter and the more peaceful and the more seemingly inactive, the stronger that impression grows : thus we shall spoil nothing by our meddling. (6) On those occasions when God allows us consolations or transports, we must at all costs avoid surrendering to them with emotional eagerness, behaving with the same discretion and modesty as a humble man invited to a great feast. (7) Let our chief interior occupation

during the day be what is known as simple interior expectancy maintained in silence and tranquillising resignation. We are not to imagine this to be mere idleness and time-wasting futility ; for, just as a poor man who waits all day at a rich man's door or at the entrance to a church, is in no way idle, but wholly taken up with his misery, his indigence and ceaseless need for alms ; so the soul in such simple waiting upon God is busily and unassumingly engaged in all the following acts : of faith in God's presence ; of adoration before God whose almighty and infinite mercy it recognises ; of self-distrust and utter humility in the belief of its own incapacity ; of eagerness that God should work within it ; of hope, since hope and expectancy go together ; of self-abandonment to Providence in everything Providence would bestow or perform. Though not all these acts be precisely defined or clearly felt, they yet exist in the depths of the heart. And there God beholds them if only in the shape of wishes and a ready will. Now, as you know, our wishes and desires, even if but half-formed, are in regard to God what speech is to mankind, He hears them far more clearly than men hear our voices ; He does not need even that our desires be expressed ; for, to quote the Psalmist, He understands even the disposition and inclination of our hearts from the moment when they stir and incline towards Him. Such words are indeed comforting to you in your present condition interiorly.

Patient endurance of obscurity, darkness, barrenness, insensibility and helplessness offers a means more effectual than any other. This sorrowful state is the particular remedy God makes use of to end merely human activity, by reducing us to simple nothingness. We shall never succeed without it ; for the confused activity of our faculties can lose its confusion only in proportion as, by repeated efforts, we contrive that

they function neither of, nor through, themselves, but solely through the grace and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. It should now be plain to you how blind and unjust we are when one of the greatest of God's blessings becomes for us a source of grief and grumbling. A blessing that serves not merely to weaken human activity, but to ensure that, dying to ourselves, we live only the supernatural life of grace.

LETTER IX

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

Too Great Eagerness in Laudable Desires.

DEAR Sister,—The desire about which you ask my advice, while excellent in itself, has too much eagerness in it, I fear. If you really wish that, under its show of good, it shall work you no harm, you must calm its fervour. As you know, the best of our desires can be mixed with human passion so that they become darkly anxious and turbulently eager. To save us from the danger of this and to purify even the holiest of our desires, God often grants our petitions only after long delay. For turbulent human desires do not deserve to be granted; only those mild, calm and peaceful desires prompted by the Holy Ghost deserve that God should hearken to them. Do all you can to live in peace and holy joy that you may be the more amenable. Grace, as you know, has more easy access to tranquilly expectant souls, while anxiously troubled hearts are more subject to the promptings of evil.

LETTER X

Over-zeal in Pious Reading.

I SEND you *Espérance chrétienne*, the book I promised you. It is just what you need. Yet if you are to get all

the good from it I expect, you must not plunge too eagerly into it or let yourself be led away by curiosity as to what comes next. Spend the time upon it allowed to you by the Rule ; fix your attention upon what you are reading and do not think upon what follows. I recommend you strongly to assimilate the enduring and consoling truth set out in this book, not so much by random reflection as by sober digestion. Pause, and then to give these glad truths time to soak more thoroughly into your soul, and to make easier the workings of the Holy Ghost who, during these peaceful pauses given up to silent expectancy, shall imprint these heavenly truths more deeply upon your heart. Do all this without straining your attention or too violently curbing speculation. Let your unforced and simple endeavour be to allow them to sink into your heart rather than into your spirit.

Make special note of important chapters of which you have particular need so that you can read them again when leisure permits. In general, I strongly advise you not to burden your mind with overmuch reading or over-many exterior actions. You had far better read little and digest that little. Your soul needs, never more than now, unity and simplicity. Your reading, then, and your actions should have as their one aim the fostering in you of a capacity for recollection. God will gradually grant you this grace, do you but yearn for it with gentle trust and humble simplicity, showing neither precipitancy nor unquiet anxiety : Beseech God often to detach you completely from all that is, that in and through Jesus Christ, you have neither liking nor love for any save Him, and that, making your heart wholly His, He shall possess it abundantly and unreservedly. ' O God, I abandon myself to you ; make me desire none but you.'

LETTER XI

TO THE SAME

Indiscreet and Undisciplined Zeal.

It is plain to me, dear Sister, that a mistaken zeal exposes you to dangers all the more formidable because their outward appearance is so specious. A desire for our neighbour's perfection is undoubtedly excellent ; the interior grief we feel at sight of his failings can be equally excellent if it originates from a pure desire to see him perfect. Yet all this can be mixed with much secret self-complacency, reliance upon our own wisdom, and severity towards our neighbour. Such a zeal, make no mistake about it, cannot come from God, but is one of the devil's illusions thoroughly harmful to both yourself and others. Yet this evil can be easily remedied, assuming you are docile and sincere enough to recognise its seriousness and to undertake its cure. The latter, which I am going to prescribe for you, has already been successful with a soul suffering from the same illusion. I can only hope that it will be no less effectual in your own case.

I advise and direct you, then, in the blessed name of Jesus Christ and His Divine Mother, to think no further of practising the virtue of zeal until this ban be definitely raised. I absolve you before God, and I take upon myself the responsibility for any inconveniences that may arise from the omission should you have any scruples, or should the devil incite you to make some benefit yours, or to avoid a threatened evil, you shall say to God : O God, charity is the queen of virtues : I must practise zeal only when You have made me fit to do so without risk to the charity I am to show both others and myself. When I am seen to be strong enough, or rather humble enough, to exercise zeal with

a deep peace in my soul and with gentle compassion and kindness for my neighbour ; when I can exercise it with benevolence and a charity that nothing can irritate and which takes offence at nothing save its own faults ; with, likewise, all the patience and forbearance that shall enable me to suffer them, O God ; when I am no longer grieved or anxious or surprised at the incorrigibility of my fellows : then the ban put upon me will be raised, and I shall be able to think of glorifying You in others. Until, then, O God, I must show my zeal inwardly in the correction of my numerous failings.

Indeed, dear Sister, when humility has dug deeply the foundation of all the virtues, I shall be the first to urge you to practise zeal again. Until then, let your thoughts be only of yourself and your sole business with yourself. Remember that God has permitted men who needed correction and punishment for this indiscreet, turbulent and bitter zeal to fall into worse faults than those which had offended them in others.

In the second place I order you never to speak of God or any holy thing except in a spirit of meekness and humility, and in a manner at once loving and gracious. In such speech be always restrained and encouraging ; never bitter and harsh since this is likely to chill and rebuff those who hear you. For although your talk be only of what is in the Gospel and the best kind of books, I judge that in the state in which you now are, that talk can take so clumsy a form that nothing but evil results from it. Did not Satan make use of words from the blessed Scriptures to tempt our Lord ? Truth consists in relating things exactly. It is distorted immediately it is stated extremely or applied unsuitably. Your peevish mood is like a blackened glass which, unless you make allowance for it, prevents you from seeing things and describing them to others

in their true colours. Be always on your guard against this distressing tendency ; cherish thoughts and sentiments that shall counteract such peevishness ; assure yourself and make it your delight to assure others of the infinite goodness of God and the trust we should have in him ; let your behaviour give them an example of virtue that is neither stiff nor embarrassing to others ; take special care never to make harsh pronouncements to your fellows. When you can find nothing gentle to say keep quiet, leaving the burden of such pronouncements to others who will find it easier than you to be exact, avoiding too great leniency and too great severity alike. At all times severity is as blameable as exactitude is laudable : it serves only to antagonise minds instead of convincing them, and to embitter hearts instead of winning them. That true gentleness which has God's approval is as calculated to frustrate evil and forward good, as excessive harshness is to make good difficult and evil obdurate. The one builds ; the other destroys.

LETTER XII

Dislike of Accepting Privileges Ordered.

TAKE particular care never to deviate from obedience on the pretext of self-mortification, remembering always the words of the Holy Ghost : ' Obedience is better than sacrifice ' ; accept without hesitation or scruple then, those little reliefs which doctors, nurses and your Superiors prescribe for you. Rather have the greater scruple in refusing them. Thus you will practise abnegation more meritorious than physical mortification, since it involves the renunciation of your theories, as of your judgement and will.

Not a few of the devout, wedded to their own theories, headstrong in their supposed renunciation,

far from mortified in their mortifications, are driven to commit many faults through ignorance or forgetfulness of this truth. What illusion they harbour not to realise that self-love spoils and corrupts the most holy of practices ! Whoever, out of love of God, shall once renounce will, judgement and ideas, shall make great progress in the ways of true and lasting perfection.

Henceforth use your intelligence and your reason solely to learn what is required of you, and to do it with ready cheerfulness, utter trust in God, and complete surrender to His mercy. This trust will come to you easily as soon as your one ambition is to do His holy will. And, indeed, is there anything more delightful than this ? That holy will sanctifies all that it ordains for us. Follow it then in all things, be they agreeable or exacting, privileges or privations, work or leisure, mental or spoken prayers, whether at office or at mass, at confession or communion. Blind obedience knows no exception, but makes warm-hearted sacrifice of its own intelligence, ideas, judgement, inclinations, dislikes, aversions, and moods—in short, of every one of its desires. It follows that this sacrifice is more pleasing to God than any other open to us and that without it all else is prejudicial rather than valuable. Accordingly, the Holy Ghost tells us in the Scriptures that victory goes to the obedient.

LETTER XIII

The Same Subject : Attachment to One's Own Opinions.

My dear Sister,—At last you find yourself free of ties and of all those engagements with which the world would keep you bound for ever. I have no doubt that you appreciate the full value of this inestimable grace and that you are bent on a generous performance of all your duties. The longer you have waited for this

grace, the more grateful you must be to Him who has at last accorded it to you. Nevertheless in your life you must expect to meet with difficulties unknown to those who enter earlier. Yet humility, renunciation, simplicity and spiritual childhood will considerably lessen these difficulties and will end with making them disappear. Aided by these virtues you will avoid one of pride's insidious illusions—an illusion the more dangerous that it is almost imperceptible—into which many novices fall. To show their zeal they are for ever trying to do something out of the common, or deny themselves of the little privileges allowed them by the charity of their Superiors. In all this, is merely disguised vanity and subtle self-love. Never make claim, my dear Sister, to do one whit more than the rest. Accept simply and humbly the little privileges and alleviations offered to the weak ; be glad to be ranked with small children and treated like them, and avoid making yourself conspicuous by a show of strength and courage. In this is an exercise of deep and meritorious humility more pleasing in God's sight than a life whose great austerity is an indulgence of the human will's. Any other line of conduct is so much pride and vanity.

To be frank with you, my long experience has taught me that those who have been most devout in the world before they enter upon the religious life are usually those who give most trouble to their Superiors and Mistresses ; for in the world these good devout women acquire various ideas of virtue that they find hard to give up. Used to the admiration of all about them, and, very frequently to the praise of their directors, they become obsessed with their own thoughts and outlook, never suspecting that the obsession is poles removed from true holiness. Consequently, it is much more difficult to induce them to practise humility and renunciation, and to discipline their ideas and wills

than to persuade the young and unformed—or even converted worldlings—to make similar sacrifices. Unless, however, we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. My wish then, is that you shall be treated as young girls of fifteen and sixteen are treated, since their needs of both body and mind are the same as your own. To such, one says : Sister, you are to rest to-morrow ; you are excused from this or that : enjoy yourself in the garden. . . . My dear Sister, this work is too much for you : the Mother Superior says you are to be excused it. You who are mature, and have been so devout in the past are to do all that you are told without a question or even the flicker of an eyelid. You are to do it in a mood of humility and simplicity, content to see yourself like the weakest and least of them all. You are to look upon yourself as precisely the latter, and are to rejoice at it or as nearly rejoice as you may ; you are to admire the love of the Mother and the Sisters and to bless God for it. True interior insight and genuine spirituality will teach and inspire you to this. Yet it must be confessed that there is the greatest difficulty in bringing our so-called truly devout to this frame of mind. The less they, poor blind deluded souls, can humble themselves, the farther they are from true greatness. Let them go to Bethlehem and there behold the God of heaven become a little child wrapped in swaddling clothes, set in a manger, taken up, carried here, carried there, turned this way and turned that, at the caprice of all ! That, my dear Sister, is the example you should set yourself throughout your novitiate. By becoming like that little child you shall be worthy of entering the kingdom of heaven.

LETTER XIV

TO SISTER MARIE-THÉRÈSE DE VIOMÉNIL

Dislike of Self-Revelation.

STRIVE, my dear Sister, with all your might against the dislike you have of talking frankly of our soul. Look upon that jealous susceptibility, which leads you to imagine that your faults will be disclosed to others, as a dangerous temptation. None other than the devil inspires this excessive fear and reluctance to disclose interior wretchedness ; for, from innumerable experiences, the devil knows that souls possessing sufficient courage and humility to make simple and straightforward revelation of themselves, are straightway cured or at least very greatly comforted.

He is as well aware how many of the soul's wounds, which generally heal when opened, can become poisoned and more spreading when we refuse to let the doctor see them. Indeed, there is nothing plainer than that while our self-love lives (and it will die only when we do), we shall tend to delude ourselves about those things which prick and disturb our conscience. This thought is calculated to make all of us tremble, whoever we be. There is but one method of avoiding the danger : we must never rely upon our own wisdom in things concerning ourselves, but must be guided by the keepers of our consciences to whom we are to disclose with complete frankness everything likely to enlighten them. The trouble is that in these very disclosures we are liable to let our self-love delude us, and with us those whose advice we ask. What can be done to guard against this new danger ? Our directors must be enlightened by others on our account, yet this is not easily tolerated. There is no lack of people ready to show zeal on behalf of others but who thoroughly

dislike zeal shown in regard to themselves. This ought not to be so. True zeal should say to itself: Think of yourself and not of others for whom you are not responsible. Yet be very glad that some charitable person has enabled your director to know how you appear to others, so that he is the better able to direct you.

This twofold attitude is found only in the most perfect of souls and possibly in a few whose dispositions are usually sincere though their virtue may be small. Normally, zeal to instruct others is accompanied by great irritability towards those who would perform the same good office, by giving full information to our directors as to what is being thought and said about ourselves. Here, once more, you have the twofold illusion of every ordinary devout person living in the world and even in the cloister. Examine yourself without self-flattery upon this double question, allowing the points I have just indicated to bring light to bear upon it.

LETTER XV

TO THE SAME

Discouragement.

MY dear Sister,—Just now you are the victim of one of the most dangerous temptations that can assail a well-intentioned soul—the temptation of discouragement. I adjure you to offer every resistance in your power. Trust in God, and be sure that He will complete the work He has begun in you. Your vain fears for the future come from the devil. Think only of the present; leave the future to Providence. A well employed present assures the future. At all times and in all places strive to cleave and conform to all God's wishes even in the smallest matter; for virtue and perfection consist wholly of this.

Again, God permits our varying faults only to humiliate us ! If you can profit by them and yet remain trusting and at peace, you will be in a better state than you would if you committed no obvious fault and so flattered your self-love greatly, leaving you in grave danger of self-complacency. Actually you can very easily make use of all your faults to become one degree more humble and to dig still more deeply within yourself the one foundation of all true holiness. Ought we not to admire and bless the infinite goodness of God who can thus derive our greatest good from our very faults ? All we need do is to have no love for them, and humble ourselves gently because of them ; after each of our falls to pick ourselves up with tireless persistency, and to go to work peacefully to correct them. Subject yourself to God's Will in the work you do, but do not be too eager and restless. Do honestly what you believe you ought to do, and rely on Providence for success, knowing neither care nor anxiety and thus possessing as far as possible a tranquil heart and unshackled mind. Be faithful in this practice and you shall dwell in peace even in the mist of perplexity ; while the involuntary troubles you may encounter shall serve only to increase the merit of the deep-seated compliance of your will with God's. Blessed be He of all things and in all things, now and forward.

LETTER XVI

Fear of Contradicting Oneself and of Making Oneself Conspicuous.

WHEN one begins wishing to belong earnestly and unreservedly to God, the interior workings of grace develop the growth of that holy desire which He Himself has inspired. Yet the more vehement this desire becomes, the more the soul is seized and possessed by

the fear of self-contradiction. This fear is a new gift of God, and, provided the soul can make use of it, it will greatly profit : it will be more humble, more self-distrustful, more watchful and more eager to ask for God's help. Yet just because it is one of God's gifts, the spirit of darkness does not fail to pursue his usual tactics : unable to obstruct the gifts of God, he brings all his cunning into play to spoil and corrupt them.

He does this in the case of the salutary fear of which I am speaking, in this instance resorting to his stratagems. First, he seeks to make this fear unbridled, restless and peevish that the soul may grow weak and disconcerted and at last be plunged into cowardice and defeat. The one remedy for this is to laugh at the tempter and answer him : he who began the work will finish it ; since in His goodness he sought me even when I fled from Him, He will take care not to forsake me now that I seek Him with all my heart. Again, do not forget that perseverance has no better guarantee than a good beginning : It is far easier to pursue one's way than to take another. Had one paid attention to these vain fears, conversion would never have taken place. This is the first temptation novices undergo.

A second and more perilous ruse is this : the tempter looks for accomplices and too often finds them among good people. He puts in the way of our good resolutions those who lack neither a certain amount of wisdom nor good intentions. These find fault with everything souls do when inspired by grace to lift themselves from the spiritual rut. If these monitors—who are as eager to give advice as their listeners are reluctant to take it—are to be believed, there is no more lamentable way to make oneself conspicuous than the pursuit of perfection. We must never, they say, overdo things, nor adopt a way of living at variance with our nature, since what is violent is not lasting and, in any case, exaggeration is a fault. I have no hesitation in saying

that here is to be found one of the greatest obstacles Divine grace encounters in souls called to perfection. It has to do with that human deference paid to the cloister which is as dangerous in its way as the deference paid to society. The souls whose conversion from imperfection to holiness the former hinders are as numerous as those whose conversion from evil to good is prevented by the latter.

What ways are open by which these dangers can be avoided? These are they : out of love for Jesus Christ we must be courageous in subduing false human respect ; we must make it a frequent sacrifice to the Lord ; we must beseech Him to help and strengthen us that we may disregard vain arguments levelled at us. If we set Gospel teaching by the side of the insidious sophistries presented to us, we shall need no more to convince us that they cannot come from the Holy Ghost, but solely from mortal reasoning and that human prudence God rebukes. Yet it is pious people who talk like this !—possibly ; but this is merely a proof that such pious folk do not always think in terms of the Gospel's pure wisdom, but sometimes allow themselves to be deceived by prejudice, human considerations, error, blindness, ignorance and the dictates of self-love. Indeed, only ignorance or blindness can be unaware that no genuine conversions and deep interior changes can take place, either in the world or in the cloister, without being known. Why should this be true of genuine conversions? Simply because they affect exterior behaviour. Even when there is no exterior irregularity to be corrected, the perfect harmony and perfect peace established interiorly can never fail to radiate outwardly, making themselves plain by various perceptible signs which, though they make for good, may arouse jealousy in those given to self-love. Equally, it can only be blindness which fails to understand that, at the beginning of a new life,

there may be an appearance of exterior disturbance and constraint, because neither the converted nor his fellows are used to his new state. In every sphere ease of manner comes with practice.

Again, can a soul wholly given up to a pursuit of recollection, to a conflict with the self and the acceptance of many constraints both interior and exterior—can such a soul be expected to appear playfully gay and pleasantly amusing? Indeed, if any do appear so I gravely doubt whether any interior change has taken place. Yet are there not, you ask, those whose intense interior life goes with much exterior graciousness? True; but only after long practice that has in a measure made interior recollection natural to them. At the outset they were as you are, my dear Sister; and what is said of you was said of them. They have said nothing, but have gone their way, till God has at last brought them to that spiritual state known as the freedom of God's children. You will reach it just as they, have no doubt about that. A day will come when your recollection will be free and unforced, mild and pleasingly gentle. Then you too will make others approve of and rejoice in you because of the exterior peace which the full love of God and your neighbour make abundantly manifest in you. Yet you cannot attain this either quickly or at once. For it comes of virtue assiduously practised and of an interior life which, at the beginning, must needs seem somewhat forced and difficult. All this will come naturally at the end, however. Once you have attained this, you can resume your unreservedness, since both will then be changed and made spiritual by the blessed workings of grace, whereas at an earlier stage these would certainly do harm.

Note the ignorance of these clever pundits! Both their talk and their judgement arouse my pity; for their arguments are precisely those heard in the world,

when God's grace has effected in it one of those true conversions which are plain to all. Can nuns indulge in such talk? Only the demon of error and illusion can make them speak and reason so crookedly. Blessed be God in all things. In one way or another He shall derive glory. On your part, be your one thought to endure this ordeal bravely, going for help to those lessons of faith and gospel teachings of which such fine reasoners seem to have lost sight. Be glad interiorly of the seeming foolishness and stupidity that expose you to their railings : there is no surer sign of the change which has been effected in you. Cry to the Lord like the Psalmist : I am become as a beast before Thee : and I am always with Thee.

In the service of so great a Master can every rank be equally exalted? Perform gladheartedly and to the best of your ability the role of awkwardness and stupidity which at present He has given you to play, and patiently await the moment which is ordained to bring a change the reverse of that which has just been effected in you. Then shall your faculties, which now seem shackled, have free play ; ease shall succeed constraint and the blessed liberty of God's children shall drive out excessive fear.

A perception of the faultiness of all your works is a great grace of God. By means of it He would keep you in humility and give you a poor conceit of yourself. Yet the overharshness with which you are tempted to regard yourself, when you do perceive this, and the melancholy, despondency and thought of reprobation that afflict you, are merely the suggestions of Satan designed to corrupt and poison God's gift in you. Reject all such thoughts, then, as coming from the devil. For a space they will return to you again and again, providing scope for your troubles and your triumphs. Yet have a little patience : perfection cannot be achieved in a day. Do not at first yearn for

perfection at its highest ; for in this you are asking to fly before you have wings, to quote S. Teresa. Be content with what God gives you and with what He performs in the meanwhile, asking no more until He shall deem fit to grant it you. You will then avoid that interior agitation which enables the devil to succeed so thoroughly in overthrowing those souls who in the practice of virtue seek less the glory of God than the satisfaction of your self-love. The raging of mortified pride is plain to be seen in the impatience with which they perceive their imperfections, and in the vexation with which they perceive themselves at the bottom of the ladder of holiness when they would prefer to think of themselves as at its top.

Be guided by me, my Sister, and let your line of conduct be precisely the reverse. Cherish your abjection, permitting God to perform peacefully His work within you. Allow Him to lay the enduring foundations of humility and to cement them with repeated experiences of your wretchedness and your weakness. There would be too great a risk of *our being absorbed by our own thoughts*, were God to give us from the outset all the perfection we desire. Undisciplined love of our own excellence would find us soaring, quickly to fall once more, like Lucifer into the abyss of pride. God, who knows our frailty in this respect, allows us to grovel like worms in the mire of our imperfections, until He sees that we can be lifted up and feel neither self-complacent nor scornful of others. This design of God's, full of wisdom and of goodness as it is, is the admiration of those who direct souls. Their grief is great when souls that undergo these merciful ordeals refuse to understand them, showing exasperation when the ineffable ways of Divine Providence are explained to them.





