

A LETTER OF DIRECTION

BY

ST FRANCIS OF SALES

[Copy of a MS. found in the Visitation Monastery, Rue de St Antoine, Paris, entitled: 'Spiritual counsel given by the Saint to Mère Agnes de la Roche, ninth religious of the Visitation Order, and first Superior of the Monastery of Rennes.' Written by herself in a small book for her own use, and headed thus: 'Spiritual counsel given to me by Monseigneur for my amendment.'—C.R.]



DEEM it most necessary for you to try always to keep your soul in peace and tranquillity. Begin first thing every morning while you are dressing, performing all your actions very quietly, thinking the while of the subject for your morning meditation, and taking care not to allow your thoughts to wander over the rest of the day.

As you go on observe constantly if you are in this state of tranquillity, and whenever you find yourself outside it, take pains to get back again, but gently without worry. I do not mean you should strain your mind in trying to keep this peace, because the very condition for attaining it is a great simplicity and much love, keeping close to our Lord like a little child near its father.

If you commit a fault, whatever it may be, quietly ask our Lord's pardon with confidence, telling him you know he loves you and will forgive you. . . . If you happen to do something that annoys or disedifies others, if it is anything of importance apologise, saying you had no ill-intention—if that is true. But if it is a matter of slight or no importance, make no excuses, but let it pass, and all without agitation of spirit. The same applies to receiving corrections, and if your feelings are upset, don't be unduly worried, but try to preserve peace in the midst of war. Perhaps it may never be in your power not to have these feelings when reproved, but you know very well that bad feelings, like any other temptation, do not make us less pleasing to God provided we do not give way to them. This is where you deceive yourself, in thinking you must make violent efforts to rid yourself of such feelings. It is not necessary. Simply pass along the road without looking at them. If they are very importunate, mock at them, make a face at them, and this by a simple glance from the superior part of your soul. Which done, bother no more about them. This applies also to feelings of envy or jealousy,

to your liking for material comfort, or any similar weakness that is apt to cling about the spirit. By acting thus you will free your soul from every care except that of holding it in peace and tranquillity.

I say the same about your own perfection, because I notice that in you this over-anxiety to become perfect is harmful. When you do commit faults you are very upset, deeming such things detrimental to your own ideas of self-improvement, while if a fault is pointed out to you you become discouraged. You must correct this, and not allow yourself to take things so much to heart.

Don't imagine this will be an exercise of days. Oh no! It takes time and perseverance to arrive at this peace. Still, if you are faithful our Lord will bless your work. It is his goodness that draws you to it, so you are under a great obligation to be faithful to it, in conformity with his Will. It will be specially difficult for you as you have a lively nature that is interested and intrigued by all it meets. Still, this need not discourage you. Just do what you can, simply and without strain. Look at our Lord, and go to God in all things with frequent ejaculatory prayer, interior glances and fervent uplifting of spirit. God would have all from you without reserve, so you must take great care to rid yourself of your own will, for it is self-will alone that can harm you, as you have it very strongly, and what you want you want very badly.

Embrace this exercise, then, very faithfully, for I tell you with the charity of God and the knowledge I have of your need, that you must see the Providence of God in all the contradictions that will come to you. He permits them in order to detach you from all things and unite you to himself, for I know that he wishes you to be his own in a most special way. So then, be quite indifferent when anything you ask is not granted, yet do not give up asking with simplicity and confidence. The same applies in the spiritual sphere.

Whenever you find yourself wanting in confidence in God because of the multitude of your imperfections, have recourse to our Lord, acting with the superior part of your soul, whispering words of loving confidence very frequently and with all the fervour you can. Do not allow yourself to become upset or give way to self-pity, especially when you have fallen into a fault. This comes from pride. Merely humble yourself promptly before God, sweetly and lovingly.

I wish your character was not so weak, but that like a valiant daughter you would serve God with courage, looking only at him, not caring whether this or that person loves you or not. Don't look at that but assure yourself that you are always loved as God wishes. And let this suffice you, that God's Will shall be accomplished in

you. You are under a special obligation of overcoming yourself as God wills to use you. So have a great love of your own abjection: this will keep you from worrying too much about your faults.

Take great care to keep your spirit in peace, occupied with high things away from self-preoccupation, particularly when you are depressed and discouraged. Tell our Lord you wish to have this peace and will not consent to troublesome suggestions.

The more poor and destitute you feel of any kind of virtue, the more must you be resolute to do well. Don't be surprised at the evil sentiments that may come to you, however vile they may be, but have great care at such times to multiply ejaculatory prayers and turn to God. And since you have a particular need of gentleness and humility, take care during the day often to put your heart into a humble sweetness. And when you are corrected or reproved, try to love the correction and don't be troubled if your feelings are upset, but bring your superior will to bear and do what you are told.

Strive to be more even-tempered without allowing your moods to show. What is the use of manifesting these imperfections? It prevents you from being used as God would wish. This unevenness of exterior behaviour is detrimental to the full utilising of the talents with which God has endowed you.

So learn humility at all costs as you have a great inclination to pride and self-esteem. Doubt not that having acquired this virtue you will acquire all the others you need. Annihilate yourself very often in the presence of our Lord and our Lady. Annihilate yourself in the knowledge of your own littleness: but immediately afterwards lift up your spirit to ask what God requires from you.

ERRATUM

In the June issue of *LIFE OF THE SPIRIT*, pp. 568-9, the Vth stanza of 'His Name from Afar' should have begun:

No sound of words!
 No music of any song!
 Only the pure tranquillity of our vigil together!
 Only a secret rhythm floods from your throne within me,
 Ruling symphony, sad, strong symphony of time.
 How is it then silent inscrutable sovereign of the ages,
 That my soul within me is watered in wisdom,
 My spirit fed with the bread of understanding and life?