

ON GRACE.

THE MEANS THAT MUST BE EMPLOYED.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER I.

GRACE.

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472. *The Thunder-Stroke that Converted St. Norbert.* -

The good God employs a thousand means to convert sinners; he waits, he engages, he prays, he touches, he strikes, according to circumstances. Thus, Heaven made use of the terrible voice of thunder to make St. Norbert enter into himself. Born near the banks of the Rhine, in Rhenish Prussia, he had all the advantages that can please the world: an illustrious birth, great wealth, a taste for magnificence, all the attractions of mind and body. Seduced by the delusive charms of the world, he had no other desire than to live in distinction and abundance, and he consumed his riches in luxury and in worldly entertainments. His gay and playful disposition rendered him the soul of all parties of pleasure. Carried away by a whirl of amusements succeeding each other without intermission, he never entered into himself, and made none of those serious reflections which might have dispelled the illusions that enchanted him. Still he was very far from finding himself perfectly happy. An insupportable void warned him, do as he

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would, that virtue alone could procure him peace of mind; but he loved his chains, and had not the courage to endeavour to break them. It was all over with him if God had not struck one day a great blow to awake him from his lethargic slumber. One day Norbert was on horseback attired with his usual elegance; he went to the country, on a party of pleasure. Being in the middle of a beautiful meadow, he was suddenly assailed by a violent storm, accompanied by thunder and lightning. As he found himself at a great distance from any shelter, uneasiness and fear took possession of him; he resolved to continue his way and to ride home with all speed; but, at that moment, the thunderbolt fell at his horse's feet with a horrible crash. The frightened animal threw his rider, who lay on the ground, as it were dead for nearly an hour. When Norbert came to himself again, he exclaimed in the bitterness of his soul: "Lord, what will You that I do?" An interior voice answered him: "Shun evil and do good, and seek peace untiringly." An event of so extraordinary a nature made the most lively impression upon him. He immediately formed a project of expiating his past life by a sincere penance, and that generous resolution was soon put into execution. Norbert became a model of penance and austerity; he even founded a religious order, around 1120, that of the Premonstratensians or Norbertines as they are known, which still exists in Italy, and elsewhere, and has recently, in the 19th century, been introduced into France.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI., 158.

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473. *Either I Shall be Saved, or I Shall be Damned.* -

Speaking of grace, which is a purely gratuitous gift of God, let me relate to you the following story; it will show you how we ought to act and to reason. Louis, landgrave of Thuringia, was a prince whom pleasures had entirely blinded, and who found no other means of stifling the remorse of his conscience than this false reasoning - "Either I am predestined," said he, "or I shall be damned. If I am predestined, whatever I do, I shall be saved; if, on the contrary, I am to be condemned, though I were the most virtuous in the world, I shall be damned; thus, my fate is fixed, I need not trouble myself about the future." He never failed to make use of this sophism in replying to all those good people who tried to make him enter into himself; he would have died in this miserable state were it not for the interposition of Divine Providence. Here is the fact: This prince having fallen dangerously ill, sent for his physician, a man of eminent virtue and capacity, who made use of this fortunate circumstance to cure him of the blindness of his mind, much more dangerous than was his corporal malady.

After making his examination, he told him gravely: "Prince, it is useless to try any remedy, - because," he added, "God has either foreseen that you shall die of this disease, or he has foreseen that you shall be cured. If He has foreseen that you shall die of it, in vain should we employ all the remedies of art; if, on the contrary, He has foreseen that you shall not die of it, you shall infallibly recover."

-- "How!" said the patient, "do you not see

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that if you assist me not speedily, the violence of the disease will carry me off, and that it is prudent to neglect nothing in such circumstances?"

Then the wise physician, making use of the occasion, made him this fine answer: "Prince, if this reasoning appears to you defective, now that there is question of saving the life of the body, why will you make use of it when there is question of the salvation of your soul? If you think it is prudence to employ all imaginable remedies to preserve your life, although you know that the hour of your death is fixed from all eternity, why do you resist grace? Why do you refuse to do penance and to lead a more regular life, under pretence that God having foreseen that you shall be damned or that you shall be saved, you cannot change the decrees of His providence? The uncertainty of the time of your death prompts you to omit nothing to preserve your life; should not the uncertainty of your happy or unhappy eternity induce you likewise to take means to secure your salvation?"

This discourse made so much impression on the prince's mind that, blinded and hardened as he was, he resolved to amend his life.

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 329.

474. *Henry IV. and the Grace of God.* -

We can do nothing available for salvation, dear friends, if we are not aided and assisted by the grace of God.

This is what Henry IV. of France did not understand in his youth. One day in a conversation with his preceptor and teacher, he expressed

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the liveliest desire to equal and even surpass all the celebrated men who had been the subject of their studies.

The preceptor said to him: "What security will you give me that you will execute this generous resolution?"

-- "How! what security? you do not then think me sincere?"

-- "I doubt not but you are; but you are making engagements very difficult to fulfil; and I should like to know whereon you found the hope of acquitting yourself of them."

-- "Why, on the extreme desire I have to do so; is one not certain of success in the things he undertakes with his whole heart? For example, being fond of playing tennis, and knowing that I shall have that pleasure, if you are pleased with my work, I apply myself to it with more ardour, and I always succeed in it. If, then, being still a child, and for so trifling a reward as that, I redouble my efforts, what will it be when I am a grown-up man, and propose to myself for reward, the love, the esteem, the praises of my fellow-men at home and abroad? Then nothing can restrain me, neither labour, nor even dangers."

-- "That is to say, then," observed the sage governor, "that to be always virtuous it suffices to will it, and that

it depended only on those great men, in whose lives we have remarked weaknesses, faults, and even enormous crimes, never to commit them?"

-- "Undoubtedly," replied young Henry eagerly.

-- "It is time, my dear child, that I open your eyes, and teach you that you reason as a pagan, and not as a christian. Know, then, that man is incapable of himself, I not only say

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of doing a good action, but even of desiring to do it, if God does not form that desire in him. So, my dear child, you may rest assured that it is God who inspires you with this noble emulation to imitate the great men of all countries and of all ages, and that it is He alone who can give you strength to execute it." Let us reason in the same way, dear friends, and act accordingly.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, VI., 158.

475. *An Actress Turned Carmelite.* -

Grace pursues us everywhere, my friends, and the greatest misfortune that can befall us is to resist it wilfully; on that our salvation depends. A young person, named Madaline Gaultier, lost her father at the age of seventeen. Finding herself portionless, and without a dowry, and those who should have provided for her subsistence having refused to do so, she went to seek her fortune in the theatrical career, (this at a time when the theatre was often no more than a place of salacious depravity, denigrating all womanhood). She had at first some repugnance to it, but this she soon overcame, the more so as she acquired in a short time the greatest celebrity. In vain, then, did a virtuous cousin, a poverty stricken, but noble woman, try to bring her back to a way of life more analogous to the education she had received; the young woman laughed at her remonstrances. Feted by the great, pensioned by princes, intoxicated with the homage of the multitude, she swims in an ocean of wealth and pleasure; she pleases the world, and the world pleases her; that suffices.

"Before thinking of the future paradise of which you speak to me," she said to her cousin, "I will enjoy a little of the earthly paradise, in which I am faring so well; moreover, if ever I am converted,

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It will not be before the age of forty five."

Nevertheless she was not yet thirty, when grace spoke to her heart and made her feel uneasy. She goes to hear Mass; she is still more tormented. She then resolves to go to Mass every day; but remorse follows her everywhere. Faithful, however, to a practice so uncommon in her state of life, she goes to church regularly every morning, but the evening sees her in the theatre. Her professional acquaintances rally her on her devotion; she feels they are right, and that no one can serve two masters at the same time. On the point of deciding she experiences the most violent struggle. At length grace prevails, her resolution is taken, she abruptly breaks off all her connections, and leaves Paris amazed at her retirement from the stage. Meanwhile a nobleman of high rank offers to give her one of his estates in perpetuity if she would only make her permanent abode there. She escapes even this new snare, and finally Providence conducts her to the Carmelites of Lyons, whom she edified by all the virtues of a fervent religious.

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 331.

476. *A Protestant Pursued by Grace.* -

The goodness of God never fails us; on the contrary, He seems to take delight in pursuing us with His grace, as He pursued a Protestant of the city of Lyons, some years before the French Revolution. I read an interesting account of it in the *Month of Mary* by Father Debussi. This Protestant was passing through a street of the city, when he met the holy Viaticum, which was being

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taken to a sick person. Vexed at the meeting he quickens his steps to avoid it, and flies from street to street.

Singular to relate! the priest that carried the Blessed Sacrament follows him step for step, having no other way to take to go where he was called. The Protestant can bear it no longer; he enters the first door that presents itself, and ascends to the very upper story. It was precisely the house and room where lay the sick person to whom the holy Viaticum was being brought. Suddenly he sees himself surrounded by those persons

who accompany the Blessed Sacrament; at this sight, he is utterly confounded, he can fly no farther.

At the same moment grace touches his heart, urging him to be converted and adore Our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist. "What!" said he then to himself; "God pursues me with His grace, and I fly Him! No, Lord, I will not be unfaithful to You; I will no longer resist You. I believe! I abjure my errors, and from this moment I promise You to live as a Catholic to the end of my life."

He left the sick room with the others, followed them to the church, went to find another priest, and made his confession that very day. Behold, dear friends, the faithful image of the persevering goodness whereby God pursues us with His grace every day; let us try to be always faithful to it.

- DEBUSSI, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, (*New Month of Mary*,) 270.

477. *Jesus Christ is Honoured in the Poor.* -

"Whatsoever you do in My name to the least of these My brethren, you do it unto Me."

It was Our Lord who said these words, and they are sometimes fulfilled in a miraculous

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manner. A great sinner, frightened at his sad state, and sincerely resolved to amend his life, was grieved that he could not weep for his sins as he wished. He one day left his house, overwhelmed with sorrow, and heedless of where he went, in order to seek some consolation. Going out, he met at the door a poor man, whose misery appeared extreme. He was touched by it, and remembering that Our Lord Jesus Christ had said that He would consider as done to Himself what should be done to the least of His brethren, he returned into his house with the poor man and gave him abundant alms. At the same time, he throws himself at his feet, as he would have done before Jesus Christ himself. In that humble and resigned posture, he said in the depth of his heart to Our Lord, whom he beheld by faith in the person of that poor man:

"Lord Jesus, You are in this poor man: Oh! if I could give You my heart! but it is so hard, that I dare not offer it to You. Receive this bread I can give You now, and in future do with my heart whatsoever You will!"

This humility was so efficacious, that he suddenly felt his heart softened, and his eyes bathed in tears. God afterwards gave him most signal graces, to which he had the happiness of being faithful. He had thus once more experienced in himself the efficacy of Our Lord's words.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. Hist. d'Educ.*, I., 537.