

creative power, which he gives to the soul whom he finds crucified and empty of her own will. Then he will make her act no longer teebly of herself, but strongly of him, bringing forth fruit a hundred-fold. This, it seems, is the secret of the immense and lasting fecundity of the action of the Saints, besides which the transitory successes of the great ones appear like coloured bubbles bursting in the air. For as a tree is the stronger the more deeply its roots are buried in the earth, so a soul is more powerful the more profoundly its life is hidden and buried in God. The powers of this world are noisy and very much on the surface—but the saints are silent and very hidden, speaking “wisdom among the perfect . . . which is hidden . . . which none of the princes of this world know. . . . But we have the mind of Christ.”

A TREATISE ON THE INEFFABLE MYSTERY OF OUR REDEMPTION

BY

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(Translated by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey.)

I

THE DISPOSITION REQUIRED FOR TREATING OF THIS MYSTERY

When Moses saw that the bush was on fire and yet not burnt, and went to look at this marvel, God told him to put off his shoes, for the place on which he stood was holy ground. (Exod. III). This must be done by those who would gaze on God within this lowly bush of our humanity amid the thorns of his wounds and afflictions. For in order to contemplate this sublime Mystery, so far above our power of reason, a man must put off all that is human: his faults, his weaknesses and human affections, with the judgements, surmises and laws of human prudence, in order that he may contemplate this mystery with greater purity. For to seek to measure God's works by the same measure as our own, with the rod of reason, especially his work of the Redemption, which is that of his infinite goodness and charity, with the goodness and charity to be found in men, however perfect and holy, would be utter folly. It would be to cheapen and depreciate the works of this infinite Grandeur and to set them on a level with our pettiness; for as it is certain that his Being infinitely surpasses ours, so do his actions surpass our own. Hence there could be no greater error than for a man to seek to judge and investigate God by what he sees in himself. These, then, are “the shoes” he must put off, these the human weaknesses from which we must free ourselves when we wish to consider the works of sovereign Goodness and

Charity that shine forth in this Mystery.

These "shoes" being put off, go with faith and humility to contemplate God in this bush, beseeching him who is the Father of Lights to send you a ray by which to see the greatness and riches it contains, for no doubt what a man learns by his own intellect and what he learns by special light and inspiration from God differ as much as do human and divine actions. Therefore this illumination must be besought with all humility in order to enter this sanctuary. He who has this light will find in this sacred Passion his Redemption, in this death his life, in his ignominy true honour and amid all the bitterness, sweetness unspeakable. Finally, in this Mystery which the blind world takes for foolishness and weakness (I Cor. i, 25), he will discover the treasures of divine Wisdom and Goodness. The Truth of this will be learnt by whoever has the light and disposition required for contemplating this Mystery. So it was with Saint Bonaventura, who was specially devoted to the sacred Passion. He relates devoutly: "Once, when I entered these wounds with my eyes open, the blood that flowed from them blinded me, and afterwards I could see nothing but blood; then I entered his tender heart in which I dwell, sustained by His delicious nutriment, and I dread leaving this blissful dwelling and losing the peace in which I live. But I trust in him that as his wounds are always open I shall re-enter them, should I go forth. Oh, how well it is to dwell with Christ crucified! I long to make in him three dwelling-places—one in his hands, one in his feet, the other in his sacred side. There will I speak to his heart and he will grant me all I ask." (*In stimulo amoris*). Later on the Saint adds that devout souls enjoy such sweetness and consolation from this Mystery that even the body, which has in itself no liking for spiritual matters, receives such delight and consolation that it is saddened if withdrawn from it by the call of obedience or charity. Then it understands the truth of the prophet's words, "My heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God" (Psalm 80). This is one among the many fruits enjoyed by those who practice this meditation with heartfelt purity and devotion.

Aristotle says that the young, whose passions are very strong, are not inclined to learn how to control them by practising the opposite virtues. But if teaching on the moral virtues obtained by human reason requires a special disposition, what would be needed for teaching these most sublime Mysteries of our Faith, which is exalted above men's understanding? This work, held by the foolish world as ignominious, is the most glorious ever wrought by God, and called God's work, on account of its excellence. I say, rather, that if all the works of God's magnificence, which he has done, will do, or might do until the end of the world, were

compared with that of our Redemption, they would shine no brighter in comparison than the stars at midday. For all these actions, done or to be done, cost our Lord God no more than to say, "I will it." With this alone, according to Saint Augustine, he created in an instant the vast structure of the earth with all that it contains, nor did he do by this anything that seems unworthy of his Majesty.

But in the work of our Redemption how many years were spent! What trials were undergone! What insults, scoffs, what stripes and pains and crosses were endured! To what humility and degradation and to how many actions contrary to his Divine Nature did the Son of God lower himself! He descended to be born in a stable between two animals, to die on the Cross between two thieves, to wash the feet of Judas, and to be reckoned below Barabbas.

How can any other of God's actions be compared to this, in which so many tears were spent, so many sorrows suffered, and such insults received? Then let all the other works, sublime as they may be, keep silence. Let the creation of the Cherubim and Seraphim and all the choirs of angels be dumb before the glory of the Cross!

Our Lord himself declares this by the Prophet Isaias; "Remember not former things, and look not on things of old. Behold I do new things, and now they shall spring forth, verily you shall know them" (Isaias, 43, 18, 19). They will cast all that is past into oblivion. Our Saviour, though preserving throughout his life singular humility and modesty regarding himself and his affairs, yet when he spoke of the Mystery of his coming, magnified it most highly. On Palm Sunday, when the people cried "How blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord," and the Pharisees, indignant at this praise, asked him, "Hearest thou what these say?" he answered, "I say to you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones will cry out." Thus he showed the grandeur of this Mystery and benefit which even the senseless stones would declare, condemning the hardness and insensibility of many bad Christians who neither compassionate him who suffered thus for them, nor love him who so loved them, nor hate the sins for which he paid so dearly.

So strongly did the Saviour desire that his familiar friends should grieve over the sufferings which he endured, that besides desiring that the Blessed Virgin should stand beside the cross, her soul crucified with him, he has allowed many other of his servants to share the tortures of his wounds, as we read of the Saints in former ages and have even seen in our own times, although this is kept secret for the sight of God alone, so that not content with what they learn in Holy Scripture, experience may show them something of what he endured for them. So he tells them secretly, "Think

of what I bore for thee; at what a costly price I purchased thee, and realize what thou dost owe me." The Prophet seems to allude to this when he says, "I have blotted out thine iniquities as a cloud and thy sins as a mist: return to me for I have redeemed thee." (Isaias, 14, 22). This, then, is the first opinion we give on this subject.

The second is to affirm that though our Lord could have restored fallen man by many other means, none was more excellent, more suitable, or more expedient than this, both for God's glory and man's remedy, especially because in this work are found the two virtues which always accompany our Lord's actions: mercy and justice, which though they appear contrary, are here seen in perfect union, as will be noticed later on.

But before finishing this introduction I warn souls that, though all that is written here concerning the immensity of our Lord's goodness and charity and the pains and injuries he suffered to redeem us moves our heart to love our Saviour and compassionate his sufferings, to thank him for this supreme benefit and to wonder at such extreme bounty and love, yet this would not suffice to arouse our affections and intellect unless it was granted by the same Lord who redeemed us. For though he suffered for all men, he did not give them all to understand what he bore for them. Thus, when treating of the virtues of the Faith, what we write of them does not confirm us in it unless we first ask our Lord for special light and help, faith being the gift of God. And it is no less by a special gift of God that we should feel these devout and tender feelings regarding the sacred Passion. Therefore, merely reading what is written here will not avail us unless accompanied by humble and devout prayer in which we beg our Lord to bestow on us his promise to the Prophet Ezechiel, that he would take away the stony heart out of Israel's flesh and give it a heart of flesh (Ezech. 36, 26) in order that we may, to some extent, realize what our Lord suffered for us.

REVIEWS

CHRIST'S STRANGE WORK. By Alec. R. Vidler. (Longmans; 2s. 6d.)

The author takes as his text some words from a sermon of Lancelot Andrewes: "If (the Gospel) once lose the force and vigour of a law, it is a sign it declines." And from an article in the Formula of Concord (1576), which distinguishes Christ's "strange work," which is to set before man the wrath of God, the teaching of the Law and Moses, from his "proper office, which is to declare the grace of God, to console and vivify." He then expounds in detail this *opus alienum*, putting it in the setting of the whole divine scheme of salvation. The Law, as the same