

ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK. CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XI.

EXTREME UNCTION.

(Page 836)

617. *Death of Queen Matilda.* -

One of the holiest queens that Germany has had is the venerable Matilda, who is even honoured with the title of blessed, on the 14th of March, the day of her death. Being arrived in the city of Quedlimburg, which she had chosen for the place of her sepulchre, near King Henry the Fowler, her husband, she fell sick, and seeing that her death was near, she said to William, Archbishop of Mayence, (Mainz), her grandson, who came to visit her: "I doubt not but it was God that sent you hither, since no one is more proper than you to assist me in the hour of death. Now, my son, you will commence by hearing my confession and giving me absolution then you will go to the church to say Mass for my sins, for the soul of King Henry, my lord, and for all the faithful departed." After the Archbishop had said Mass, he went back to her again, gave her a second absolution, then the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, (the Sacrament of the Sick,) and, finally, the Holy Viaticum. He remained yet three days with her, and, seeing that she was not so near her end, he asked her permission to depart. As she had given all to the poor, she had no other present to give him but a pall, one of those

(Page 837)

she had reserved for her own burial. She gave it to him, then, saying: "Take it, my son! you will need it more than I, for you have a hard journey before you." In fact, Archbishop William died suddenly on his way home to his diocese. Queen Matilda survived him twelve days; but, on the Saturday in the first week of Lent, at the dawn of day, she sent for the priests of her household, and the nuns of the monastery of Quedlimburg, which she had founded and to which she had retired. When her condition became known, a great multitude of women flocked to see her; she ordered every one to be admitted, and gave them much salutary advice. Then she desired the priests and nuns to draw near, to hear her last public confession, and beg of God to forgive her her sins. After this she ordered that Mass should be said and the Body of Our Lord brought her for the last time. Lastly, she caused herself to be laid on the floor on sackcloth, put ashes on her head with her own hands, and died in the odour of sanctity, on the 14th of March, 968, on which day the Church honours her memory.

- GODESCARD. *Vies des Saints*, (*Lives of Saints*), 14th March

618. *A Dead Person Brought to Life to Receive Extreme Unction.* -

The Church earnestly recommends that people should not neglect having the last sacraments administered to the sick; it is better to take it a little too soon than expose persons to die without that indispensable aid.

Indeed, it is recommended for anyone who is in danger of death or is seriously ill or very aged.

It is an unpardonable fault in parents who have the cruelty to act otherwise. St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, in Ireland,

(Page 838)

having entered the house of a lady of quality who was dangerously ill, in order to administer to her the

Sacrament of Extreme Unction, the people who were there were of opinion that he had better postpone the ceremony till next morning. The holy bishop acceded to their wishes and retired; but this poor woman died a little while after. St. Malachy was the more grieved at this that he took all the blame to himself for having allowed her to die without receiving the last sacraments. He passed the whole night praying and weeping, so that the abundance of tears he shed on that occasion supplied, in some degree, to the dead the want of Holy Unction. Whilst he persevered in prayer with his disciples, the Lord rewarded his faith in a very extraordinary manner; the dead returned to life, like a person awaking from a deep sleep. She raised herself on her bed, recognized St. Malachy, who was praying, and saluted him respectfully. Immediately the sadness was changed into joy, and all who saw this miracle were amazed. But the holy bishop thanked and blessed the Lord; he anointed the resuscitated woman, well knowing, says St. Bernard, who relates this story, *that sins are forgiven in that sacrament and that the prayer of faith saves the sick*. When the holy archbishop had repaired what he called his fault, he withdrew. The patient continued to grow better, and even recovered her health. She lived so for several days, as if to give time for every one to be convinced of the miracle. At length, when she had

(Page 839)

performed the penance which St. Malachy had imposed upon her in her last confession, she died a second time in the grace of the Lord.

- *Vie de Saint Malachie, (Life of Saint Malachy, by St Bernard) Chapter XXIV.*

619. *A Dauphin at the Bedside of His Servant.* -

The best way of proving one's affection for a dying person is not to keep away the priest who can alone do any good; on the contrary, everything must be done to procure for them a good and holy death. The virtuous Dauphin, father of Louis XII. of France, one day learned that an old servant of his house was in danger of death, and that he would not hear of regulating the affairs of his conscience. He was painfully affected.

"Alas!" said he, "and the soul of that unhappy man is as precious before God as ours! My confessor must be sent to him." But thinking that he might still do some good himself, in behalf of a man who had spent his life in his service, he went himself to his house. "Well! my friend," said he, "I am coming to see you, to tell you how sorry I am on your account. I have not forgotten that you always served me with affection; think, on your side, that you would give me, for the first time in your life, the greatest of all sorrows, if you did not employ the little while you have yet to live in preparing for death." The poor man, softened even to tears by this step of his good master's, awakes from his fatal lethargy, and reproaches himself for not having profited by the great examples of virtue he had had under his eyes. The lively faith of a great prince

(Page 840)

reanimates his! He gives shining proofs of repentance, and disposes himself for the grace of the sacraments, which he receives with much edification. Some hours before his death he sent word to the Dauphin that he was dying content, but that he hoped to have a small share in the prayers of his virtuous master. The prince, happy to hear this, sent his valet to tell him on his part: "I thank you, my friend, for the pleasure you have given me; you may reckon on my feeble prayers, and on others that will be still more efficacious." How beautiful this is, my friends! and how fortunate one is, at that last moment, to have true friends, who occupy themselves with our eternal interests, when we can no longer do so ourselves!

- REYRE, *Anec. Chret.*, 293.

620. *A Young Girl who Converted Her Mother Before She Died.* -

"During the winter of 1824," relates a worthy and pious clergyman, "I was called to a young person attacked by the king's evil, (the name given to *scrofula* after several cases were cured by holy Christian kings in the Middle Ages after their solemn anointing). She resided with her mother, a woman about fifty years old, who had been a widow several years. Having learned that the latter did not frequent the sacraments, I spoke to her several times on that subject, and always without effect; soon she avoided meeting me, and took care to retire to her own room as soon as I entered the house. Meanwhile the daughter saw her end approaching, and appeared nowise alarmed. It seemed that the death, of which she so often spoke, had for her no bitterness.

One day, after hearing her confession, I was going away, when she asked me

(Page 841)

to send for her mother and not go away myself. The woman, being come, was surprised to see her daughter in tears; it was something unusual with her, and she was generally very cheerful, notwithstanding her sufferings. 'Why these tears, my dear daughter?' said she; 'are you losing courage now after bearing all so patiently heretofore?' -- 'No, mother, no! it is because I must bid you farewell to-day that I am weeping. Ah! what a sad farewell!' -- 'But why are you not more resigned?' -- 'Alas!' said she, 'why? Because that farewell will be eternal.' -- 'What is that you say, daughter? You do not mean it.' -- 'Indeed I do, mother; the leave I take of you on this day is forever. You and I do not go the same road. By approaching the sacraments I walk in the way marked out by our holy religion, and I hope for the happiness she promises. As for you, poor mother, since you are going another way, you cannot pretend to reach the same destination.' She uttered these words in a strong, firm voice, which showed her agitation. I, the witness of this scene which I could not expect, and could not possibly have anticipated, I could not restrain my surprise. The mother turned pale, and appeared much affected. Then the dying girl mustered all her strength, and raising herself painfully on her elbow: 'Adieu!' she cried 'Mother! dear mother! I shall never see you more! -- Adieu, mother, adieu! We shall be separated forever! - yes, forever!' At these words the mother fainted away. In a little while she recovered somewhat,

(Page 842)

rose up and approached the bed. 'No, my daughter,' said she all in tears; 'no, we shall not be separated! Console yourself; my child! I have been your mother; to-day you are mine; I will go to confession, and will henceforth be a Catholic in act as well as in profession. Sir,' said she, turning to me, 'will you hear my confession to-day? I must give my child that comfort before she breathes her last; she must, at least, see that I have commenced.' I appointed an hour for her to be in the church; she was faithful to her promise. This happy change rejoiced the young girl, who died some days after thinking only of heaven, where she had now the sweet hope of meeting her mother again."
- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 414.

621. *The Combat of a Young Dying Christian.* -

Do you know why it is, dear friends, that the Church is so eager to administer the last sacraments to the dying? It is because the devil then redoubles his assaults, to try and precipitate souls into the abyss of eternal woe. Here is the example of a child about your own age. Edmond de Laage, a pupil of the sixth class in the Little Seminary (or Minor Seminary) of Saint Acheul, having been attacked by the disease called *tetanus*, was soon apprised of the dangerous state in which he was. The teachers and his friends, they endeavoured to excite him to resignation "Oh! yes!" he repeated often, "yes, I am very resigned - I believe - I love the good God; I am resigned to His holy will." To strengthen him against the horrors which usually accompany the approach

(Page 843)

of death, they ask him if he does not desire to receive Extreme Unction. "Oh, yes!" he cried with transport, "I shall be very glad to receive it."

And he did receive it with the most edifying piety, responding himself to all the prayers of the Church. The assistance of that sacrament was much needed by him; it seemed, in fact, that the devil was making a violent attack upon him. Several times he was seen to make motions of the head and arms, as if repulsing some one, and at the same time he exclaimed: "You weary me! - begone - no, I do not want you! - But You, my Lord, all Yours, my God! all Yours, soul and body!" In another such crisis he began himself to say aloud the Lord's Prayer, which all present continued with him. Some time after, as he appeared more agitated, some one near him said:

"Fear nothing, my child! there are five priests among us around you."

-- "Oh! I am not afraid, Father!" And immediately he added, in a tone of voice that drew tears from those who heard him: "Jesus, my God, my God! have mercy on me! cast a look on me in this miserable life! - O my God! I commit my soul to Your hands!" This holy youth died so in the Lord, the 27th May, 1825; he was but 14 years of age.

- *Souvenirs des Petits Seminaires*, 258.