

A TREATISE

ON

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN

TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL.

Written in Spanish,

BY THE

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FIRST BOOK

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEMPORAL AND ETERNAL.

CHAPTER I.

Our ignorance of what are the true goods; and not only of things Eternal, but Temporal.

To use things aright, we ought first to know their value and estimation; and we cannot give them their true value, unless we know their nature, and what they are; which knowledge is in this world so short and imperfect, that it passes not beyond worldly things, nor enters into the consideration of things heavenly and eternal, for which we were created. And it is no wonder, that in matters of eternity being so far removed from our senses, we know so little, since we are ignorant even in temporal things, which we see and daily touch with our hands. How can we comprehend the things of the other world, when we know not those of this wherein we are? and even to that stupidity can human ignorance arrive, that we know not what we presume to be best acquainted with, the riches, commodities, honors, and goods of this world, with which mortal men so much converse, and which they so much covet; for they covet them because they know them not.

Good reason had St. Peter when he taught St. Clement the Roman, (Clem. Rom. in Epist.) that the world was like a house filled with smoke, wherein nothing could be seen, either within or without, the smoke hindering the distinct sight of both. After the same manner it happens to those who live in this world; they neither know what is without it, nor what within it; they neither know the greatness of what is eternal, nor the baseness of what is temporal; and being ignorant of both, for want of knowledge, mistake their

value, giving what is due to one to the other; making that small account of things heavenly and eternal, which they ought to do of things fading and transitory; judging so contrary to truth, that, as St. Gregory remarks, (lib. 8, moral, c. 12.) they take the banishment of this life for their home, the darkness of human wisdom for light, and this wandering peregrination here for their rest and abode; all which proceeds from ignorance of the truth, and the small consideration of what is eternal; in such manner as they qualify what is good with the name of bad, and what is bad with the name of good; by reason of which confusion in human judgment David asked of the Lord, that he would give him a master who might instruct him? which is the true good: saying, "Who shall teach us what is good?"

The world is therefore ignorant of all things, even of its own proper goods, which it most enjoys; it faring with us, as it did with the children of Israel, who having manna in their sight, and holding it in their hands, yet knew it not, but demanded, "What is this?" but to us even that curiosity is wanting; we inquire not so much as what these riches are, for which mortal man hazards so many dangers of death; what the honors are, for which men's hearts burst with envy and ambition; what the pleasures are, for which we endanger our health, and often lose our lives; what the goods of the earth are, which are only enjoyed during our pilgrimage in the exile of this life, and are to vanish at the entrance of the other, as the manna did at the entrance of the Land of Promise. With reason did Christ our Redeemer, in the Apocalypse, call it the hidden manna, because the Hebrews, holding it in their hands, knew not what it was: even so are the things of this life hidden from our understandings, which, although we touch, we know not; and so confounding their value, do that for things temporal, which we ought to do only for the eternal; underrailing these for the esteem of those, which for themselves are worthy to be despised and contemned.

Hence, failing in the knowledge of things, we fall in their estimation, and consequently in their use. That which happens in this, may likewise be seen in those who eat the manna; for in them it caused a loathing, and procured vomit; to others it tasted pleasantly, and like the meat they

most desired: so great a difference is there between the good and ill use of things; and the good use of all depends upon their knowledge.

Let mortal men, therefore, awake and open their eyes, and let them know the difference between what is temporal and eternal, that they may give to every thing its due estimation; despising that which time makes an end of, and esteeming that which eternity preserves; which they ought to seek during this life, and by those momentary things purchase the eternal, to which they cannot attain without the knowledge both of the one and the other; because, aiming at the eternal, as that of greatest value, they conserve the temporal, although of itself of no worth, and that which is corruptible and transitory, they render firm and durable.

The manna which our Lord gave to the Hebrews, whilst they wandered in the Desert, and was to serve them until their arrival in the Land of Promise, amongst other mysterious significations which it contained, one was to be a symbol of the blessings which we enjoy in the peregrination of this life, until we come to the promised land of eternal happiness. For this cause it putrified and corrupted suddenly, lasting but a very short time, as all things of this world do; only that part of the manna, which was gathered with intention to keep for the Sabbath, which was a figure of glory, or to preserve in the Ark to be carried into the Land of Promise, corrupted not; inasmuch as gathering the same thing with different respects, made that, which in itself was corruptible, to be of a condition eternal, as is well noted by Baldwin,* an ancient Doctor, and a most learned interpreter of the Holy Scripture. So much it imports to have our intentions elevated and placed upon eternity, as by the use of temporal and transitory things we may gain eternal; converting small things into great, mutable into immutable, and mortal into immortal.

Some philosophers, who considered better the things of this life, although without attention to the eternal, found in them many defects, which the most wise emperor and philosopher, Aurelius Antoninus,† reduced to three, to wit, that they are little, mutable, and corruptible, even until they

* Bald. apud Thira. in Exod. 16.

† In vita sua.

arrive to their end; all which we shall find represented to the life in manna. The hithleness of it was such, saith the Holy Scripture, that it was small, like that which is brayed in a mortar, and reduced into powder; the mutability was so notable, that carrying it from the field where it was gathered into their tents, if they brought a quintal,* it shrunk and contracted itself into the small measure of a gomer; with some it diminished, and with others swelled and dilated itself into a greater proportion. The corruption of it was so sudden, that it lasted not one day without being putrified and filled with worms; and yet, notwithstanding all these qualities, the enjoying and eating of it cost much toil and labor, first in gathering, then in grinding, then in cooking and performing many other duties requisite for the use of it. After the same manner, the goods of this life, notwithstanding all their faults and evil conditions, are not obtained, nor enjoyed, without much travail and vexation. After this, all did not enjoy that quality proper to the manna, which was to taste like unto that, which he that eat it most desired; for sinners found this taste limited, and not so full and savory as others. Even so, we with our vices alter and diminish the natural sweetness of the things of this life, as we shall see hereafter in its due place.

It is true, that the appearance of it was good, as the seventy interpreters say,† it was like crystal, clear and transparent. The same is the condition of the goods of this life; they have the splendor and an appearance, but are really more brittle than glass; they are variable, fading, and inconstant, and subject to a thousand alterations; they are corruptible, transitory, and mortal, and only by reason of their glittering we seek after them, as after things great and eternal.

Let us leave the appearance and painted superficies of things, and look upon their substance and truth, and we shall find, that what is temporal is small, and what is eternal is great; the temporal inconstant, the eternal firm; the temporal short and temporal, the eternal durable, and, in fine, eternal. This alone was enough to make it more esteemed than the temporal, although the temporal in all other respects

* Vi. Bonifacium in Exod. 16 Species illius specie christi auti.
† Seph. Interp. in cap. 11 Numb.

did exceed it; but the one being so short and mutable, and the other great, firm, and constant, the difference between them can be no less, than as St. Gregory esteemed it, (lib. 7, moral c. 12) who says, "immense is that which shall follow without limit, and little is all that which ends." The same saint notes, that the small knowledge and memory of eternity is the main cause of the deceiving of mankind, who have in esteem the false goods of this life, and undervalue spiritual and eternal of the other; and, therefore, speaks in this manner (lib. 8, moral. c. 12), "The thoughts of the predestined always have their intentions placed upon eternity; although they possess great felicity in this life, and although they be not in danger of death, yet ever look upon it as present. The contrary do obstructe souls, who love this temporal life, as a thing permanent, because they consider not how great is the eternity of that which is to come; and not considering the solidity of the eternal, they judge this banishment for their country, this darkness for light, and this race for their station; for those who know not great matters, are not able to judge of the smallest." We, therefore, will begin to draw the curtain, and from the consideration of eternity, and the loose condition of time, discover the distance between the goods of heaven and those of earth; from whence we shall come to treat of the baseness of the temporal, and the greatness of the eternal. For, as a philosopher said of light, that there was nothing more clear, and nothing more obscure; the same may be said of time and eternity, which, being held no less perspicuous, are ill understood, and are no less obscure and dark than the other. But we shall endeavor to make them more intelligible, being assisted by the light of faith, the doctrine of saints, and wisdom of philosophers.

CHAPTER II.

How efficacious is the consideration of Eternity for the change of our lives.

The thought of eternity, St. Augustine* calls a great thought, because the memory of it is of great joy to the saints, and no less horror to sinners, and to both of much profit and concern:

* August. in Psal. 76, Magna cogitatio.

It causes us to do great matters, and shows the smallness of the fading and transitory things of this earth. I will, therefore, from this light begin to discover the large field of the poverty, deceit and baseness of the temporal, and recommend the consideration of the eternal, which we ought still to have in our thoughts, as David had perpetually in his; in whom, whilst he was a sinner, it caused horror and confusion, and being a saint, it comforted and encouraged him to be yet more holy; drawing from this meditation more spiritual and incomparable profit to his soul, and therefore, in his Psalms, he so often repeats the memory of it, not only in the body of them, but almost in every passage, saying, *for ever, or, eternally, or, world without end*: there being no inscription or title which he uses more frequently than this, *against the end, or, to the end*, because he composed them with the consideration of eternity, which follows the end of this life; and for more cleanness adds in some of them, *against the end, for the Octave*; which, according to St. Augustine, signifies eternity, that being the Octave, after the seven days of the week, into which all time is to be resolved; which seven days being past, there are to be no more weeks, but as St. Peter says, one only day of perpetual eternity.

In this eternity, therefore, did the prophet employ his thoughts by day, and his meditations by night; this forced him to send up his voice to heaven, and to cry out to God; this made him mute, and took away his speech with men; this astonished him, and made his pulse fail with the consideration of it; this affrighted him, and mingled wormwood with the pleasure of this life; this made him know the littleness of all that is temporal, and made him enter into himself, and examine his conscience; finally, this brought him to a most miraculous change of life, beginning to serve the Lord with more fervor; all which effects, proceeding from the thoughts of eternity, are apparent in the seventeenth Psalm; therefore, says he, amongst other things, "My eyes prevented the watches; I was troubled and I spoke not;" immediately after he gives the reason, saying, "I thought upon the days of old, and I had in my mind the eternal years, and I meditated in the night with my own heart." This thought was the occasion of his long watches; on this he meditated before the sun was risen, and on this many hours

after it was set, and that with so great astonishment of what eternity was, that as himself affirms, his spirit failed him, and he trembled with the lively apprehension of what it was, either to perish eternally in hell, or to enjoy a blessedness for ever in heaven. And it is no wonder, that this great thought of eternity should make so holy a king tremble, when, as the prophet Habacuc says, the highest hills of the world bow down and quake at the ways of eternity. The holy youth Josaphat (Damas, in vita ejus,) at the representation of eternity, fell being placed on one side, and heaven on the other, remained astonished and without strength, not being able to raise himself in his bed, as if he had been afflicted with some mortal sickness.

The philosophers more barbarous, and who had less light, were yet daunted with the thought of it, and in their symbols made choice of things of the greatest terror to express it; some painted it in the form of a basilisk, a serpent the most terrible of all others, who kills with only his sight; there being nothing of more horror, than that eternity of torments into which we are subject to fall. Conformable to this, St. John Damascen represented eternal duration under the figure of a fierce dragon, which from a deep pit lay waiting with open jaws to swallow men alive. Others figured it by a horrible and profound cavern, which at the entrance had four degrees; one of iron, another of brass, the third of silver, and the last of gold, upon which many little children of different sexes and ages stood playing and passing away the time, without regarding the danger of falling into that bottomless dungeon. This shadow they framed not only to set forth how worthy eternity was of their fear and amazement, but also to express their amazement at the folly of men, who laugh and entertain themselves with the things of this life, without remembering that they are to die, and may then fall into the bottomless abyss of hell; those children who are playing at the entrance of that dismal cave, being no other than men in this life, whose employments are but those of children, and who being so near their death, and therefore, to eternity which succeeds it, have neither fear nor care to leave the pleasures and vain entertainments of this world. Truly it is a thing of great amazement, that being in expectation of two such extremes, as eternal glory, and

torments without end, we live as if there were neither. The reason is, because men set not themselves seriously to consider what eternity is, which is, either hell, whilst God is God, or glory without end. For this cause it is, that they remain as settled and obstinate in their fading pleasures, as if they were immortal; which was signified by these degrees of such hard metals. But in David, who seriously meditated and framed a lively conception of what the eternity of years was, it caused so great a fear, and so awakened his spirits with care and diligence, that it produced in him an extraordinary change of life, that he said with great resolution within himself, *Now I begin. This is a change from the right hand of the Most High.* "Now I begin," as Dionysius explains it, (Comment. in Psal. 76.) "to live spiritually, to understand wisely, to know truly, perceiving the vanity of this present world, and felicity of the future, reputing as nothing all my past life, and all the progress I have hitherto made in perfection. I will, henceforth, seriously take to heart with a new purpose, a new fervor, and a more vehement endeavor, the paths of a better life, and entering the way of spiritual profit begin every day afresh." And because he knew his heart to be so much changed, he confessed his resolution to be miraculous, saying, *This change is from the hand of the Most High*; as if he had said, according to the same Dionysius, to have in this sort changed me out of the darkness of ignorance into the splendor of wisdom, from vices to virtues, from a carnal man to spiritual, is only to be attributed to the aid and most merciful assistance of God, who by the knowledge of eternity hath given so notable a conversion to my heart. This great thought of eternity doth mightily enlighten the understanding, and gives us a true and perfect knowledge of things as they are. For this cause, in the title of some of the Psalms which David made with this consideration, as we have already said, he added the word, (Psalms 6,) *understanding, or for the understanding*; that is, to give understanding to those who meditate upon the end of this life, and the eternity of the other, and, therefore, despise the goods of the world.

By the experience of what happened to his own soul, the prophet exhorts all men, that they meditate with quietness and leisure upon the eternity of two so opposite conditions which hereafter expect them, that they may not only run, but

fly to it with profit, and suffer with patience all the difficulty which attends on virtue; and therefore with great mystery promises, on the part of God, to those who shall sleep between the two lots—that is, to those who, in the quietness of prayer, shall meditate on the eternity of glory and of hell—that there shall be granted to them the silver wings of the dove, (a bird of the swiftest flight,) and her shoulders of gold, because the spiritual life consists not only in the actions of our own good works, but also in the patient suffering the evil works of others; in lifting up ourselves from the dirt of this earth, and flying towards heaven, by performing heroic and precious acts of virtue, and not yielding to the troubles and afflictions of this life which oppress us. All which is, by a lively conception of eternity, affected with great merit and perfection; and for this reason did the prophet express it by the similitude of those things which men esteem the most precious, as of gold and silver. But because to suffer is commonly more difficult than to do, and, consequently, more meritorious, although both be very precious; for this cause he said, that the shoulders should be of gold, and the wings of silver. This also did the patriarch Jacob hold for so singular a good, that he gave it to his son Isachar for a blessing, telling him that he should lie down between the two borders; that is, that he should at leisure meditate upon the two extremes of happiness or misery eternal. For this reason he calls him a strong beast, as having the strength of mind to overcome the difficulty of virtue, to support the troubles and burdens of this life, to suffer the scorns and disgraces of the world, to undergo great penances and mortifications, by considering the two external extremes which attend us.

And not only amongst saints, but amongst the philosophers, did the quiet and calm consideration of eternity produce a great love and desire of things eternal, and as great contempt of all which was temporal, even without looking upon those two so different extremes, which the Christian religion proposes to us. Seneca complained much, that he was interrupted in the meditation of eternity, in which he was wholly absorbed, his senses suspended, and tied up, as it were, in a sweet sleep, by the content which he received from that consideration. "I delighted myself, (says he) amongst other things, to inquire into the eternity

of soul, and believing it as a thing assuredly true, I delivered up myself wholly to so great a hope, and I was now weary of myself, and despised all that remained of age, though with perfect and entire health, that I might pass into that immense time, and into the consideration of an eternal world." So much could the consideration of eternity work in this philosopher, that it made him despise the most precious of temporal things, which is life. Certainly, among Christians it ought to produce a greater effect, since they not only know that they are to live eternally, but that they are either to rejoice, or suffer eternally, according to their works and life.

CHAPTER III.

The Memory of Eternity is of itself more efficacious than that of Death.

It is, therefore, of much importance for us to frame a lively conception of eternity, and having once framed it, to retain it in continual memory, which of itself is more efficacious than that of death; for, although both the one and the other are very profitable, yet that of eternity is far more generous, strong, and fruitful of good works; for by it virgins have preserved their purity, anchorites performed their austere penances, and martyrs suffered their torments, who were not comforted and encouraged in their pains by the fear of death, but by the holy reverence and hope of eternity, and the love of God. It is true, the philosophers, who hoped not for the immortality of the other life, as we do, yet, with the memory of death, retired of themselves from the vanity of the world, despised its greatness, composed their actions, and ordered their lives according to rules of reason and virtue. Epictetus advises us always to have death in our minds: "Thou shalt never, (says he,)* have base and low thoughts, nor desire anything with trouble and anxiety." And Plato said, that by so much man were to be esteemed wiser, by how much he more seriously thought of death; and for this reason he commanded his disciples, that when they went any journey, they should

* Epict. c. 28, apud. S. Hier. in cap. 10 Math.

go barefoot; signifying thereby, that in the way of this life, we should always have the end of it discovered, which is death, and the end of all things. But Christians, who believe the other life, are to add to this contemptation of death, the memory of eternity; the advantages whereof are as far above it, as things eternal above those which are temporal. The philosophers were so much moved with the apprehension of death because with it all things of this mortal life were to end; death being the limit wherunto they might enjoy their riches, honors and delights, and no further: others desired to die, because their evils and afflictions were to die with them. If then, death amaze some, only because it deprives them of the goods of this life, which by a thousand other ways used to fail, and which of themselves, even before the death of the owner, are corruptible, dangerous, and full of cares: and if others hope for death, only because it frees them from the evils of life, which in themselves are short and little, as all temporal things are; why should we not be moved by the thought of eternity, which secures us goods great and everlasting, and threatens us with evils excessive and without end? Without doubt, then, if we rightly conceive of eternity, the memory of it is much more powerful than that of death; and if of this, wise men have had so great an esteem, and advised others to have the same, much more ought to be had of that of eternity. Zeno, desirous to know an efficacious means how to compose his life, bridle his carnal appetites, and observe the laws of virtue, had recourse to the Oracle, which recommended him to the memory of death, saying, "Go to the dead; consult with them, and there thou shalt learn what thou demandest." There, seeing the dead possess nothing of what they had, and that with their lives they had breathed out all their felicity, he might learn not to be puffed up with pride, nor to the value vanities of the world. For the same cause, some philosophers used to drink from the skulls of dead men, that they might keep in continual memory that they were to die, and were not to enjoy the pleasures of this life, although necessary, unless alloyed by some such sad remembrance. In like manner, many great monarchs used it as an antidote against the blandishments of fortune, that their lives might not be corrupted by their too great pro-

perity. Philip, king of Macedonia, commanded a page to tell him three times every morning; *Philip, thou art a man*; putting him in mind he was to die, and leave all. The emperor Maximilian I., four years before he died, commanded his coffin to be made, which he carried along with him whithersoever he went, which, with a mute voice, might tell him, as it were, "Maximilian, thou art to die, and leave all." The emperors also of the East, amongst other ensigns of majesty, carried in their left hand a book with leaves of gold, which they called *Innocency*, full of earth and dust, in signification of human mortality, and to put them in mind hereby of that ancient doom of mankind, "Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return." And not without much conveniency was this memorial of death in the form of a book, nothing being of more instruction and learning, than the memory of death, being the only school of that great truth; its being of gold, and carried in the left hand, being that next the heart, had also its mystery; for it was to give us to understand, how precious this disabuse is, and that we ought to stamp and imprint it in our hearts, where we may best learn to receive ourselves. With reason also was the book called *Innocency*; for who will dare to sin, that knows he is to die? Neither were the emperors of the Abyssinians* careless herein; for at their coronations, amongst many other ceremonies, were brought to them a vessel filled with earth, and a dead man's skull; advertising them in the beginning, that their reign was to have a speedy end. Finally, all philosophers agreed in this, that all their philosophy was the meditation of death.

But, without doubt, the contemplation of eternity is far beyond all philosophy; it is a greater matter, and of far more astonishment, for the torments of hell to last for ever, than for the greatest empires suddenly to have an end; more horrible to suffer eternal evils, than to be deprived of temporal goods; greater wonder that our souls are immortal, than our bodies are to die. Wherefore Christians, especially those who aim to be perfect, are rather to endeavor to raise in themselves a strong conception of eternity, than to stir up the fear of death, whose memory ought not to be needful

* Nichol. Gog. lib. 1. de rebus Abiss cap. 8.

for the contempt of what is temporal, since the first step to Christian perfection (according to the counsel of Christ) is to renounce all that we possess of the earth, that being so freed from those impediments of Christian perfection, we may employ ourselves in the consideration and memory of that eternity which expects us hereafter, as a reward of our holy works, and exercises of virtue. This awful voice, *eternity, eternity*, is to sound often in our hearts. Thou not only art to die, but being dead, eternity attends thee. Remember there is a hell without end, and fix it in thy memory, that there is a glory for ever. This consideration—that if thou shalt observe the law of God thou shalt be eternally rewarded, and if thou break it, thou shalt suffer pains without end, will be far more powerful with thee, than to know that the goods and evils of this life are to end in death. Be mindful, therefore, of eternity, and resound in the inmost part of thy soul, *eternity, eternity*. For this the church, when it consecrates the fathers of it, which are bishops, puts them in mind of this most powerful and efficacious memory of eternity, bidding them think of eternal years, as David did. And in the assumption and consecration of popes, they burn before their eyes a small quantity of flax, with these words: "Holy Father, so passes away the glory of the world;" that by the light of that short and transitory blaze, he may call to mind the eternal flames. And Martin the Fifth took for his device a flaming fire, which in a short time burnt and consumed a pope's tiara, an imperial diadem, a regal crown, and a cardinal's hat; to give them to understand, that if they complied not with the duties of their places, they were in a short time to burn in the eternal flames of hell; the memory whereof he would preserve ever present by this most profitable symbol.

The name of Isachar, whose blessing from his father was (as we have formerly said) to lie down and rest between the two limits of eternity, signifies him *That hath a memory*, or *The man of reward or pay*; the Holy Ghost by this mystery, charging us with the memory of eternal rewards. And the Lord, to show how precious it was in his divine esteem, and how profitable for us, caused this name of Isachar to be engraven in a precious amethyst, which was one of these stones worn by the high priest in the rational, and one of those also revealed unto St. John, to be of the foundation of the city of

God. By it, says St. Anselm, is signified the memory of eternity, which is the principal foundation in the building of all perfection. Truly, if we consider the properties of this stone, they are so many marks and properties of the memory of eternity, and of the benefits which that soul reaps, which seriously considers it. The amathyst* causes vigilance. And what requires it more than the passage between the two extremes of eternal glory and eternal pains? What thing in the world ought to awake us more, than the danger of falling into hell-fire? How could that man sleep, who was to pass over a narrow plank of half a foot broad, which served as a bridge between two high rocks, the winds impetuously blowing, and he, if his foot slipped, certain to fall into a vast abyss? No less is the danger of this life. The way by which we are to pass to heaven is straight, the winds of temptations violent, the danger of occasions frequent, the harms of ill example infectious, and the deceits of wicked counsellors very many. How then can a Christian sleep, and be careless in so evident a peril? Without doubt, it is more difficult to be saved, considering the depravity of our nature, and the deceitful ambushes of the devil, than for a heavy man to pass over a heady and rapid river, upon a small and bruised reed.

They say also of the amathyst, that besides the making him watchful who carries it, it frees him from evil thoughts; which how can that man have, who bears eternity in his mind? How can he think upon the short pleasures of his senses, who considers the eternal torments due to his soul, if he shall but consent to the least mortal sin? The amathyst also resists drunkenness, preserving him that wears it in his senses and judgment; and there is nothing that more preserves a man's judgment in the midst of the wine of delights in this life, than the memory of the other, and that for the pleasure of one moment here, he is not only to suffer for hours, for days, for months, for years, but for worlds and a world of worlds hereafter. The amathyst, besides this, preserves the wearer from the force of poison. And what greater antidote against the poison of sin, than to remember hell, which he deserves, and heaven which he loses by committing it? The amathyst also quiets a man, and settles his

* Albert. Mag. Milius et Ruiz. v. Cestum de Min. lib. 4. p. 2, cap. 14, sec. 11.

thoughts. And what can be more efficacious to free us from the disturbance of this life, to bridle the insolence of covetousness, to repress the aspiring of ambition, than to consider the blessings of eternity, which attend the humble and poor in spirit? Finally, the amathyst confers fruitfulness; and this great thought of eternity is fruitful of holy works. For who is he that considers with a lively faith, that for a thing so slight and momentary, he may enjoy the reward of eternal glory, and will not be animated to work all he is able, and to endure and suffer what shall happen, for God Almighty and his cause? O, how fruitful of heroic works is this holy thought, *Eternal glory expects me?*—the triumphs of martyrs, the victories of virgins, the mortifications of confessors, are the effects of this consideration. O holy thought! O precious amathyst, that makes vigilant and attentive the negligent and careless; that gives wisdom and judgment to the most deceived; that heals those who are most ulcerated and corrupted with the poison of sin; that quiets and pacifies the motions and troubles of our concupiscences; that makes the most tepid and barren of virtues fruitful of holy works, who will not endeavor to obtain and fix these in his soul? O that Christians would so engrave thee in their heart, that thou mightest never be blotted out, nor removed from thence! How differently would they then live to what they now do! how would they shine in their works! for though the memory of hell, heaven, death, and judgment be very efficacious for the reformation of our lives, yet this of eternity, is like the quintessence of them all, and virtually contains the rest.

CHAPTER IV.

The state of men in this life, and their miserable forgetfulness of Eternity.

BEFORE we come to declare the condition of eternity, whose consideration is so necessary for leading a holy and a virtuous life, let us set before our eyes the forgetfulness and miserable mistakes of the sons of Adam, in a matter of so great importance, living as if eternity were far off, when, as the philosopher says, it is not two fingers distant, and every minute threatens them. What divides the mariner from his death, but the thickness of a plank? What the

choleric and hasty man from eternity, but the edge of a sword? What the soldier from his end, but the reach of a bullet? What the thief from the gallows, but the distance between that and the prison? Finally, how far is the most healthful and vigorous person distant from eternity, but as much as from life to death, which often happens suddenly, and ought every moment to be expected? The life of man is a dangerous passage, wherein he walks upon the brink of eternity, with a certainty at last to fall into it. Why lives he then so wretchedly? He who should walk close to a great precipice, in a path no broader than the breadth of his foot, and that also full of ruts and stumbling-blocks, how circumspcctly would he look about him, and how carefully would he order his steps? How then is it, that being so near eternity, he is so careless, and lives as he were out of danger?

St. John Damascen excellently declares,* the fondness and, mistakes of men in a most ingenious parable, wherein he naturally sets forth the state of this life. A certain man, says he, flying from a furious unicorn, which, with his very roaring made the mountains tremble, and the valleys resound, not regarding through fear which way he went, chanced to fall into a deep pit; but in his fall spreading abroad his arms to catch at something, which might relieve him, happened to light upon the boughs of a tree, that grew out of the side of that pit, on which he seized with much joy, hoping he had then both escaped the fury of the beast, and the danger of this fall; but looking towards the foot of the tree, he perceived two great rats, the one white, the other black, perpetually gnawing the root of it, in so much that it was now ready to fall; looking afterwards into the bottom of the pit, he beheld a most deformed dragon, with flaming eyes gazing upon him, and with open mouth awaiting his fall, that he might devour him; then casting his eye upon that side of the pit where the tree grew, there appeared four poisonous asps, shooting forth their heads to bite him mortally. Yet, notwithstanding, marking the leaves of the tree, he perceived some of them to distill certain drops of honey, with which he was so greatly pleased, that forgetting the

* In Hist. Barla. 12 in fine.

danger, which from so many parts threatened him, he employed himself wholly in gathering and tasting drop by drop that small quantity of honey, without reflecting or making further account either of the fierceness of the unicorn above him, of the horribleness of the dragon beneath him, of the poison of the asps beside him, or the weakness of the tree, which was ready to fall, and precipitate him into that horrid dungeon. In this image we see represented the state of man, who, forgetful of the manifold perils of this transitory life, gives himself wholly over to vain pleasures. For, by the unicorn is signified death, which, even from the hour of man's birth, follows and pursues him; the pit is the world full of evils and miseries; the tree is the course of this life; the two rats, the one black, the other white, which gnaw it at the root, are day and night, which, continually seconding one another, go by hours and minutes consuming it; the four asps are the four elements, or four humors, of which we are composed, which, by the excess of any one of them, distemper the whole frame of our bodies, and at last destroy it; that horrid and fearful dragon is the eternity of hell, which enlarges his throat and jaws to swallow sinners; the small drops of honey are the pleasures and delights of this life; and so great is the diversion which they cause, that men, for a short and momentary content, consider not the many dangers to which they are exposed; and seeing themselves encompassed on all parts by as many dangers of death, as there are ways and causes of dying, which are infinite, and are so many mouths and gates of eternity, yet notwithstanding, solace themselves with the momentary delights of this small drop of honey, which shall, at last cause them to disgorge and cast up their entrails for a world without end.

Wonderful it is, that so great a forgetfulness possesses us, and a matter full of amazement, that we are not moved with so great dangers. How comes it to pass that, every minute a new day of eternity dawning upon us, we carelessly pass over so many days and months? Let the most strong and healthful person tell me, what one year he is assured of, wherein death may not assault him, and push him headlong into an eternal abyss. But what speak I of a year? what month, what week, day, hour, what instant

is he sure of? How then can we eat? how sleep in safety? how indulge ourselves with any pleasure of this world? If one should enter into a field full of ambushes and secret traps, whereon if he should chance to set his careless foot, he were in danger to fall upon the points of spikes and halberts, or into the mouth of some terrible dragon, and seeing with his own eyes, that they, who entered with him into the same field, hourly fell into those traps, and appeared no more, should, notwithstanding, run leaping and dancing up and down, without fear or apprehension of anything amiss, who would not say that man were a fool? Certainly more fool art thou, who seeing thy friends fall daily into the trap of death, thy neighbor swallowed up in eternity, thy brother sink into the pit of the grave, dost yet, notwithstanding, remain careless and secure, as if the same fate did not attend thyself. Although to die were a thing uncertain, yet for the doubt and danger that it might happen, thou oughtest to be vigilant, and prepared for it. What oughtest thou then to be, if being so certain, and that early or late, thou art to enter in at the gate of eternity? A marvellous thing it is, with what care men provide themselves against dangers, although very uncertain. If they hear that thieves are in the way to rob and spoil the passengers, no man passes that way but armed, and well provided, and many in company; if they understand that the plague begins to rage, what antidotes and counterparts are sought for? if they fear a famine, every man in time provides himself in corn. How happens it then, that knowing that there is a death, a judgment, a hell, an eternity, we stand not on our guard, nor provide ourselves for it? Let us open our eyes, and look into the perils which environ us; let us take heed where we set our feet, that we perish not; for the paths of this life are full of dangers. And with reason did Isidorus Clarissus (et juxt. St. Greg.) compare it to a narrow bridge, scarce broad enough to receive our feet, under which was a lake of black and filthy water, full of serpents, and of ugly and poisonous creatures, which only sustained themselves by feeding on those unfortunate people who fell from the bridge; on either side were pleasant gardens, meadows, fountains, and beautiful buildings; but as it were extreme madness in

him, who was to pass so dangerous a bridge, to entertain himself with gazing upon those gardens and buildings, without taking care where he set his foot; so it is as great a folly in him, who is to pass this transitory life, to apply himself to pleasures and delights, without taking care of his ways or works. To this Cæsarius Arelatensis adds, that the greatest danger of this bridge consisted towards the end, where it was narrowest; and this is the most straight passage of death. Let us, therefore, if we intend to gain heaven, look how we place our feet in this life, lest we misplace them in death, and perish in that eternity, wherein our life is to conclude. O eternity, eternity, how few there are that provide for thee. O eternity! peril of perils, and danger (if we miss the mark, whereat we ought to aim) above all dangers, whence comes it that we prepare not for thee? why do not mortals think of thee, and fear thee? There is no peril greater than that of eternity, no danger more certain than that of death; why then do we not arm ourselves and prepare for them? whence comes it that we fear thee not, which are to endure as long as God is God? This present life is but to last a very little time; our forces will fail us, our senses wax dull, our riches leave us, the commodities of the world fly from us, the want of wealth make an end of us, and the world at last casts us out of it; what then will become of us; we are to be sent into a strange country for a long time; why do we not forecast what to do when we come thither?

But that we may the better see this our condition, and so learn to be more cautious, I will relate another parable of the same St. John Damascen. (In vita Josephi.) There was, says he, a city very great and populous, whereof the inhabitants had a custom to elect for their king a stranger, who had no knowledge of that kingdom, and commonwealth. This king, for a year, they suffered to do what he pleased, but that being ended, and he most secure, without fear or apprehension of anything amiss, thinking he should reign as long as he lived, they suddenly came upon him, despoiled him of his royal apparel, dragging him naked through the streets, and banishing him into an island far off, where he came to suffer extreme poverty, not having wherewith to feed or clothe himself; his fortune, without thinking on it,

