

THE RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XIII.

ELEVENTH ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

The Resurrection of the Flesh.

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164. *The Resurrection of Job.* -

All the nations of antiquity believed in the immortality of the soul; so did they all believe that men shall one day rise again to be rewarded or punished according to their works. The strongest proof I can give you of this ancient belief, is the faith-inspired language of the holy man Job. You, doubtless, know his history. Here is the substance of it: Job was an Arabian prince who lived more than two thousand years before Christ. He was extremely rich, but still more virtuous. The devil, jealous of his virtue, obtained permission to deprive him in succession of all his flocks of camels, oxen, and sheep, to make all his children die, and finally to reduce him to such a state of leprosy and misery, that he spent his life on a dunghill. At each of these misfortunes Job contented himself with saying: "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may His holy name be blessed!" He was then visited by three of his friends, to whom it was his pleasure to praise Providence for all it had done.

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Then, taking a more solemn tone, he cried with admirable faith: "For I know that my Redeemer lives and on the last day I shall rise out of the earth: and I shall be clothed again with my skin; and in my flesh I shall see my God, who I myself shall see, and my eyes shall behold, and not another; this my hope is laid up in my bosom." These are the sentiments, so fine and so clear, which have induced the Church to insert numerous passages from the Book of Job in the Office of the Dead.

- *Job*, Chap. X.

165. *The Seven Brothers of the Maccabees.* -

I regret much, my friends, that the history of the seven Maccabees brothers is a little long; I can only give you an abridgement of it. But what struck me the most in that story is the confidence with which those pious martyrs awaited the resurrection and life eternal. Antiochus Epiphanius, king of Syria, a cruel and inhuman prince, thought that he could force them by torments to renounce their religion. He had them tortured one after the other, beginning with the eldest. One of them, the second, I think, had the skin of his head torn off with hooks; when he was on the point of expiring, he said to the king: "You take from us the present life, but the King of kings will one day raise us up for life eternal." The fourth made use of nearly the same words: "It is better," said he, "to be slain by men, because we hope that God will restore our lives at the resurrection." When none remained but the youngest of these

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valiant champions, the king sent him to his mother hoping that she would prevail upon him to apostatize. But that mother, worthy of such children, exhorted him, on the contrary, to walk in the footsteps of his brethren. And so he did, saying to Antiochus "My brethren had to endure only temporary pain, and now they have entered into life eternal." At length the sacrifice was completed by the execution of the mother, who went to rejoin in Limbo, (the Limbo of the Ancients) the seven children she had had the happiness of giving to God. Ah! my friends, if we thought of the resurrection to come, we should be much more faithful in discharging our duties and avoiding sin.

- *II. Maccabees*, Chap. VII.

166. *The Unfinished Tomb.* -

The Greek emperors of Constantinople had a somewhat singular custom, but one very useful and salutary for their personal conduct. The day that one of them was crowned, it was forbidden to speak to him on any business whatsoever, but there appeared before him sculptors and marble-cutters, who brought with them five or six beautiful specimens of marble of divers colours, and said to him: "Prince, which of these marbles will it please your majesty to select for your tomb, that we may set about preparing it?" The object of this strange custom was to make the new emperor understand, that being mortal like other men, he ought to employ the few years he had to live in the care of his soul and the good government of his people. St. John the Almoner, patriarch of Alexandria in the sixth century, found

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this custom so conformable to the sentiments which ought to animate Christians, that he would himself profit by it. He had a tomb made for himself, but never entirely finished; only he commanded that every year, on some grand festival day, some one should come and say to him aloud, before everyone present: "My lord, your tomb is not yet finished. Order them to finish it, *because*, as Jesus Christ says, *you know not the day or the hour.*" These words, spoken at such a time, were worth a good meditation were they not, my young friends?

- LEONTIUS, *Life of St. John the Almoner.*

167. *St. Francis Borgia Before a Dead Body.* -

Death is an eloquent preacher, who gives us continual lessons on the nothingness of earthly things. The very sight of a grave or a corpse has sometimes sufficed to make saints. Here is a striking example of the kind. St. Francis Borgia, before quitting the world, was Duke of Gandia and one of the most illustrious grandees of Spain. The Empress Isabella having died in 1539, Charles the Fifth, Emperor of Germany and King of Spain, deputed Francis to convey and accompany her body to Grenada, where was situated the tombs of the kings of Spain. This mission was very honourable, and yet God made use of it to make the Duke of Gandia an humble religious. When the body had reached its destination, and was about to be lowered into the royal vault, Francis Borgia had to open the coffin, in order to swear upon it that those were really the mortal

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remains of his sovereign, the Empress Isabella. What was his horror and disgust on beholding, instead of a beautiful princess, a foul and disgusting corpse! "What," cried he, "is this all that remains of my gracious sovereign? Where, then, is her smooth white brow, her fresh fair cheeks, her smiling lips, and her radiant eyes?" This thought and these reflections acted so promptly on his mind and heart, that he resolved to consecrate himself wholly to God. Accordingly, having accomplished his mission, arranged his temporal affairs, and provided suitably for his children, he entered the company of Jesus and became a great saint. I was right, you see, in telling you that death is an eloquent preacher.

- *Life of St. Francis Borgia*, I., 41.

168. *Charles the Fifth Celebrating His Own Obsequies.* -

Charles the Fifth, Emperor of Germany and King of Spain, may serve us as a model on the article of preparation for death. He was only 55 years old when he abdicated the crown, and renounced all his titles and dignities to consecrate his last years to the great work of preparing to appear before God. He retired to the monastery of St. Just, on the frontiers of Spain and Portugal, and gave himself up to the same exercises as the monks. By night, he rose like them to sing the Office; by day, he divided his time between prayer, reading and study. His sole recreations were a short walk in the fields and the culture of a small garden. There was all that remained to him of so many states and provinces which

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he had once possessed. But this is not all, he contented himself with the simplest and coarsest food, and often fasted with the rigor of a coenobite. Every Friday in Lent, he gave himself the discipline till the blood almost flowed, in order to obtain more efficaciously the pardon of his sins. But he did something more extraordinary still. In order to familiarize himself with the thought of death, so salutary for a Christian, he would have his obsequies celebrated as though he were already dead. He laid himself then in a coffin, and was borne to the church. The walls were hung with black, tapers were lit, the bells were rung, prayers recited, and the Office of the Dead sung, precisely as if Charles the Fifth had been really dead. However extraordinary this ceremony might be, the event showed that it was by a sort of presentiment he had had it solemnized. The very next day he was seized with the malady of which he died. His death was most edifying, for he had remembered the words of our Lord, "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

- FELLER, *Universal Biography*, III., 352.

169. *God's Turn Will Come* -

"I will laugh at the destruction of those who have laughed at me during their life." These frightful words were pronounced, my dear friends, by God himself and many, many times have the impious seen their fulfilment. Hear what befell d'Alembert, one of the philosophers most hostile to religion. He had been present at the death of his friend Voltaire, and had had the cruelty to

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prevent a priest from being called in. When he himself reached his last hour he felt so keenly the sting of remorse that he sent in all haste for the pastor of the local parish church, St. Germain l'Auxerrois named after the great saint of the town of Auxerre. Condorcet, one of the philosopher's so-called friends, went out on pretence of going to seek him, and returned in a few minutes, saying that he would come presently; it was a lie, for he did not go. But d'Alembert, unable to wait, sent once more this perfidious friend, who again went out, walked about for some time, then returned saying that the priest would come very soon, but that for the moment he could not come, being engaged. This, too, was a falsehood; the wretch was playing on d'Alembert. The latter, being a prey to the most fearful anguish, sent a note by a faithful servant; but alas! he had not yet returned when d'Alembert breathed his last. May God have mercy on his soul! Perhaps, his repentance was sufficiently sincere that he was enabled to join the ranks with the repentant thief of Mount Calvary. All this happened in Paris on the 29th of October, 1783, What a lesson for us, and oh! my young friends, let us profit by it; let us not mock God, for assuredly His turn shall come.

- GUILLOIS, *Explic. du Cat.*

170. *Death of Collot d'Herbois, the mass executioner.* -

It is dreadful to fall into the hands of the living God whilst in a state of sin. To convince oneself of this, my dear friends, it would suffice to witness the scenes of despair which accompanied the death of some great criminals. Collot d'Herbois had played the most execrable part during the French Revolution. Becoming a representative of the people under the reign of Terror, he had the people of Lyons massacred in hundreds. The very accomplices of his crimes regarded him as a man so dangerous that they thought it

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expedient, in the end, to exclude him from society, by banishing him to the deserted tropical wastes of Guiana in South America. Transported to that tropical country, he looked upon himself as the most miserable of men. "I am punished," would he sometimes exclaim, "the abandonment in which I find myself is a hell." Being attacked by a malignant fever he was to be taken to Cayenne, the capital settlement of that region. The negroes charged with this commission threw him on the public road with his face turned to the scorching sun.

They said in their own language: "We will not carry that murderer of religion and of men." - "What is the matter with you?" asked the doctor, Guysonf by name, when he finally arrived. "I have a burning fever and perspiration." - "I believe it; you are sweating crime." Now the criminal called on God and the Blessed Virgin to assist him. A soldier, to whom he had preached irreligion in his former days of power, asked him why he invoked God and the Blessed Virgin, he who mocked them some months before: "Ah! my friend," said he, "my mouth then belied my heart." He then cried out: "Oh! my God, my God, can I yet hope for pardon? Send me a consoler, send me a priest, to turn mine eyes away from the furnace that consumes me. My God, give me peace!" The spectacle of his last moments was so frightful, that no one could remain near him. Whilst they were seeking a priest he expired, on the 7th of June, 1796, his eyes half open, his hands clenched, and his mouth full of blood and froth. May God have mercy on him. May his repentance have been so genuine as to save himself from the fate that he had otherwise so richly deserved. Yet God's compassion and mercy is boundless. Sadly, his burial was so neglected that the negro grave-diggers only half covered him

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and his body became the prey of swine and scavenger birds of prey.
- DEBUSSI, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, (*New Month of Mary*) 251.

171. *Mozart's Requiem*. -

How little we can count on life! A thousand examples prove this truth. One of the most extraordinary is that which relates to Mozart, the most famous musical composer of his day in all Germany. One day, a stranger presents himself before him: "Sir," said he, "I have been commissioned to ask a favour of you; it is to compose a *Requiem* as soon as possible, for a person of distinction who does not wish to give his name. He desires that you will employ all your talent on this *Requiem*, for he is an excellent judge of music, and will pay you whatever you ask." Mozart went immediately to work, and worked day and night with so much ardour that he fell ill. But the most curious part of the story is that no one claimed the famous *Requiem*, which was finished at the very moment when the illustrious composer's strength was completely exhausted. His malady went on increasing, and at length he died in Vienna, on the 5th of December, 1791, being scarcely thirty-six years of age.

But what is more singular still, his friends, desirous of making his obsequies worthy of himself, found nothing grander or more suitable for that sad occasion than his *Requiem*, and it was executed for the first time at his own funeral service. And that is what may any day happen to us; the things we do to gain a living are perhaps those that may hasten our death. Let us, then, be ever on our guard.

- FELLER, *Biographie Universelle (Universal Biography)*, IX., 53.