

HELL AND ETERNITY

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XIV.

TWELFTH ARTICLE OF THE CREED.

Life Everlasting. -- Amen.

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III. - HELL.

184. *Dives and Lazarus.* -

Amongst the Gospel parables, there is one which gives us an idea of the sufferings of the damned. A rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, fared sumptuously every day, whilst a poor beggar, named Lazarus, remained lying at his door, unheeded by any one. He was not even

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permitted to pick up the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table; it was only the dogs who, moved by a sort of compassion that might make men ashamed, came and licked his sores. This poor man died, and the Angels carried his soul to Abraham's bosom, that is to say, to heaven. The rich man likewise died soon after, but he was buried in hell. God permitted that one day, raising his eyes towards heaven, he saw afar off the patriarch Abraham, and the poor man he had formerly known at the gate of his palace. "Father Abraham," cried he in a tone of supplication, "have pity on me; send Lazarus, that he may dip his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am grievously tormented in these flames." - "Son," replied Abraham, "remember that you in your lifetime enjoyed good things, whilst Lazarus had only evil things; for that reason it is that he is now in bliss, and you in suffering. Moreover, there is a gulf between us, as you see, so that no one can go hence to you, or from you hither." - "At least, Father Abraham, send to the earth to warn my five brothers who are still alive, that they may not fall into this place of torment." - "But," answered Abraham, "they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." - "No, no, Father Abraham, I am sure they will do penance if one from the dead goes to them." - "I do not think so, my son; if they hear not Moses, or the prophets, neither will they believe one who goes to them from the dead." Let this parable serve for our instruction, my dear children; let us not forget these useless lamentations of the rich

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man, which are those of all the damned.

- *St. Luke*, Chap. XVI.

185. *Something About Hell.* -

How imperfect whatsoever may be the description sometimes given of hell, it is very capable of making those reflect who seriously dwell upon it. At the beginning of the second century, there lived at Heliopolis, in Sicily, a young person named Eudoxia. She was one who led a very irregular and scandalous life. One day, a priest, who was called Germanus was passing through that city. He came to lodge with Eudoxia's parents,

because they were Christians. At midnight he arose to say some particular prayers and recite the Office of the Church. It so happened that there was in the office for that day a description of the torments of hell, and the excruciating sufferings of the damned. As the good priest recited it aloud, Eudoxia, whose chamber was adjacent to his, heard the greater part of it. The silence of the night, the profound darkness, the hushed repose of all nature and especially the grace of God, which touched her heart, suddenly effected an extraordinary change within her. She began to reflect on her evil doings, and on the eternal torments which were to be the inevitable consequence, if she did not change her life. Scarcely had the day appeared, when she rose and went in search of the strange priest, to inform him of her resolution. He confirmed her, as may be supposed, in her good dispositions, gave her some profitable advice, and promised that if she were faithful, God would forgive her her sins. "I regret,"

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added the pious traveller, "being obliged to depart so soon, but you will go and have yourself instructed by one of the priests of this city, who will baptize you, and all your sins shall be effaced and forgotten. Eudoxia followed his advice, and had the happiness of being martyred about the year 114. It is well to recall here to our minds those words of the Holy Ghost: "Remember your last end, and you will never sin."

- BOLLANDUS, *Act. Sanc. (The Acts of the Saints)*, 1st March.

186. *Our Fire and that of Hell.* -

Of all the torments endured in hell, my young friends, that which seems to make the most impression on us, to cause us the most terror, is fire. We know the activity of fire, but ours is nothing to that which shall burn the damned for all eternity, without consuming them. I have read, in the *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert*, that a holy solitary named Martinian, had already passed some twenty-five years in a most austere retreat. His virtue was much extolled. A wicked woman named Zoe, said one day before some persons: "Bah! I have no faith in his virtue, and I will engage to make him do whatsoever I desire." She dresses herself in her finest apparel, over which she puts on some tattered rags, takes some provisions, and sets out for the desert where dwelt the holy hermit. It was late at night when she reached his cell, and she told him she had lost her way and must crave his hospitality for the night. Martinian was touched, gave up his cell to her, and passed the night outside. Next morning the wretch strips off

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her rags, reappears before the solitary, and shamelessly urges him to offend God, telling him that no one would know anything of it. Martinian hesitates a moment how to answer, but all at once he tells Zoe to wait a few moments. He retires to a corner of his cell, heaps up wood and kindles a great fire; then, taking off his sandals, he sits down on the ground and puts his two feet in the fire. The pain soon makes him cry aloud; the temptress runs in, and starts back in terror. Martinian took occasion from this circumstance to exclaim several times: "Alas! if I cannot bear this fire for some minutes, how shall I bear the fire of hell for all eternity?" Zoe was so touched by this reflection, that she changed her life and became a saint. Let us also profit by this reflection, my dear friends, and carefully avoid sin, which can alone lead us to hell.

- MARIN, *Vie des Peres des deserts (Lives of the Fathers of the Deserts)*.

187. *St. Teresa's Hell.* -

What is hell? Alas! dear friends, I wish I could only give you a just idea of it: I prefer, however, to let a saint speak. St. Teresa being one day in prayer, God permitted her to get a sight of the place which the devils had prepared for her in hell. She thought herself, then, transported for a moment to that place of torments, without knowing how it happened. The entrance appeared to her like that of a very small oven, very narrow, and very dark; the bottom of it was nothing but filthy mud, emitting an insupportable stench, and full of venomous reptiles. She saw herself lodged in a hollow made like a niche in the wall. "There," said

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she, "I felt my soul burned by a fire so horrible, that I could scarcely describe it as it was, since I could not even conceive it. I have experienced in the course of my life torments, which, according to physicians, are the greatest that can be endured, by the contraction of the nerves and in many other ways; but all those pains

were as nothing in comparison to what I then suffered. And even that is little if we compare it to the agony of the soul. It seems as though it were stifled, choking; and its affliction and despair exceed all description. . . . As to that fire and that despair which are the acme of so many horrible torments, I confess myself still less able to represent them. I know not who made me endure them, but I felt myself burning, and, as it were, hacked in a thousand pieces." The saint, writing, six years after, of what she had suffered in that frightful prison, was so terrified by the recollection, that it seemed as though the blood froze in her veins. "So," she adds, "whatever ills or pains I suffer now, I cannot remember what I suffered then, without deeming all one can endure here below as of no account whatever. To burn in this world is nothing, compared with burning in the other." There are her own words, and yet God showed her only the image of a portion of hell; from which it may be inferred that, in all its reality, it is a thousand times worse than this horrible picture; nothing can give one any exact idea of it.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, II., 329.

188. *What the Devil would do to see God.* -

It seems

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to us that the greatest torment of hell is the intelligent fire which devours the unhappy reprobates. We are mistaken. The most excruciating of all, the most intolerable for the human soul, is being deprived of seeing God, and the thought of being forever deprived of Him. This is what is called the pains of loss. I have read, I believe in the works of Father Surin, a learned theologian of the seventeenth century, a curious fact in relation to that. It happened in 1634, at Loudon, in the diocese of Poitiers; several persons possessed of the devil were exorcised, and the priest who performed that difficult task sometimes interrogated the evil spirit on questions of great interest. One day he said to him: "In the name of God, I command you to tell me, what pains are suffered in hell?" - "Alas! we suffer a fire which is never extinguished, an eternal malediction, and especially a rage, a despair impossible to describe, because we can never contemplate Him who created us, and whom we have lost by our own fault." - "What would you do, to enjoy the sight of God, were such a thing possible?" - "Oh! if God could permit it, I would consent with all my heart to climb a pillar that would reach to heaven, were it all over bristling with sharp points, keen edges, piercing thorns; I would consent besides to suffer ten thousand years, only to have the happiness of beholding God for a single moment. Ah! if men knew what they lose, in losing the grace of God!" Now, children, you must remember that the Church in her official exorcisms. discourages her priests from asking such interesting but obscure questions, because the Devil is the Father of Lies. In this case, the good priest seems to have indulged his curiosity and is to be reprimanded for that. But behold what truths were contained in the answer! Such was the reply of the Devil, and surely he ought to know, my dear friends, he who has been

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the enemy of God and inhabiting hell for so many ages.

- GUILLOIS, *Explic. du Cat.*, 95 - G. S. G.

189. *The Will of a Reprobate Sinner.* -

How clearly we see things at the hour of death! Ah! my dear friends, why do we not, then, reflect a little more during life on our eternal interests? Hear a story which is very fit to make any one shudder who has even a little faith. A father of a family, whose name charity does not permit me to tell you, had unhappily employed all sorts of means, good and bad, to enrich himself. He lived in Italy, and practised exteriorly the duties of religion; but that did not prevent him from cheating and extorting in business, without ever thinking of making restitution. When he felt that he had but a little time to live, he sent for a notary to make his will. He commenced in these terms:

"*This is my last will and testament. I leave my soul to the Devil!*" At these words the pen fell from the notary's hand; every one present shuddered with horror, and cried: "Poor man! he is out of his mind." - "No, I am not out of my mind," replied the dying man; "write what I dictate: '*I leave my soul to the Devil, to carry it to hell, because of the robberies I have committed. I give also to the Devil the soul of my wife, who encouraged me to rob. I furthermore give to the Devil the souls of my children, who profited by my*

robberies'." - "No! No!" cried the witnesses. "You acknowledge your guilt! Now plead for mercy from the judgement seat of God! The Good God longs to embrace a repentant sinner! Do not despair! Do not abandon yourself into the clutches of the seductive fiend!" It appeared to have no effect on this reprobate sinner. He added several other imprecations no less horrible, and ended by expiring in the most frightful rage and despair, leaving to all the witnesses of this awful scene a lesson they never forgot.

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Let us not forget it either, my dear children, for, as St. Paul says, *it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. Let me further reassure you, my children, that the man's wife and family were NOT condemned to hell, since they had their own free will and were not the possession of their father and husband. The wife led her children to the church for the sacrament of Confession and did her utmost to restore the ill-gotten goods for which her own greed had inspired her husband to steal. Let us show a like repentance over any of our sins.

- ABBE FAVRE, *Le Ciel Ouvert, (Heaven is Open)* 112.

IV. - ETERNITY.

190. *Thomas More's Twenty Years.* -

In 1534 the unhappy Henry VIII., King of England, had plunged his States into disorder by his schism. He hoped to find in all his subjects the same docility he had met in some wretches without morals and without conscience. He was mistaken. Among those who had the courage to resist him, history loves to cherish the name of Thomas More, High Chancellor of England. The tyrant had him despoiled of all he possessed and thrown into a gloomy prison; but he did not succeed in disturbing the peace which reigned in his soul. Some perfidious friends tried, one day, to reason with him: "How can you be so blind and obstinate," said they, "as to maintain an opinion contrary to that of almost every member of Parliament? It is madness, for surely you alone have not more intelligence than all these gentlemen put together?" - "I am not alone in my opinion," answered Thomas; "my opinion is that of the whole Church, spread throughout France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the entire world." But the best answer made by him on this occasion was as follows: His wife had the weakness to try to tempt him. She came to visit him in his

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prison and besought him to regain the king's favour by doing as he desired. "Then," added she, "we shall have the consolation of having you with us for a long time to come." - "And how many years longer, wife, do you think I could live?" - "At least twenty years yet." - "Twenty years!" repeated the heroic chancellor, "twenty years! and, Madam, would you have me barter an eternity of happiness for twenty years of a troubled and dishonoured old age? I would not gain by the exchange." Some days after, my young friends, Thomas More died a martyr on the scaffold, and commenced that eternity of happiness which they would have had him sacrifice for twenty miserable years.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. Hist. d'Education*, II., 652.

191. *Father Argentan's Comparison.* -

It is difficult, and even impossible, my young friends, for a mind so limited as that of man to form a just idea of eternity. Still we may, by means of certain comparisons, arrive at something formidable enough for the imagination. Father Argentan makes the following supposition to a damned soul: "Suppose the justice of God told you: 'I am going to fill the whole solar system to the height of the sun (or even the whole of this present universe) with little grains of sand, which you are to carry to another world that I will show you. You shall not carry them in a sack, nor even by handfuls, but grain by grain. You shall not even be at liberty to take them one after the other, without interruption; on the contrary, you shall suffer and allow a thousand years between each journey. Thus, after having removed the first grain of sand, you shall remain a whole

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thousand years in hell; then you shall carry the second, after that, another thousand years; after the third, the same torments; and when you shall have removed all those millions of grains of sand, your torments shall end.' Well, would you accept those conditions?" asks Father Argentan. - "Praise the Lord, yes, yes, I would willingly accept them, for it would seem to me as though I already saw the end of my pains." Thus cries out the damned soul. - "How! the end of your pains! think what you say, unhappy soul!" - "I do think of it and know well what I say, for what is a duration which is one day to end compared with an eternity that will never end?" The reflection was wise and true, my friends; let us never forget it, and our salvation is secure. - FATHER ARGENTAN, *Conferences sur les grandeurs de Dieu*, I., 293.

192. *When Shall Eternity End?* -

The celebrated Joseph Dominick Mansi, one of the most learned men of his age and of all Italy, had not always led a very regular life. He had commenced by being a notary. One day, being obliged to go to a house where he had probably some will to make, he passed a church where a sermon was being preached. Impelled by curiosity, he entered and soon perceived that the preacher had taken for his subject the eternity of the torments of the damned. From time to time he paused, and electrified his audience by crying out: "*O Eternity that shall never end!*" The tone in which he pronounced these words produced an extraordinary effect on Mansi. He left the church absorbed in thought and

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went on his way; only now and then he stopped, and repeated to himself: "O Eternity that shall never end!" Returning to his house, just as he was about to sit down to table, an interior voice seemed to repeat the same words in his ear: "O Eternity that shall never end!" By night, as well as by day, alike at prayer, and at business, that important sentence sounded in his ear and occupied his mind. Touched, at length, by this celestial warning, he left the world, became a priest, and died archbishop of Lucca, in Italy, in 1769. Let this reflection influence us, too, my dear children, for life is very short, whilst *eternity shall never end*. - SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, II., 569.

193. *Father Croiset's Ant.* -

In regard to comparisons that may give us some idea of the immeasurable duration of eternity, there is none that has struck me so much as the following. By constant rubbing, earth, stone, and even iron is at last worn away; but what time it would take to wear away a rock, an entire mountain, by rubbing it, merely with the finger!

Well! if a damned soul were told: "God is going to change into steel the earth with all that composes it, such as stones, trees, rocks, mountains, etc.; He will afterwards permit an ant to come once every hundred years on that enormous globe of polished steel, and when that little animal shall have succeeded in wearing it all away, merely by passing over it, eternity shall be ended." Can you even imagine the millions of ages it would take that ant to wear away even the thickness of a knife-blade?

And what is a

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knife-blade to the thickness of a mountain? to the whole earth? Well! my dear children, if one said to a damned soul: "When that incredible task shall have been finished by the ant, your eternity shall be ended," it would be a mistake: its eternity would be only commencing! Ah! well might the Holy Ghost say: "Think of your last end, and you shall never sin."

- PERE CROISSET, *Christian Year*, Month of August, 195.