

LIFE EVERLASTING

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XIV.

TWELFTH ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

Life Everlasting. -- Amen.

(Page 210)

I. - PARADISE.

172. *St. Bernard's Little Brother.* -

"But earth seems to me vile and contemptible when I contemplate heaven:" said the great St. Augustine ; and was he not right, my young friends? A child once made a reflection almost as fine on the occasion which I am about to relate. St. Bernard having reached man's estate, was not slow in perceiving that it is very hard to save one's soul in the world, and resolved to leave it. His parents and relatives loved him so much that, although they were full of faith and piety, they did their utmost to keep him amongst them. But Bernard made them understand so well the happiness and the advantages of the religious life, that he not only obtained their consent, but even prevailed on four of his brothers to follow him; it was only the youngest who remained in the paternal house. At the end of six months, these five young men quitted their home town, Chatillon-sur-Seine, and passed by Fontaine, near Dijon, to ask their father's blessing. They then set

(Page 211)

out for the Abbey of Citeaux, where they were to pronounce their vows. Crossing the court-yard of the Castle of Fontaine, they perceived little Nivard, their young brother, playing with some children of his own age. "Adieu, little brother Nivard," said they, "we are going away; we leave you to inherit all our father's possessions; you shall have all our lands and all our wealth." - " Yes, yes," answered the wise child, "you take heaven and leave me earth, the shares are not equal, and I will not be satisfied with mine." In fact, my dear children, when little Nivard grew up, and his father had no need of his services, he went to rejoin his brothers in their monastery and, in his turn, left earth for heaven.

- RATISBONNE *Life of St. Bernard.*

173. *I Want to Save My Soul.* -

A famous author of the fifteenth century, Denis the Carthusian, relates that a woman, seeing her son resolved on becoming a religious, did all she could to prevent him. The young man remained immovable in his resolution, and to all his mother's arguments he made but the one answer "Mother, I want to save my soul." He entered a religious order and took the habit. But, at the end of some years, his fervour relaxed, and he unhappily forgot the good resolutions which seemed formerly to animate him. He fell ill, and so dangerously, that the last sacraments were administered to him, after which he fell into a swoon, which led to the belief that he was dead, or nearly so. He was not dead as yet, however, for in that species of lethargy it seemed to

(Page 212)

him that he appeared before the judgement seat of , God. There, whilst other persons were being judged he recognized his mother, and he saw himself unhappily on the left side amongst the reprobates. She approached him, and began to reproach him bitterly with his tepidity. "So you are there," said she. "What use was there in your quitting the world? do you no longer remember those words which you so often repeated to me: '*I want to save my soul!*'? Those words sank into my soul and eventually they led me to reform my whole life." The young man, covered with confusion, knew not what to answer. But God permitted that he not only recovered from his trance, but also recovered his health. Then was seen the happy effect of the warning he had received from Heaven. He wept incessantly for his faults, busied himself only in expiating them by penance, and, very far from neglecting the usual fasts and austerities, he added others to them everyday. His brethren tried sometimes to moderate his fervour, but he answered them with tears in his eyes: "When I could not bear the reproaches of my mother, how could I bear those of Jesus Christ at the last judgement?" And we, my good friends, let us try to avoid those reproaches, by working out our salvation with all the care of which we are capable.

- DEBUSSI, *New Month of Mary*, 187.

174. *The Learned Man who Lost his Memory*. -

You remember, my little friends, having sung a hymn in which is often repeated: "*Le ciel, le ciel en est le prix* (heaven, heaven is the prize) (heaven, [in it] is the prize)?" That word, *heaven*, ought to be the last pronounced before one

(Page 213)

dies. This is what happened to a holy man, named Thomas Canisius. He was a very learned monk, but the day on which he heard of the death of his brother Father Canisius, who was also very remarkable for his learning and his virtue, a singular accident occurred to him: he completely lost his memory. He neither remembered his studies, nor his prayers, nor even his name or his age. It was only the holy names of Jesus and Mary that he could remember. So, for five years that he afterwards lived, he only moved his lips to pronounce them, making on himself the sign of the cross. When he was seen approaching his last hour, the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, the Anointing of the Sick, was administered to him. He then regained a little strength, and even his memory returned, but only to utter the following words: "*In Heaven! in Heaven!*" Scarcely had he pronounced them twice or thrice with all the fervour of which he was capable, when he yielded his soul to God, and went to take possession of that paradise after which he sighed with so much love.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 542.

175. *A Preacher in Heaven*. -

Here is a death such as I would like to die. The Abbe Boursoul, who, for forty years, exercised the holy ministry at Rennes, in the Department of Ille-et-Vilaine, was one of the holiest priests and best preachers of the eighteenth century. He was often heard to say, in the fervour of his zeal: "Oh! if I could die arms in hand! If God would only give me the grace of dying either in the pulpit or in the confessional!" Notwithstanding

(Page 214)

his age and his infirmities, he had preached the Lent at Toussaint, a parish of the city of Rennes. On Easter Monday, the 4th of April, 1774, he said Mass at five o'clock, and went immediately after to shut himself up in his confessional. At three o'clock in the afternoon, he ascended the pulpit to continue his Lenten sermons, starting a new series for Easter week. That day he preached on heaven. He spoke with all the vigour and ardour of youth; his voice had an extraordinary strength and clearness; his movements were so rapid, his gestures so vehement, that he indicated beforehand what he was going to say. Towards the end of the first point, after having given the liveliest and most touching description of the beauties of paradise, he made a new effort and exclaimed: "No, never shall it be given to the weak eyes of man to behold here below the splendour of the Divine Majesty." Then, lowering his voice "It will be in heaven that we shall see it face to face and without a veil. We shall see him as he is." These words were pronounced in a deep and penetrating voice; he repeated them in Latin: *Videbimus eum sicuti est*. Finishing these last words, he bowed his head on

the edge of the pulpit and expired, turning his face to the vault of the church. His eyes were fixed on heaven and remained in that position. The consternation of the people was beyond description; they wept, they cried aloud, they threw themselves on their knees, and some even fainted away. Every one cried aloud: "A Saint! a Saint! he died speaking of the happiness of heaven!" There was even a little child kneeling beside his mother, who exclaimed: "He spoke of

(Page 215)

paradise and he is going there." Oh, my friends, how happy should I be to die such a death as that! and would not you, too?

- ABBE CARRON, *Modeles du Clerge*, I., 257.

176. *It Goes Badly, Father, but . . .* -

"Heaven suffers violence," says Our Lord, "and only the violent bear it away." I could cite a thousand examples, my young friends, of the truth of these words, how only those who are willing to be violent to themselves can gain heaven, but I shall confine myself to one. I knew a French missionary who had the happiness of converting a great number of sinners; one in particular he brought back to virtue, a poor young man, previously abandoned to the fury of his passions. His conversion was so sincere that he quitted the world in which he had to deplore so many grievous falls, and retired to a monastery of the Grande-Chartreuse. At the end of some years, the missionary having occasion to visit the neighbourhood, remembered his former penitent and went out of his way to pay him a visit. "Well my dear friend," said he, "how do you find yourself now? how goes your new mode of life?" - "It goes very badly, father; I have as much trouble to-day in keeping silence and retreat, in observing fasts and abstinences, as I had seven years ago. My cell seems to me a prison; my coarse habit weighs heavily on my shoulders; the Offices appear to me very long and very fatiguing; in a word, I repeat, it goes badly." The poor missionary knew not what answer to make to this language, which appeared to him the expression of weariness and disgust. But the young

(Page 216)

religious was not slow in extricating him from embarrassment; he threw himself on his neck and tenderly embraced him, saying: "Rest content, my good father; when I tell you it goes badly, I mean to say that it is hard on poor human nature; but it is so much the better, because I hope that, by these voluntary sufferings, the good God will have mercy on my past transgressions. I suffer, but I am content, for I remember that it is by that means alone and through the grace and merits of my sweet Saviour that I can reach heaven.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. Hist. d'Education*, II., 503.

177. *Higher than the Stars.* -

Amongst the astronomers who have made France illustrious in the nineteenth century, few have been so much spoken of as M. Leverrier. He is specially known as having discovered, in 1846, the planet Neptune, which is so distant from us that it can only be seen with the aid of a very good telescope, although it is one hundred and eleven times larger than our Earth. At the end of November, 1847, the Prefect of the Department of La Manche had Benediction in his chapel at St. Lo and invited on the occasion a large number of distinguished persons. Among them was M. Leverrier, to whom every one hastened to pay their respects. Mgr. Robiou, Bishop of Contances, addressed to him this charming compliment: "Sir, it cannot be said of you what is said of many others, that you have raised yourself to the clouds; of you it may be said that you have raised yourself to the stars." - "My lord, that is not sufficient. I mean to ascend still higher."

(Page 211)

"I meditate an enterprise much more important." All present listened with great attention; they were anxious to know what new discovery the illustrious astronomer had in contemplation. "Yes, my lord," resumed M. Leverrier, "I mean to rise higher than the stars. I mean to ascend to heaven itself, and I hope your lordship will assist me by your pious prayers." Could any one give a more Christian, and, at the same time, a more graceful answer, my young friends? Let each of us say with the famous astronomer: "And I, too, mean to ascend higher than the stars, I mean to ascend to heaven."

- *L'Ami de la Religion*, 9th November, 1847.

II. - PURGATORY.

178. *Purgatory Amongst the Jews.* -

The most precious fact that I know of in the Old Testament concerning Purgatory, is that which we read in the history of Judas Maccabeus. The Jews were at war with the King of Syria, because that prince would oblige them to submit to him and adore idols. Judas, their brave chief, led them almost always to victory, but his army was enfeebled by its very victories. Having at length obtained an armistice, they thought of paying to the dead the honours due to them. Judas was full of faith; he knew that the Jews who had fallen in battle should one day rise again, and that great mercy was in store for those who died in piety. Hence it was that he made a general

(Page 218)

collection throughout the country; his messengers went amongst the twelve tribes of Israel, and returned with rich offerings; they had collected more than ten thousand drachmas of silver, that is to say, the value of more than one hundred thousand francs, or the wages that a man could earn as income for a total of thirty-five years. Judas sent this sum to Jerusalem, that it might be employed in having sacrifices offered in the temple for the repose of the souls of the dead soldiers of the army. It was on this occasion that he pronounced those words, so often repeated: "It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins." These words, my dear children, prove very clearly that there is a purgatory, and that we may, by our prayers and good works, relieve the poor souls therein detained.

- *II. Book of Maccabees*, Chapter XII.

179. *A Child in Purgatory.* -

It sometimes happens, my little friends, that you commit faults which you regard as trivial, and to which you attach no importance. Yet young as you are, you will be condemned to expiate them in purgatory, if you have not done penance for them on earth.

That was what happened to a little boy of your own age, who was called Dinocrates, and was born at Carthage, in Africa, (the region is now known as Tunisia) about the year 195. He died at the age of seven years, of a horrible cancer which he had in his cheek. His sister, named Perpetua, was older than he; being a virtuous young person, she was arrested in a great persecution, and thrown into prison to force her to worship idols. It was then that she prayed

(Page 219)

to God for the soul of her little brother, without knowing whether he had need of her prayers or not. It was during the night. All at once this holy martyr, who was to be delivered to the wild beasts some weeks later, had a vision. She seemed to see Dinocrates, with many other persons, in a dark and filthy place. His face was pale and squalid, his eyes inflamed, and his cheek still covered with the ulcer of which he died. She saw that he suffered much, and was tormented by a burning thirst; there was, indeed, beside him a large basin full of water, but the edges were too high for him to reach. St. Perpetua, touched by sufferings which were undoubtedly the representation of those he endured in purgatory, prayed for him with renewed fervour.

Some days after, having changed her prison, she had another vision, in which she saw her young brother, his body all clean, his garments white, his face radiant with the freshness of health; she then understood that her prayers had been heard, and that Dinocrates was delivered from purgatory. It is she herself who relates these visions, for she committed her experiences to paper before her death and that of her companion St Felicity, read in the Acts of her Martyrdom, which occurred about the year 203.

- D. RUINART, *Veritable Actes des Martyrs*, I., 216.

180. *Prayers for a 'Dead-Alive'*. -

The most extraordinary history that I have read concerning purgatory is one, I think, which is related by St. John the Almoner, patriarch of Alexandria, at the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century. St John locates the incident quite precisely. It was a little before a great mortality or plague which happened in that city.

(Page 220)

Several inhabitants of the Isle of Cyprus were brought into Persia by a raiding army, and thrown into a prison so rigorous that it was called the jail of *oblivion*. Some of them, however, succeeded in escaping, and returned to their own country. A father and a mother, whose son had been taken from them, inquired of them concerning their son. "Alas!" said they, "your son died on such a day; we ourselves had the sad consolation of burying him." The afflicted parents hastened then to have a service celebrated and solemn prayers offered up three times a year for the repose of their son's soul. But, wonderful to relate! what was their surprise to see that son so deeply lamented, knock one day at their door and throw himself into their arms! They had been told that he was four years dead, and yet he still lived; the person buried by the prisoners had resembled him much; that was all. "What! is it, indeed, yourself, dear son? Oh! how we have wept for you! Thrice every year we have had prayer and sacrifice offered up for you." - "And on what days were those services solemnized?" asked the son with much eagerness. "On the holy days of Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost." - "Exactly," he cried, "those were the very days on which I saw every year an officer in shining apparel who came and took off my chains, and opened the gate of my prison; I went out into the city, walked wheresoever I liked, without any one appearing to notice me; only, when evening came, I found myself miraculously chained in my prison. It was the fruit of your good prayers, and

(Page 221)

if I had been in purgatory they would have relieved me all the same; I beseech you that you do not forget me when the good God shall call me to Himself."

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

181. *Purgatory in Painting*. -

I have read in the *Dictionary of Education* a very amusing anecdote, which may, nevertheless, be cited in support of what I have said of purgatory. Certain canons having had to repair their church, added to it a chapel dedicated to the souls in purgatory. The sculptor who was charged with the decorations, represented the poor souls in the midst of the flames; but he was so malicious as to place in the very midst of his figures the portrait of a neighbouring abbot. The likeness was so perfect that no one could mistake it; the Superior himself recognized it. He immediately complained to the canons, who summoned the sculptor and laughingly besought him to deliver that poor soul from his purgatory. The artist excuses himself under pretence that he could not touch his work without spoiling it. The complaint is carried before the archbishop. The prelate inquires of the sculptor if the likeness is accidental. "No, my lord," said he, "I did it on purpose." - "Then you must destroy that figure, for it is an outrage on the original." - "I shall do no such thing, my lord, and your lordship will not ask me to do it, I am sure, when you hear my reasons. Last year, this reverend Superior proved in one of his sermons that those who die without having made satisfaction are detained in the flames

(Page 222)

of purgatory till they have paid their debts. Now, his procurator, the abbot in question, has owed me a hundred crowns these two years past, and I am not yet paid. So that is just the reason why I thought myself authorized to place the abbot in my purgatory. I assure you, my lord, I will leave him there forever, unless your lordship will have the goodness to see me paid." The prelate and all who were present could not help laughing at this singular justification. The complainant himself could not object to the demand thus made; he acquitted himself with a good grace, and ordered his procurator to pay the hundred crowns. The sculptor, on his side, modified the figure in purgatory, and represented it ascending to heaven, like a soul which has fully satisfied the justice of God.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Education, (Dictionary of Education) II.*, 155.

182. *Burial of a Little Dog.* -

We sometimes meet, children, with good peasants who, upon occasion, know how to give useful lessons to those who need them. I have read a circumstance of the kind which amused me much. It was, I think, in the Department of Tarn-et-Garonne in France. A worthy peasant noted for his faith and piety, named Mathurin, came to lose a dog which had rendered him great service, and to which he was much attached. Instead of throwing the body of the poor animal into a ditch, or on the skirt of a wood, fearing that he might be devoured by wolves he made a grave in his own ground and there buried him. He was engaged in covering him up when a Protestant minister passing by began to laugh at him, saying: "Now, Mathurin,

(Page 223)

you are burying your dog without saying any thing; you ought, at least, to sing a *Libera* (Free him, O Lord), or a *De Profundis* (Out of the Depths, I Cry) over him." - "Alas, I can't," said the peasant with great composure. "And why so?" - "Ah, my dog was a *Protestant*, and I'm forced to bury him like the Protestants, who pretend to say that prayers said for the dead are of no use." The minister went off ashamed and confused; but, if he had been in good faith, he must needs have confessed that Mathurin's reasoning was both just and true.

- F. A. M., *Joyeux Passe-tems de la jeunesse*, 104.

183. *A Protestant in Purgatory.* -

I once read, I do not remember where, that a Swiss heretic was converted to the true religion, solely because that Catholics have the consoling doctrine of *purgatory* whilst Protestants will not admit it. He was a Lutheran already advanced in years. He had a brother who passed for a worthy man according to the world, but had also the misfortune of being a heretic. He fell ill, and notwithstanding the care of several physicians, he died and was buried by a Protestant minister of Berne. This death was a terrible blow to the person of whom I write. In order to divert his mind he tried to travel; but the thought of his brother's eternal lot pursued him everywhere. He one day chanced to meet on board a steamboat a Catholic priest with whom he entered into conversation. Confidence was soon established between them; they spoke of death, and the afflicted traveller asked the priest what he thought of it. "What I

(Page 224)

think, sir, is this: when a man has faithfully discharged on earth his duty to God, his neighbour and himself, he goes straight to heaven; if he has not fulfilled them, or neglected any of those which are essential, he goes straight to hell; but if he has only to reproach himself with light faults, which are inseparable from our frail nature, he passes some time in purgatory." At these words the Protestant smiled cheerfully; he was consoled. "Sir," he exclaimed, "I will become a Catholic, and for this reason. Protestants admit only heaven and hell; but, to go to heaven, one must have nothing whatever to reproach themselves with. Now, although my brother was a good man, he was not exempt from those trivial faults of which you spoke just now; those faults will not damn him, but they are sufficient to prevent him from going to heaven; there must, therefore, be an intermediate place to expiate them; consequently, there must be a purgatory. I will become a Catholic, that I may have the consolation of praying for my brother."

- G. S. G.