

The Saints and Servants of God.

THE LIVES
OF
ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,

OF THE THIRD ORDER OF ST. DOMINICK;

ST. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO;

B. BENVENUTA OF BOJAN;

AND

B. CATHERINE OF RACONIGI,

OF THE ORDER OF ST. DOMINICK.

**"Gaude Maria Virgo, cunctas hæreses sola interemisti in
universo mundo."—*Antiph. Ecclesiæ.***



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CHAPTER.	PAGE.
XVIII. On the Saint's last illness and happy passage to another life - - - - -	130
XIX. The graces and miracles worked by God through the intercession of St. Catherine after her death - - - - -	141
XX. On the events which took place after Catherine's beatification - - - - -	151
XXI. On the miracles which were approved of for the canonization of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci - - - - -	153

THE HISTORY OF S. AGNES OF MONTEPULCIANO.

PART I.

SECTION I.

1. Preface.—2. Birth of Agnes.—3. Her education and youthful fervour.—4. Origin, fortunes, and condition of Montepulciano.—5. Her parents permit her to retire from the world.—6. Her reception in the monastery of del Sacco.—7. Her noble and virtuous disposition.—8. Her miraculous rapture.—9. Her plety.—10. Our B. Lady appears to her.—11. Increase of Agnes' fervour - - - - - 169

SECTION II.

Agnes goes to Proceno and founds a monastery there.—She is elected abbess.—Miraculous shower of manna.—Our Saint's contemplative life.—She is favoured by a heavenly apparition.—An angel communicates her, and brings her some relics.—Some wonders are worked by Agnes' intercession.—The austerity of her life at Proceno.—The power of her prayers with God.—Her illness, and the events of it.—She is refreshed by a vision.—The spirit with which she governed the monastery.—Her union with God.—She goes for some time to Montepulciano, and returns to Proceno - 194

PART II.

SECTION I.

Agnes is inspired to undertake fresh enterprises.—She returns to her country.—Revolutions in Montepulciano.—Agnes commences the building of a monastery; of which she is made superioress.—She gives a bright example of perfection.—Her wisdom and prudence.—She introduces the rule of St. Dominic in her new monastery.—Her care to promote religious observance.—Her spirit of solitude and peace.—The walls of the monastery fall down and are rebuilt.—Agnes' journey to Rome, and the incidents of it.—Her return to Montepulciano.—Her internal lights. - 222

SECTION II.

Agnes makes further progress in piety.—The events of this period of her life.—Her confidence in God's help.—She delivers a possessed man.—Her humility.—She cures a nun who had lost her sight.—She multiplies the bread.—Her anxiety for the instruction of her religious.—She receives a warning of future evils.—Her illness, and journey to the baths of Chianciano.—The wonders which happened to her there.—Her gentleness.—She returns to Montepulciano.—Her love of God.—She prophesies public misfortunes.—Her last sickness and death.—What occurred shortly after her death - - - - - 245

SECTION III.

The body of our Saint sweats blood.—Seditions in Montepulciano.—Fresh tumults in the city.—Arrival of the Emperor Charles IV. in Italy.—This prince visits Saint Agnes
Bernardo Guidonis.—Revelation of the glory she enjoys in heaven.—Saint Catherine of Sienna goes to visit her shrine.—The homage to our Saint is confirmed and spread - - - - - 273

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1. THAT matured system which can persuade a man to renounce himself, and to sacrifice, to the cultivation of his own soul, the greater part of those sweet ties which bind him to society, presupposes a long series of religious ideas, and an advanced state of enlightenment. However great its advantages, it is invariably a painful sacrifice to a feeling heart, to withdraw itself from the intercourse of others, as if from dangerous companions, provided that it be not done out of an unnatural antipathy to our fellow creatures,

or an aversion arising from satiety of pleasure. In order that the sacrifice should be laudable and meritorious, it must be made with a lofty end, and matured by the thought, that after having fled with magnanimity from human companionship, solitude may become to us a school in which, by contemplating the Supreme Being, we may ever find a fresh reason for loving Him, and making ourselves worthy of Him, and then, filled with His love, we may remember that we left many of our fellow creatures, whom God has obliged us to love, in the midst of the turmoil of the world. Thus, that solitude which divides us from men that we may go in search of heavenly wisdom, recalls us to them in order that we may procure their real good by the most efficacious means. In all ages the Church has honoured a life separated from the world, while the people have regarded it with mingled veneration and aversion. The promiscuous multitude of those who devoted themselves to this manner of life, introduced of necessity some absurdity, originating in the influence of the climate, or in national prejudices; but if the veil has been lifted from off some affectation of austerity, or of mystery by more enlightened times, the homage which is due to those Christians who pledge themselves to follow out the evangelical counsels is undiminished or rather increased.

Hence arose the greatness of our saint in the eyes of the pious; and we shall find her great in the midst of all her cares and all her projects, ever intent upon solitude, and averse to figuring in the

world. The character of virtue is always the same, and is of so delicate a nature, that it cannot permit its rays to partake of that conspicuous lustre which surrounds human enterprises. It is a miracle of grace; it lives in neglect, while silence is the only witness of its triumphs; and the more it finds itself forgotten by the world the better it learns to despise, without insulting, its folly; but it knows how to wait, until the world, wearied, and at length undeceived, turns to the praises of the Author of all sanctity.

2. Yet, although virtue shrinks from appearing before the eyes of men, and although its only happiness is to rejoice in the contemplation of the Sovereign Good, the brightness which emanates from it cannot long be concealed.

How could a virgin, whose whole conduct breathed unspeakable purity, fervour, and holiness—a virgin to whom not a single passion obtained access—a virgin over whom were poured the most attractive sweetnesss of divine mercy—a virgin like Agnes, whose principal actions we have undertaken to describe, ever prevent that veneration being entertained for her, which even in the world is only conciliated by long-tried goodness?

The heavenly presages, which were remarked before her birth, influenced the wise conjectures which were made from that period upon the glory of her destiny. An unvarying tradition, which rests upon respectable monuments, assures us that when Agnes's mother was overtaken by the pains of childbirth, a number of burning torches of extra-

ordinary brilliancy appeared round her bed, and this singular phenomenon, which cannot be attributed to any atmospheric or natural cause, lasted until the moment of Agnes's birth. Her native town was a village in the neighbourhood of Montepulciano, called Graciano Vecchio, and the year in which she was born, 1268. It is difficult to understand why the historians of that period should have neglected to inform us the precise month and day, and have passed over in silence an epoch which they themselves tell us was distinguished for remarkable prodigies. We only know that her father's name was Laurence de Segni; her family was rich and prosperous, and in process of time became one of the noble families of Montepulciano, but is now extinct. Her parents, however, were most conspicuous for their exemplary lives and tenderness towards the poor, and God rewarded them with this holy daughter.

3. When she was born, Clement IV. sat in the chair of St. Peter, and dying on the first of December of the same year, was succeeded by Gregory X. That age of strife, and of political revolutions, in which both the priesthood and the empire passed through more than one severe crisis, was fortunate in beholding many eminent geniuses together, who made up for the rudeness of the thirteenth century. The bishop of Arezzo, who was also the pastor of the church of Montepulciano, had the happiness of seeing in Agnes a mind of unusual strength, and worthy of a place among the great men of her time.

The youth of this innocent child would not have arrested the historian's attention unless it had been decorated by traits which justified the highest expectations of her goodness. It seemed her privilege to be exempt, even from those weaknesses which are common to the moments of the development of nature. Her composed and candid disposition was an excellent ground to receive the first seeds of virtue, accompanied by an infusion of grace, which prevented them from being stifled or suppressed in any degree by the lively imagination, or the playful and innocent disposition of childhood. Her father's household presented none but edifying models. Before she seemed old enough to be instructed how to pray, she had made great progress in that science, which is one of the most necessary communications between God and His creatures. She repeated the Lord's Prayer assiduously, and while her lips pronounced it, her appearance gave clear proofs of an unspeakable interior joy, caused without doubt by that most sweet unction and calm which the thought of her Divine Creator brought to her soul.

It was these secret attractions which led her to hurry at certain hours of the day to a corner of her father's garden, where, secluded from the eyes of all, she offered all her affection to the Most High, as a protestation of gratitude and love. Already convinced of the emptiness and the danger of worldly dissipation, her inclinations unconsciously led her to seek for a life of solitude ; and some internal lights never allowed her

to doubt that this was her vocation. A sweet impatience made her reprove herself for her involuntary delays, and she almost wished to anticipate the call of God to separate herself from the world. The first fruits of her youth appeared to her a most precious part of the offering she intended to make to God. She anxiously sought to ascertain the will of her parents in this respect, but their refusals, dictated by prudence or by unwillingness to lose such a daughter, did not destroy her confidence that God would open a way for her to follow the calls of Heaven. There was no sacred community of virgins near the spot where she was born, where she might make arrangements to be admitted, as soon as she had overcome the reluctance of those whose authority she ever respected, so she earnestly wished either to go frequently into the city, or to live there, in order facilitate her resolutions.

4. But the turbulent state of Montepulciano, rather than the wish to turn away their daughter's mind from her design, prevented her parents from thinking of removing their habitation to the town. The fire of discord and the ardent spirit of national strife, had been kindled in Montepulciano, which acted like principles of destruction in the policy of the smaller states into which Italy was divided. We will cast a rapid glance over the Annals of Montepulciano, for they deserve some space in the history of a saint, by whom their glory was so greatly increased.

、 The continual discoveries of many remnants

of antiquity, referring to the religion, the manners, and the arts of the Etruscans, induce us to believe that the city and its territory were, during many ages of the Roman Republic, and of the Etruscan kingdom, the abode of a numerous and thriving population. The enlightened visitor regards the Museo Buca'lliano as an invaluable archive, and beholds in it the relics of a nation which no longer exists. These remains inspire him with a lofty idea of the origin of the Poliziani, which, in spite of all investigations, remains lost in the darkness of ages. If we consider the new inhabitants of Chiusi, mentioned by Pliny as the ancestors of the Poliziani, which appears most probable, we know that by the influence of Laartes Porsenna, Lucomo of Chiusi, or by some unknown misfortune, a portion of the inhabitants of that city was induced to retire to this hill, the most delicious in the neighbourhood. In the course of time the new site changed its name of Monte Mercurio to that of Monte Poliziano, perhaps in the 350th year of the Christian era, when it was enlarged and embellished by the Tribune Zanobius of Landericus. But neither changes nor years could destroy the lasting tradition among the Poliziani that they came from Chiusi, and they employed the celebrated sculptor Andrea Sansovino to make a marble bust of King Porsenna, whom they regard as their founder. We will not, however, pursue our researches into this matter, lest we fall into the vanity which seeks for itself a noble origin in the uncertain shadows of ages.

The remaining records of the year 770 make a distinct and honourable mention of Montepulciano, and name the illustrious men who came from thence ; among others Gualterotto Bernardino who fought with extraordinary courage under Boniface, Count of Corsica, against the Saracens of Africa. The family of Gualterotto became extinct in a woman of the race of Contucci.

Until the year 1110 the Poliziani enjoyed full and entire civil liberty and uninterrupted peace, but from that period they were victims to disasters caused by rivalries and wars. The inhabitants of Sienna, who wished to annex them to their dominions, attacked them at three different periods, but with the assistance of the people of Orvieto and Perugia, and the Florentine Republic, then in alliance with the Pisans, they succeeded in maintaining their independence, which was secured by the mediation of the Emperor Frederic Barbarossa in the differences between the Republics of Florence and Sienna, for one of the articles of the peace contained the liberty of the Poliziani.

In 1176 that calm which they hoped would last far longer was overshadowed. A Diet of all the Republics of Tuscany held in San Quirico the following year only relieved Montepulciano from its dangerous disturbances after much deliberation. Hugo Vinceguerra, the Sindaco of the Florentines on one hand, and Bartolommeo Rinaldini, who held the same office among the Siennese on the other, opposed each other with great warmth, the former maintaining that Montepulciano should be left in the enjoyment of its

ancient rights of liberty, which should be guaranteed by all the Tuscan Republics, while the latter declared that the rights of his own Republic over Montepulciano were inalienable. The battles which followed, and the long uncertainty of their success at last wearied the Siennese, who promised to allow what they had so obstinately refused to agree to in San Quirico.

But the internal dissensions of Montepulciano, sown there by Pepo di Jacopo and Gulfo Brandoli, soon furnished the Republic of Sienna with a pretext for renewing their attacks upon it and taking advantage of them.

In 1223 and 1228 the malcontents went over to Sienna and plotted the ruin of their native town. This raging discord was the cause of slaughter on all sides, to which the Florentines were not indifferent, and their soldiers were soon engaged in fierce warfare with the Siennese. There were nothing but difficulties in the way of peace and quiet, for each party inflicted severe injuries on the other, without any other result than the enfeebling of both. The interposition of Piccardo dell' Isola, the emperor's vicegerent in San Quirico, of Gerard of Arnasthein, imperial legate for Tuscany, and of the deputies sent for the express purpose by the Romans to Sienna and Florence, produced no effect upon parties mutually enraged, and become familiar with slaughter and blood. The Siennese, who had then the forces of Perugia at their disposal, threatened to make Florence pay dear for the

protection which she had with trouble and cost afforded the Poliziani.

In the heat of these struggles a strict order was received by the cities of Tuscany from the Emperor Frederic, who was just reconciled with the Pope, commanding them to lay aside their arms, and to come to a perfect understanding. The Florentines, as well as their allies the Poliziani, received it with contempt and indifference, but the Pope, who had the glory of suggesting this just and humane measure to the emperor, and wished for its success, sent his nuncio Gattifredo de' Cesari into Tuscany furnished with most important instructions. He assembled several congresses, but finding his personal instructions useless, had recourse to the ecclesiastical censure, which deprives an entire body politic of the celebration of religious rites. The war notwithstanding continued, and in the year 1232, after many changes of fortune, truces, defeats, and victories, the Siennese turned all their efforts against Montepulciano, which, on the eve of an assault, either made an honourable capitulation, according to Manenti, or yielded to an attack of the enemy, according to Villani. The fall of Montepulciano wounded the minds of the Florentines deeply, and they prepared to revenge themselves by a campaign against Sienna. The hostilities became most sanguinary, and were only ended by the interposition of the Pope Gregory IX., who sent Cardinal Jacopo Conti as his representative. The treaty of peace restored their liberty to the Poliziani, together with the castles •

of Vagliana, Castellare, Laviano, Casal di Tolle Sarteano, Chianciano, Panicale, Gucciano, and the Badia Spineta; and from thence to 1253 they enjoyed the happy fruits of peace and prosperity.

The calm was at length disturbed by Ungerida Bagnolo, general of the troops of Sienna, who threw himself on to the Poliziano territory to devastate it; but the energetic remonstrances of the Florentines checked this disturbance. However, their inveterate quarrels with Sienna, which began so long ago about Montepulciano, and were accompanied by wars, and by the secret practices of many turbulent spirits, gave too much reason to dread new disturbances and troubles. In effect when the affairs of the Florentines were on the decline, in consequence of their great defeat by the Siennese at Monte Aperti on the Arbia, on the 4th of September, Montepulciano was forced, in spite of her steady neutrality, to submit to the conquering arms of Sienna.

Although he was on the side of Sienna, the virtue, courage, and consummate experience of Messer Manente called Farinata degli Uberti, saved Florence from destruction, which had been resolved on in a congress held at Empoli, chiefly composed of Siennese of the Ghibelline faction. But Florence was no longer able to protect Montepulciano, although she had promised to do so to Count Giordano, lieutenant of Manfredi, king of Sicily, and the Poliziani submitted unconditionally to the Republic of Sienna, which

sent Provenzano Salimbeni with the authority of first magistrate, and ordered him to erect there a fortress, to ensure the possession of their conquest. Many of the conquered Guelphs voluntarily exiled themselves from their country, perhaps with the hope of finding some means of breaking their chains. In the month of June, at the end of six years, they surprised the fortress, and made themselves masters of it without much resistance. This proceeding would have called forth a tremendous vengeance from the Siennese, but the pacific projects of the Pope, Alexander IV., and the manœuvres of king Charles of Anjou, imperial vicegerent in Tuscany, furnished them with abundant employment, suitable to their views. Although the most resolute of the Poliziani opposed king Charles with arms in their hands, he prevailed entirely, and not only the Guelphs who had entered by a surprise, but also the Ghibellines, who were of the party opposed to his, were forced to evacuate the fortress. Montepulciano was obliged to swear a complete obedience to Sienna, was forbidden to hold any intercourse with the Ghibellines, and the laws and statutes of Sienna were put in force by the authority of a judge and four citizens sent from thence. The fire was thus apparently extinguished, but it is easy to imagine that melancholy traces of it still remained, which kept alive the fear of new agitations.

Such was the state of our city, as we are emboldened to call it by the example of the ancient historians, who, in speaking of other countries,

gave the name of cities to places which could not claim all the qualifications of a city; such, I repeat, was the state of Montepulciano at the time of the birth of Agnes. Her history has been traced up to the age of nine years. A virtuous restlessness disturbed her mind on the subject of her vocation, which was too decided to require further proofs. It seemed to her a culpable resistance to the law of God to delay putting it in execution, for the laws both of faith and reason taught her the importance of this point. "If the choice of a state of life," she frequently said to herself, "depends upon God's will, how anxious I ought to be to find, and to enter that state which has been allotted to me from all eternity in His inscrutable counsels. God has decreed to lead me to salvation by one only way among the many. Although His merciful will has prepared many ways for the consummation of His elect, He has pointed out but one, to mistake which would be fatal. Besides, the sacrifice which God requires from me is another proof of His infinite goodness, which leads me to desire to make it. When He speaks to my heart about the fulfilment of His will, He shows that He wishes to save me. I will adore Him for ever and wait in the hope of my Lord, till He has given me the means of executing His inspirations."

This simple and innocent child, divided between her sweet impatience to consecrate herself to God, and her fear of showing too much resistance to her parents' wishes, waited until her victory

became more admirable from having been longer disputed. Much time did not pass, however, before those who had opposed her most strongly, were drawn by an internal inspiration to consent to all her projects ; and the joy and consolation of Agnes, who at length found herself free, and of her parents, who knew that their offering was well pleasing to God, were mutual. The old accounts report that it was the following circumstance which led her parents to give their unexpected consent to her desires. Our holy virgin was one day going to Montepulciano, in company with some women, when, as they approached the gate of the city called Gracciano, she was suddenly attacked by a large flight of crows, who came from a neighbouring hill, on which stood a house of prostitution. It is said that she had great difficulty in freeing herself from the beaks and claws of these birds, so unnaturally furious ; and it is believed that the malignant spirits, foreseeing that Agnes would in time expel them from that place of infamy, employed those crows, as fitting instruments to make war upon her ; and finally, that Agnes herself put forward this event before the eyes of her parents as a means of overcoming their reluctance to allow her to leave the world.

Using the rational historians' right of freedom of judgment, I will here state that I cannot find the slightest connexion between the anecdote of the crows, and the love of the parents, who laid aside their own objections. It is true that the Divine Wisdom which rules over every circum-

stance and change of circumstances, can make use of the most ordinary things, by putting them to extraordinary uses, to penetrate the hearts of men ; but this principle must be kept within its just application, otherwise everything in nature might be viewed by visionary minds as an absurd manifestation of the adorable and inscrutable counsels of Heaven. This mode of thinking would lead us at one step into the most deplorable fanaticism ; for men became a prey to superstition as soon as they indulged too abstracted ideas, and dreamt at all hours of the marvellous and the supernatural. They thus precipitated themselves into the mad deliriums of enthusiasm, and with an excess of folly despised those who reasoned with the lights of sound theology. Theology, indeed, shows us the hand of Providence in every event which happens to man, but it teaches him at the same time to humble himself, and to be silent about the unsearchable ways of the Most High.

Let the aforesaid circumstance be considered at the reader's pleasure ; we cannot, however, admit it, without presupposing that the spirits who entered the crows had a foreknowledge, which was too far removed from their conjectures, and without allowing that Agnes herself learnt the reason of their wrath, by a work which she did not know that she would perform in after times. The native simplicity of this history is destroyed by a similar complication of circumstances, whereas it is more reasonable and probable to say that it was the secret voice of God, which called

Agnes to an eminent state of religious perfection, which suddenly moved and changed the hearts of her parents.

As soon as the pious girl had received her father's approval, she went without delay to a house in Montepulciano, inhabited by a society of women consecrated to God, and vulgarly called *Del Sacco*, on account of the roughness of the clothes they wore, as a sign of having renounced all earthly pomp. She was here received with joy, and here she buried herself in the death of Jesus Christ, to live anew in His life alone. In a place where the fruits of virtue were only an ordinary spectacle, the new proselyte made herself a subject of special admiration. Although fasting and prayer, silence and meditation, are most likely to strike the eye of the multitude, these were grounded in her upon more essential virtues, from which they derive a brighter lustre. At that early age she possessed the steadiness of principle, and the constant tenor of life, which are in general the results of long training and of advanced virtue. Grace, which had chosen her, prevented her with its ineffable blessings, and crowned her in the beginning of her course with the glorious fruits which properly belong to more mature years. Agnes saw everything around her, so to speak, with the eyes of humility, of that wise and enlightened humility which cannot be confounded with cold and unreflecting indolence; and which can penetrate the depths of its own frailty, without losing the knowledge of, and gratitude for the gifts it has received. These sentiments animated

all her daily exercises. Believing herself the weakest and the most imperfect of all in the performance of her religious duties, and thinking on the other hand, that the special graces which she received from God, bound her particularly to profit by them, she continually incited herself to purify her own heart, and to make it more fit to receive light from heaven.

At this period a religious woman of singular prudence, came by command of the Bishop of Arezzo, to make the accustomed visitation of the monastery, and determined to investigate the truth of what she heard concerning the spirit and the virtue of Agnes. She found that her merits were far greater than the praises which were made of them, and she could not forbear congratulating Agnes, and predicting a still happier progress. Seeing, however, that her words pained the humble novice, she drew her mistress aside, and said with an irresistible air of confidence, "I can assure you with certainty, that this girl will reach a high degree of perfection, and rival the glories of the other Agnes, who has illustrated the Church with the double triumph of virginity and martyrdom."

These words increased Sister Margaret's (for that was the name of the mistress) care and anxiety in the cultivation of such a precious and hopeful plant; but, however much she increased her vigilance, she always found to her joy, that the fervent efforts of Agnes anticipated her. It is difficult to give a precise account of her daily conduct, which exhibited a perfect model of virtue;

let it suffice to say that her companions wondered how she could persevere in the greatest trials of voluntary mortification, and how she could live so detached from all objects of sense, and from the inclinations of nature.

As she showed herself full of an affectionate desire to assist her fellow-religious in any way, the prioress gave her the charge of the dispensary. The trouble and fatigue of managing this office, so that all might be satisfied, were but slight trials of her charity. The love of our neighbour has a brilliant character. It directs the necessary intercourse with holiness, because it teaches us to love our neighbour for God's sake, who is our common father; it partakes of the greatness of justice, for in the act of loving, it seeks to value the true God alone, and it is clothed with an intrinsic candour, which is identical with truth, because, according to the precept, our love of others ought to be the same as our love of ourselves. The appearance of virtuous love always bears the mark of these qualities, and it is easy to see how Agnes, who was well instructed in this school, invariably showed, that whatever her outward employment might be, her moving principle was charity, so that no service seemed hard or wearisome to her. Occasions were not of course wanting in which a person of less virtue than hers might have had disturbed moments, but Agnes's charity was too well grounded to suffer the smallest relaxation of vigour.

She soon discovered the manner of preserving the most complete recollection, peace, and con-

tentment during every exterior employment. She knew how to find time enough to familiarize herself with prayer, and to rekindle the ardour of her soul. Henceforward, God was pleased to show her more ostensibly how pleasing her assiduity in prayer was to Him, by outward signs of His favour. He makes the soul that He loves His temple, and loads it with inestimable riches, but these are only known to the spirit which is enriched by them. If God wishes to glorify Himself by presenting some image of His bounty, He must make some sensible manifestation of power, in order to convince mortal minds that the soul of the just is a mine of most admirable treasures. In these cases He gives full play to the energy of His love, and the process which goes on in the loving soul extends itself to the body in a corresponding manner, which we are not able to explain, but which we cannot doubt. We have an instance in the life of Agnes, recorded by a pen, which the learned universally allow to have been guided by truth, sound criticism, and excellent doctrine. One day, when our saint was in prayer, with her eyes fixed upon an image of our crucified Saviour, which was placed high on the wall, such was the violence of the transports of love that prompted her to draw near to that divine effigy, that she could hardly distinguish the desire from the act. She was suddenly raised by an unknown power as high as the image, where she was able, suspended in air, to express her immense affection, and after embracing it with tears, she placidly descended to the ground. A rapture is distinguished by certain

signs which raise it above a simple ecstasy, which is that separation from the senses, during which the spirit seems to interrupt its accustomed relations with the body. A divine power is the instrument of both, which removes every danger of an illusion. In the former, however, the reasonable will itself is inclined, by an amiable and extraordinary violence which accompanies a rapture, to follow the flights of the intellect, that grasps some supernatural and attractive object. When this violence has, with surprising regularity, taken possession of the entire physical frame, this latter acquires an impetus, a rapidity, and facility of motion, which breaks through the laws of nature, by the assistance of a superior power. Although the senses prevent us from forming an adequate idea of these things, they are thoroughly convinced of their reality, when it happens, as it did to Agnes, that they become the instruments of a soul which shakes off its bonds and its burdens, and raises itself towards God with the love and the force of all its affections.

Tokens like these, of mercy and partiality, by which Heaven was pleased to mark her out and to animate her feet to run the paths of perfection, were frequently conferred on Agnes, even in her earliest years. A series of sweetnesses were the foundations of that magnificent design of the works she was in future to perform for the glory of her beneficent Lord. When we examine the Holy Scriptures, which are the history of the dealings of God's providence with men, we find the same diversity in the events by which God prepares

even the holiest souls which He has chosen from all eternity, showing Himself as a God of tenderness to some, in order to allure them to His great ends, and trying others with terrible and rigorous proofs, in order to accustom them to enterprises of peril and fatigue. Both these means are embraced with the same joy by the soul which loves God, and desires to love Him with the same constancy amidst pains and misfortunes, amidst pleasures and joys. Neither of these means of corresponding with the intentions of Heaven, were wanting to Agnes; and we will regard her for the present absorbed in the joy which arises from feeling in our own person the benign influence of Heaven. In order to make it still more propitious, she used every effort to be devout towards her who reigns there as Queen, for she is the Mother of God. Her anxiety to obtain our Lady's protection, made her adopt most ingenious and unusual devotions to her. Although Jesus Christ the Mediator, is the one end and object of Christian worship, for He is the only fountain of hope and grace, of merit and of reward, still the intercession of the saints, and especially of our Lady, is most useful in the necessities of our earthly pilgrimage. As St. Augustine teaches, the homage we render to the saints is an homage of fellowship. We honour them as chosen members of that Church to which we also belong, and the honour we pay them refers principally to Jesus Christ, the sovereign and head of that body in which we are united with the saints. God wishes to save His elect, but not separately; He desires

to save them, inasmuch as they belong to one society, which is the Church. This body, by means of its prayers, and the charity which animates it, helps each of its members ; which made St. Augustine say, that the Church brings forth all the Christians. But as the Church comprehends all the elect in glory, and the saints who are yet in this life, every Christian depends on both these, for he depends on the whole body, so long as he is not cut off from it by that terrible separation, which is the greatest punishment the Church can inflict. This bond of union shows the efficacy of the saints' intercession. Jesus Christ Himself, to whom all our gratitude is due, being the Head, it follows that we should honour His chosen members, provided that the honour we pay to creatures who are dear in the sight of God, is exempt in every way from certain complicated practices, foreign to the spirit of the Church, which only inculcate superficial piety, and seem little likely to awaken a true love of Jesus Christ in the souls of the faithful, or to lead them to imitate the saints' lives in sincerity.

The piety of Agnes was abundantly enlightened, and acted with that correctness of ideas which is most consonant to the sublime character of true love of God, so that there was nothing about her which did not tend to increase this love. Her daily exercise of tender devotion to the angels and saints, and especially, as has been said, to the Mother of God, were prompted by her desire of inviting all creatures to love God, and her anxiety to obtain the assistance of those

who love Him in heaven with a love that is rendered divine by their perfect beatitude.

The Blessed Mother of God rewarded her with sensible signs of her protection. She appeared to her one day surrounded by glory and brightness, comforted her in the most benignant manner, and giving her three small stones of extraordinary beauty, went away leaving her overflowing with joy. The meaning of the gift was revealed to Agnes at the same time, which was, that she should in future build a church in honour of the most holy Mary, and lay these three stones in the foundations of it, while she placed the happy progress of the sacred edifice under the auspices of the Three Divine Persons, who were indicated by the number of the stones. We shall see in process of time how the whole was fulfilled.

There are many parts of this fact which may perhaps be received ambiguously by those who, in their eagerness to explore and unravel the prodigies of heaven with mere ordinary light, seem to forget that man is ignorant of even the origin of those laws which influence the reflecting spirit within ourselves. We have related this fact, as we found it in the old histories, with lucid and concordant simplicity, nor have we perceived in relating it any of that want of reality which pains and offends. The truth of the vision remains the same whether it was a vivid impression on the senses, or the keen imagination of the intellect, enabled by the power of divine love to see great things, because a vivid impression on the intellect, which has the marks of reality,

is a sufficient proof that the mind perceives and distinguishes the object represented. As to the symbolical meaning of the three stones, there is nothing in it incongruous to the character of the donor who predicted the future event. The sacred doctors frequently use a threefold number of substances to signify the Persons of the ineffable Trinity. Is it absurd or unreal that the Queen of angels should exhort Agnes to construct a temple, and insinuate that she was to begin the building with a sign which refers by the number of its parts to the greatest mystery of the Godhead? We may therefore say with reason, in spite of all sophisms, that this favour of heaven animated Agnes' steps, to walk still more swiftly in the path of virtues.

Although she entertained no doubt of the vision and the prophecy, which was revealed to her by an interior light, she was uncertain of the place and of the way she should choose to begin the future temple; but this uncertainty could not shake her confidence, and was soon forgotten in the readiness with which she replaced herself, if we may so express it, in the arms of God. Her favourite portion was to serve Him according to His Will. She only considered herself as an instrument, which would have been strangely misapplied if used for any other purpose but the service of her supreme Lord. Hence, her commonest actions were ennobled by her sole aim, which was to fulfil the will of God. Probably her ardent desire of serving God with the greatest fitness afflicted her not a little, as it discovered

to her her own insufficiency. She well knew what a difficulty, and what an obstacle to perfection it is after the loss of innocence to live in a body that is continually exposed to the shocks of passions hostile to the laws of the spirit, and she neglected no means to guard herself against it. The voice of obedience alone could moderate the severity of the voluntary macerations which she made a rule of inflicting on her limbs. Whenever she purified her heart, she always found a fresh reason for regarding her body as an enemy, only fit to be brought into subjection, according to the expression of St. Paul. It is certain, however, that in giving a glance at her past years, she found nothing which could give her a sufficient motive for self-reproach, for her life was one course of innocence and purity. We are not asserting that she was free from the incitements of passions, which are contrary to virtue ; such praise we will leave to those writers who, without examining the nature of such a rare privilege, have thought fit to apply it to those holy men whose deeds they relate, and they attribute it to them with an openness that is surprising, because it is destitute of proof. Agnes found by experience that she was liable to passions, but this knowledge had the happy result of making her combat them, while the victory she gained over them before she well knew what they were, increased her glory. Still, the knowledge that we live, as it were, in a circle of enemies who harass us at every step, or at least lay dangerous ambushes for us, is always a great

pain to a soul that aspires to perfection. Our saint watched continually over herself, refrained her desires, and even her inclination to rigorous penitence, under the guidance of the most sublime light, which was infused into her by heaven. This light, which was always clear and vigorous, and brought perfect peace and encouraging hopes, increased tenfold whenever she approached the sacred mysteries. She did so very frequently, and used to call those days the days of joy and love. The world could not have brought to her in her narrow cell any object which would give her the smallest pleasure in comparison with that delight, without measure, which she there enjoyed; but this will not bear an historical description, and should only be admired in silence.

SECTION II.

Agnes goes to Proceno and founds a monastery there.—She is elected abbess.—Miraculous shower of manna.—Our saint's contemplative life.—She is favoured by a heavenly apparition.—An angel communicates her, and brings her some relics.—Some wonders are worked by Agnes' intercession.—The austerity of her life at Proceno.—The power of her prayers with God.—Her illness, and the events of it.—She is refreshed by a vision.—The spirit with which she governed the monastery.—Her union with God.—She goes for some time to Montepulciano, and returns to Proceno.

At length, after so many proofs of favour and love, Heaven sent Agnes a trial of her constancy. She was compelled by her duty to leave the monastery called Del Sacco, the place for which she had sighed, and where she had her first

satisfaction, namely, that of consecrating herself to God, which she justly regarded as a happy soil, whence she had learnt to gather the delicious fruits of the most sincere piety, a departure which could not fail to excite sensible sorrow and tenderness. The place where they first learnt to love is ever remembered with affection by feeling hearts, but however great Agnes' partiality for this monastery might be, her readiness in leaving it, at the command of her superiors, was equally great.

The inhabitants of Proceno, a small village situated in the district of Orvieto, being desirous of establishing a congregation of virgins dedicated to God's service among them, thought that the best means of effecting their design would be to send for one of the religious from Del Sacco, who should instruct the candidates in that manner of life which requires discreet guidance. They therefore, despatched some of the principal men of the place to the magistrate of Montepulciano himself. Their demand was considered just and suitable, and after consulting which sister should be sent, the views of all fell upon sister Margaret, mistress of the novices. She did not object to undertaking the charge, as she hoped with reason to be able thereby to promote the glory of God, but she protested at the same time, perhaps inspired from above, that she would not consent to depart unless she was permitted to take Agnes with her, and in order to carry out their decision the nuns were obliged to consent to this sacrifice. No sooner had Margaret and Agnes arrived at

Proceno than a good number of young women crowded round them, who had previously retired to a common dwelling, in order to attend to the cultivation of their piety. As their numbers increased daily, it was necessary to enlarge the former house, and it became a good-sized monastery. The most exact spirit of discipline was soon introduced, and made great progress. The attractiveness of Agnes' fervour and regularity became to the others as it were a polished looking-glass, in which they all saw the method of modelling their lives by the spirit of Christian perfection; and Sister Margaret saw with the utmost joy how advantageous her determination of taking her Agnes with her to Proceno had been.

Guided by this fortunate experience she formed greater designs for her. Knowing how much she was admired by the Procenese, she negotiated with them to make her superior of the newly formed monastery. The project was carefully concealed from Agnes alone, for fear she should raise the greatest obstacles. They considered seriously the best means of succeeding in this affair, and as Agnes was then only fifteen years old, Cardinal Federigo, at that time Bishop of Ostia, obtained a dispensation for her from the Sovereign Pontiff Martin II., commonly called Martin IV. The age now prescribed by the Canon Laws at which a religious woman may be made superioress, was then only fixed by some private synod, or some regulation generally observed. However that might be, it was well to obtain the oracular approbation of the common

Pastor of the Church for a choice which would seem too inconsiderate if weighed by the ordinary opinion that is held of a person only fifteen years old.

From the year in which Agnes was born, in which Clement IV. died, until the present year, 1283, the Chair of St. Peter had been occupied by Gregory X., Innocent V., Adrian V., John XX., and Nicholas III., who was succeeded by the above-mentioned Martin IV. When he was fully informed of the fame of singular piety which illustrated Agnes' name, he willingly consented to allow her to be placed at the head of a monastery, and blessed the dispositions of heaven in her election. The greatest difficulty that the sisters had in carrying out their project, was to find a way of preventing Agnes' great humility from disappointing the desires of all. In effect, she only listened to its voice, which was more powerful than all the entreaties of the Procenese, and the tears of her religious sisters, who earnestly begged her to take this ministry. The only thing which could change her determination was an authoritative command from Sister Margaret, whom she always held in the place of a mother; but it was with some repugnance, caused by the bad opinion she entertained of herself, that she obeyed, and at last undertook the charge they imposed upon her. When she was made the model of those whom she ardently loved as daughters in Jesus Christ, she became their consolation and their support. She bore in a certain sense the burdens of all, and all found by treading with

emulation in her footsteps, a path of security. An uninterrupted peace, a total estrangement from the dissipations of the world, a unanimous spirit of mutual charity, which was free from the weaknesses of their sex, prone to confound natural with virtuous affections, a sweet odour, in fine, of all virtues, reigned in that dwelling of which Agnes was the ornament and the joy. The Procenese were confirmed in the opinion that they had made an acquisition of inestimable value in the person of Agnes, and sought for an opportunity of showing their gratitude to the people of Montepulciano. This was the beginning of a mutual friendship, and led them to grant each other an exception from some taxes, namely, that the inhabitants of Montepulciano should be allowed a free passage over the bridge at Centeno, while those of Proceno were allowed the same privilege at the Vagliana bridge.

But we should not omit the approbation of Heaven, being incomparably greater than that of men, which manifested by portentous signs the worth of Agnes in the sight of God. This history, almost without our perceiving it, is always bringing marvels before us. We should reject them with indignation were they but catastrophes invented to enliven a miraculous recital, but they are facts witnessed by those whose authority we cannot doubt. History, therefore, has a right to take them as ornaments, and to despise the invidious censures of him who presumes to reckon such events among the pious fables of over-credulous and unenlightened ages.

When Agnes' election for abbess of the monastery was reported to Monsignor Monaldeschi, Bishop of Orvieto, he went himself to Proceno to give her the consecrated veil according to the solemn rite of the Church. This ceremony was signalized by an extraordinary occurrence. When the prelate, preceded by all his clergy, went to the temple where it was to be performed, they were surprised on entering it to find the pavement, and the altars, and the high altar in particular, covered as it were by a shower of snow, with particles of the purest white in the form of small crosses, which we shall now, and when we have occasion to mention it again in the course of this history, designate by the name of manna, a word which expresses the novelty of the phenomenon, and signifies in the original Hebrew, *manhu*, *what is this?* The numerous concourse of people assembled there was surprised and astonished, and every one strove to collect a portion of that heavenly dew to keep as a memorial of this wonderful event. In the meantime the bishop went through the sacred function, restraining with great difficulty the tears caused by the tenderness and piety with which the prodigy and the angelic modesty of Agnes inspired him; and he afterwards declared that he had given the veil to a saint.

The shower of manna, as the Blessed Raymond of Capua, a man of most enlightened judgment, writes, was a favour which heaven bestowed upon Agnes every time that she prayed, and not only her clothes but the place she was in kept the

trace of the miracle. One day, when the holy virgin was covered with more manna than usual, one of her religious meeting her, thought that some snow had recently fallen on her, and stretched out her hand to shake her clothes, but Agnes smiled, and said, "Do not take that off me, for it is a visible sign of the spiritual sweetness which God deigns to grant me in prayer."

It was precisely the time of prayer in which she found means to inebriate herself with that inexpressible sweetness which is generally a proof of God's merciful love towards the just soul. Agnes' pure and ardent desires never knew those limits which satisfy a less elevated spirit. She followed all the movements of her ever active love, ever yielding to its new desires, and the less satisfied the more it discovers how pure and lovely is the object of its love. Neither were powerful incitements wanting to enlarge the sphere of Agnes' holy desires. We will give some specimens of these which rendered glorious to her the time in which they happened. The intimate union with her God, which this virgin enjoyed by the help of the powerful bonds of charity, often suggested thoughts which were connected with that tender longing to diminish, as far as possible, the distance between a soul confined for the present to enigmas and to darkness, and the Sovereign Good, who dwells in inaccessible light. The contemplation of the divine attributes is an abyss of inconceivable wonders, which, although it fatigues the mind, never diminishes the intensity of the love with

which the just soul rises above itself to adore them. The propensity of the human mind to allow itself to be seduced where error appears attractive, makes it rather easy to go astray in a region of dazzling light. The wish of contemplating the nature of God, and the idea of seeing Him when we only behold the creations of our own ardent imaginations, was the origin of many sects which were followed and spread by fanatics led by pride and vanity : but this chain of danger, darkness, and deceit, is completely annihilated by the true inspirations of holy and humble love, the child of faith, if we may use the expression.

When a holy soul turns to contemplate God, it begins by addressing Him a prayer of excuse and of holy fear, in which the heart expands with a sentiment of adoration, and recognises Him as the infinite and incomprehensible God, and entreats Him to cast one ray of His mercy on a vile creature, full of nothing but misery. Here faith lends her assistance, reminds the soul of all the mysteries of love worked for her by the Supreme Creator, and animates her with that supernatural courage which is produced by grace. The steps by which the soul arrives at God are the operations of charity ; and thus the just one sighs, desponds, and revives in the flames of this charity, then raises itself towards God, and learns more and more how sweet it is to be near Him. Effects like these, described in several passages of the Holy Scriptures, were recognized in Agnes by those who examined her spirit. Her life of contemplation had no doubtful phases which

might give rise to the slightest suspicion that she was subject to giddiness during some moments of her exalted meditation. The most enduring laws of charity had become naturalized in her heart, and she well knew that the presumption of raising oneself in a lofty contemplation of the immense and uncreated Being, in order merely to free oneself from the obscurity of this present life, is not to seek God but one's own vanity, whose fleeting and corrosive bonds fall away in the presence of love. But when the soul feels the weight of its earthly condition with a sweet impatience, and desires to enlighten itself by the knowledge of God, inasmuch as He merits to be known and loved above all, as the beginning and end of all things, we may say that its right desires can safely hope that they are guided by charity, which is the most necessary and quickest means of union with God.

This enviable union with Heaven raised Agnes' sight to behold objects which can only be represented by supernatural colours. Although she moderated the desires of her heart by the most profound contempt of herself, she had been inflamed for some time with an intense desire of seeing and adoring the most holy Humanity of Jesus Christ, to which she was consecrated by an irrevocable promise as a spouse. Similar desires are not, as some false mystic theologians have asserted, a failing of faith; on the contrary, directed by humble confidence, they may contribute greatly to keep up the vigour of that active faith which is the life of the just. It is

one thing to desire to convince ourselves, by the experience of our own senses, of the truth of some revealed mystery, which is an insult to the infallibility of revelation ; and another to believe firmly that which we learn from the Scriptures and the Church, and to desire at the same time that God may glorify Himself still more in His ineffable works by giving us, if it pleases Him, and is consonant to our spiritual good, some sensible demonstration of them. There is nothing unworthy in this of our character, of the reverence we owe to faith, or of the nature of true piety. Thus Agnes, inspired by heaven, which was about to grant her this signal favour, could not overcome the desire of rejoicing in the sight of the life-giving flesh of the Redeemer of men, and at last had the consolation of finding that she had not desired in vain. The most holy Mary appeared to her with the most beautiful and beaming aspect on the night before the Feast of her Assumption, holding Jesus Christ in her arms, as the same tender infant that He willed to be in the first years of His stay on this earth. The consolation of Agnes was not limited to this sight alone, for the divine mother deigned to give for some time into her embrace, the precious and Divine fruit of her womb. Agnes did not die in that moment, as might have been expected, overwhelmed by the excess of her joy ; but she summoned all her strength and all the powers of her soul to sustain her beating heart, and prolonged her tender communications with the heavenly Child, until, with loving reluctance, she

had to restore Him to His mother's arms. Before He was taken from her she loosened a small cross of strange workmanship, which hung round His neck, and kept it for herself as a memorial of the honour she had received. When she saw the vision disappearing she uttered loud cries and fainted. Some of her religious sisters ran to her assistance when they heard that sorrowful cry, and found her stretched on the ground as if she were dead. She recovered with difficulty, and when she returned to the use of her senses she concealed the circumstance from all, except the one who was her spiritual guide, in spite of the inquiries which were put to her. We willingly admit that the pure and strong intellect, assisted by extraordinary light from heaven, was able to comprehend this wonderful sight, but it is further evident that the above-mentioned cross, the salutary sign of our redemption, deposited itself by a supernatural power in her hands at the moment when it seemed to her that she loosened it from the neck of the Divine Child.

It is not surprising that after obtaining such a privilege from the Word made flesh, Agnes should continue to receive new and still more special favours. As there is no mystery in religion which is more august, or which brings us more close to the Divinity than the adorable Eucharist, it has always been the dearest object of the love of all those souls which are remarkable for their faith and love. At this Divine banquet Agnes enjoyed the sweets of peace,

unction, and renovation, which cannot be described by mortal tongue; and, therefore, from the dawn of the day which was fixed for the reception of the sacramental species, she sighed and longed for the moment in which she might satisfy her pure desires, panting with uncontrollable transports after the fountain of life. It is not exactly known how many times a week her director permitted her to partake of the sacramental communion, but it seems probable, from the context of the old memoirs of her life, that she was not in the habit of approaching the table of the Divine Victim every day. Agnes knew the importance of the great act of her own weakness too well not to entertain the desire she felt of frequenting it daily, a frequency which we cannot disapprove, because we are clearly told by the history of the first ages of the Church, that the faithful were sometimes accustomed to fortify themselves daily against the difficulties and dangers of persecution with the Bread of the strong; but no praise could be given to him who imitated the early Christians in this respect, without imitating at the same time their golden simplicity, their complete detachment from earthly pomps and interests, and the fervour of their prayers. On the days when Agnes received the Divine Sacrament she redoubled, with the most pious dispositions, her fervent acts of religion, and actually obtained a pledge of the satisfaction of heaven, which assured her that the purity of her heart was adequate to that tremendous act, as far as it was

possible for that of a creature, still a pilgrim on this earth, to be. One Sunday morning, when she had retired before the dawn of day to pray in the most remote corner of the garden, as she frequently did, she let the hour for beginning the Divine Office pass without perceiving it, and lest she should be grieved by this pious delay, which put off the hour for receiving Holy Communion, an angel of the most beautiful aspect appeared to her, and gave her the most holy mysteries of the Body of Jesus Christ. The Blessed Raimond tells us that for nine successive Sundays she was fed with the Divine Eucharist by a messenger from heaven. It does not show a desire to multiply miracles without necessity, to believe with the most faithful historians, that Agnes received the life-giving sacrament from the hand of an angel, as may be inconsiderately imagined. It is true that Agnes' pious desires might have been satisfied without the angel's ministration, but it must be remembered that the Author of miracles works them when it pleases Him, with that liberty which is the prerogative of His omnipotence, in a way which cannot be searched by our feeble intelligence.

A similar reflection will entirely satisfy our minds when we are informed of the following circumstance, which is asserted with the greatest confidence by the Blessed Raimond of Capua. He tells us that Agnes, touched at the bottom of her heart by the consideration of the sufferings which our Divine Saviour endured for love of us, nourished a most intense desire of visiting those

parts of Palestine, which were sanctified by the presence of God made Man, when in His visible flesh He conversed with men. He adds that God was pleased to appease in a measure her holy and fervent desire, and caused the angelic spirits to bring her a clod of earth, which was enriched with some traces of the blood which the dying Saviour shed on Calvary, and also a fragment of the vase in which Jesus was washed in His earliest infancy.

We are not going to enter into a discussion of the question of similar relics, which is important enough to afford occupation to Catholic doctors and teachers of theology. Those relics, which, besides having been sanctified by the touch of the divine members of our Redeemer, bring Him before our minds as He was in the various circumstances of His life among men, are always worthy of the greatest veneration. It is most true that when our Saviour rose again to an immortal life He reunited to His body every drop of blood which He had shed in His Passion, lest His humanity should be found at His resurrection to have lost an integral part by His death: still the blood which appears in some relics ought to be regarded as miraculous, and figurative of that which dropped from the wounds of the Saviour, and consequently worthy of being venerated with the most sincere faith and devotion. The desire of examining how these precious relics can have been preserved and transmitted to us after the course of so many ages, is equivalent to scrutinizing the wonderful ways

of Providence, which, without doubt, has used every means to preserve them from the rapacity of time, and the revolutions which have desolated the earth.

Agnes, however, deposited the precious gift with jealous care among the other relics of the monastery. In process of time the Conventual Friars of St. Francis at Procono obtained possession of those which were said to have been given by angels to St. Agnes, and the report is, that they were placed inside the head of a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary, which was honoured in the church of Saint Martin. This tradition is corroborated by the fact that Monsignor Domenico Danesi, who flourished in the beginning of the seventeenth century, being informed of it by the Marchioness of Procono, Lucrezia Pia Sforza, went in person to open the above-mentioned wooden image, and found a piece of earth in the expected spot, which had some red marks upon it, together with some packets of sacred relics.

In proportion as heaven heaped extraordinary favours on the head of Agnes, she, guided by a sentiment of true humility, studied to conceal them from the eyes of others; but in spite of all the efforts of that virtue, which, the richer it is, the more it strives to appear empty of all good, she was obliged to yield to the entreaties of those who sought the aid of her prayers in time of their distress. She became a consoler and a mother to all, conformably to the dictates of the most sincere charity, nor could she help

feeling great joy when her prayers for others were heard, because God was glorified by her means, and because the Gospel tells us to do good works sometimes openly, that praise may be given to our Father who is in heaven. The heavenly consolations that overflowed her whole spirit, and could spring from no other source but her love of God, were not the only proofs of how much He delighted in showering His mercies upon His beloved servant. His omnipotent hand, which reverses at pleasure the natural order of things, manifested itself also in other ways. The bread of which the monastery was, for some unknown reason in want, was twice multiplied at the prayer of Agnes. On two other occasions the worth of her confidence in Divine Providence was proved, by finding two empty jars of oil unexpectedly filled. Another time, when the monastery was entirely destitute of money, a large sum was suddenly found in the chest of the religious in whose care their common property was placed. Finally, when Agnes was dining with two pilgrims, whom she had received with the most benevolent hospitality, a fresh rose fell from above on the table, although it was the depth of winter, which was a subject of great astonishment to all those who were sitting at the table, and of humble strife, as each endeavoured to attribute this prodigy to the merit of the others. Perhaps some of our readers might wish us to describe all the minor circumstances relating to these occurrences which are given by others; but this is not the purpose of our Life. We know that

gratuitous gifts, like that of the power to work miracles, are not enough to make the possessor a saint, and since the relation of all the minute facts would lead us into long digressions, we are justified in omitting them, for our purpose is to place our saint's virtue in the right light, and not to attract the devout curiosity of those who, forming their ideas of virtue on those of the multitude, only seek for miracles and prodigies in the Lives of the Saints.

Although the above mentioned wonders deeply struck the minds of the religious women over whom Agnes presided, her constant and persevering manner of life was a more powerful argument for showing her every kind of reverence and respect, in spite of her unwillingness to receive it, for her desire was to be considered the lowest and vilest of all. But what caused the greatest admiration, were the austere mortifications to which she made a law of submitting herself. They might appear excessive, but they were suggested by love, which imparts incredible strength to just souls, in order that the virtue of penance may take root in them, and become a powerful habit, and increase the sphere and the beauty of all their other virtues by its sacrifices. During fifteen years, while Agnes governed the monastery of Proceno, she never tasted anything but bread and water, and this so sparingly, that they could not understand how such scanty nourishment could preserve her life and health. Her night's rest was never more than a short and uneasy sleep upon the bare ground; nay, she frequently passed the whole

night, from sunset to sunrise, in reading holy books, and exhaling her love of God in prayer, in weeping, and in sighs, without allowing herself one interval of quiet. She was ingenious in crucifying her own flesh ; she used to choose to do all her actions in the most fatiguing way, and in those circumstances which were most painful to her nature ; and further, used to scourge herself many times in some days of the week. This latter penance, which goes so far as to lacerate the body and to shed blood, might spring from a fanatical spirit, which makes a man cruel when he thinks he is generous and devout, if it were not regulated, as it was in Agnes, by a superior direction and by obedience to the minister of God, who can and ought to know when it may be conveniently permitted to pious souls. This method of afflicting and subduing her body, gave a new vigour to Agnes's spirit, and the desire of submitting it to a still heavier and more rigorous yoke, increased in proportion with the love which burnt within her. In fact, although the effects of such rough treatment showed themselves in her enfeebled body, her spirit grew in readiness and in alacrity, the greater because she knew that her works were a sweet holocaust in the sight of Heaven. Heaven continually employed this favourite soul as a suitable instrument of its glory. A native of Acquapendente was attacked by phrenzy, and all the remedies applied to him were useless. After some time, as his fury became every day more horrible and more dangerous, his neighbours firmly believed that he was tormented

by a malignant spirit, and treated him as a demoniac. It is not our business to discuss this fact, but we can assure our readers, that as soon as this wretch was presented to Agnes, who had gone on purpose to Acquapendente, he felt the power of her intercession, which obtained for him, from the Most High, a sudden and complete cure. When he was released from his misery he declared that he had been, until that moment, possessed by a devil; such was the violence of the malady which had disordered the nerves, the blood, and the electric fire which animates us, in a frightful manner. However that may be, the favour which God granted to Agnes's prayers remains the same, even if we do not venture to add this man to the list of the possessed. The devil was, moreover, confused and mocked on another rather dissimilar circumstance, when a victim, which he flattered himself that he securely possessed, was snatched from him. One of Agnes's friends was a rich man, who was led by his vices far from the path of eternal salvation. As he had often assisted the monastery with alms, Agnes used to recommend him fervently to the Most High, and regarded him with gratitude and partiality. She was totally ignorant of his unhappy state, for he managed, in spite of his bad conduct, to keep up a plausible appearance of probity and honour. But as soon as Agnes was shown, by a ray of heavenly light, the terrible situation of her misguided friend's soul, without loss of time she sent for him, and warned him with the greatest earnestness, to provide with all diligence for his

spiritual safety. "God has brought to my knowledge, with a certainty which does not admit of doubt," said she, "that in punishment of your crimes, a special kind of torment is prepared for you in the place of the damned; and it is God Himself, who is terrible in His justice, who has inspired me to tell you not to abuse to your ruin that time which He has granted you to repent in." These words roused that man, as it were, from a deep sleep, and he was moved to horror and repentance by looking at his past life. Agnes redoubled her humble prayers for him, and after a short time she had the consolation of seeing him contrite and determined to gain God's pardon. Furthermore, after his death she was fully consoled on his account, for she was told by an interior heavenly voice, that her departed friend had reached the haven of a blessed eternity.

Whether Agnes consoled herself by the proofs of the special love of Heaven which she received, or considered the weakness of our frail nature ever ready to impede the progress of virtue, her resignation to the will of God remained the same. The chances of life which are problems, that souls which fear them too much cannot solve, were to her so many inducements to increase her confidence in God. She frequently said, bursting into tears, "It is my God who preserves my life, it is He who gives me my being. How can it be other than certain that He does it for His glory? And the more He makes use of me for His glory. the more I am bound to give Him the tribute of my whole heart." Her invincible tranquillity was

never disturbed for an instant. She once fell into a state of total languor, which was accompanied by fatal symptoms, and she was the only one who gave no signs of sorrow. At last they ordered that, to restore her strength, which had been shattered by her uninterrupted macerations, she should eat some meat which was prepared expressly for her.

Agnes did not resist the order, but she merely raised her eyes to heaven and made a short prayer, and at the moment when she prepared to eat the meat, it was turned into fish by an unseen power. He who at the marriage of Cana in Galilee, changed the water into wine, to prevent the guests from being grieved, could without doubt change the meat into fish, that His beloved servant might have the satisfaction of observing, even in the time of illness, the severe laws of abstinence which she had laid down for herself.

Besides, the honour of the person who registered this event in the annals of that period, leaves us no room to doubt its reality. After Agnes had displayed proofs of heroic patience, her health partially returned.

During her long and trying malady, she never lost her accustomed cheerfulness, because it did not diminish her knowledge of God. The knowledge of God is a comfort which man never loses. If we make God present to our minds as He really is, no event will be able to shake their balance ; as a manifestation of unseen things greatly contributes to increase this lively perception of God's presence, and at the same time our love of Him.

After the saint's recovery she was consoled by a wonderful vision, in which she seemed to be admitted to contemplate the glory of her heavenly country. She was not really raised to behold that light which forms the happiness of the inhabitants of heaven, but the immense joys of that eternal kingdom were presented, as it were, by allegory to her intellect. Among the dearest objects which fixed her attention there, was the august throne of the Mother of God, who was clothed with the sun, and surrounded by ineffable beauty. A chosen choir of the brightest spirits stood round that sublime threshold, who celebrated the greatness of their Queen in most joyful songs and canticles. Heaven resounded with their voices, and except the triple sanctus to the Most Holy, there was nothing in the whole court of heaven more joyful and triumphant. After that vision Agnes frequently recited or sung a devout Latin hymn in honour of our Lady, which she said she had learnt from the angels on that occasion. It begins, "*Vernans rosa, spes humilium propitia,*" which the blessed Raymond gives at length. It refers entirely to the seven joys relative to the incarnation and life of her Divine Son, which Mary most holy experienced. The sentiments are refined and expressive of devotion, but the style and the phrases are not concise, and are those of an age in which elegance of language and the dignity of the lyric metre had quite disappeared. But whoever endeavours to prove from this that it was not composed by angels, must recollect that those inspirations that saints and

prophets recorded in the Holy Scriptures, were worded according to the style of that period, the genius of the language and the character of the writer. Hence arises the difference of styles, one sublime and the other simple and familiar, between Isaias, Ezechiel, Jeremias, Amos, and the other prophets; though every one of them spoke by divine inspiration, they each used the language suited to their respective characters, and the age in which they lived. It is not, therefore, surprising that the praises which are given to Mary in heaven, should be expressed to Agnes, an innocent virgin, ignorant of letters, in the language that she herself would have used. When the angels speak by the mouths of others, they can, without derogating from their own perfection, adapt themselves to the instrument of which they make use, to make known their meaning to human minds. This vision left in Agnes's soul the seeds, so to speak, of unutterable joy, which greatly assisted the perfect recovery of her health.

She resumed all her ordinary practices of devotion, that she prescribed to herself when she undertook the government of her monastery. The general rule of this house was founded on that of the great Augustine, which is the most secure guide of all those communities whose members have united in order to attend to their advancement in Christian perfection, which is based, as St. Augustine, with the authority of the Gospel, begins by teaching us, upon the love of God and our neighbour. Upon this firm foundation, Agnes had built up those laws and those customs which

she thought most necessary for the government of her fellow religious, without binding herself to any particular institute. She was most careful to prevent idleness, dissipation, or slight jealousies from introducing the least disturbance in this family, and used her utmost skill in consulting the natural dispositions of each, that the Lord might come with the spirit of peace to dwell amongst them. They were accustomed to a holy and regular manner of life, but they were willing to give up their customs when any useful innovation was proposed. Agnes's gentle and obliging nature made her feel great compassion for the weaknesses or the wants of others, and she corrected or assisted them with such affability, that they had only to explain their circumstances and they obtained their desires. Instead of considering her companions as a burden entrusted to her care, she regarded them as her support and her crown. Those whose zeal is sour or fanatical, are disturbed and disquieted when it is their business to direct others in their religious duties, but true and enlightened zeal is full of loving confidence in its subjects. Whether they are weak or virtuous, it always considers them as its children, whom it must, with grief sometimes, but always with love and patience, bring forth for Jesus Christ, as St. Paul said. In spite of the rank of mother, which she held over the others, she was rather averse to claiming any title of superiority. She only considered her elevation as an obligation to be holier than the others, and this species of obligation was quite consonant to her inclinations.

On the other hand, desirous to live only for herself, freed from the burden of government, and anxious to be of use to others, without being responsible for them before God, she used every means, and at last, after many failures and long efforts, succeeded in withdrawing from the office of superioress.

We cannot refrain from giving some account of the way in which she spent the next seven years, the remainder of her stay in Proceno.

The whole edifice of Christian perfection, being, as we have already said, founded upon love, this love is also the root of the habit of the other virtues, and from it spring all the outward actions which show a complete detachment from creatures. The progress of it is rendered more admirable in the souls of those who are travellers on this earth, the more it resembles that love which inflames and makes happy the inhabitants of heaven. Hence we may imagine to what a lofty degree of perfection Agnes was tending. Her thoughts found no rest, unless they were centered in God, and every short moment in which some passing distraction prevented her from fixing them on her uncreated Good, brought with it a complication of sufferings. This love is tried by moments of distraction, of tempest, and of dryness, but it merits by its constancy in bearing them, and the flood of its former sweetnesses returns. The faintings, the raptures and abstractions, the intermission of the physical powers, which sometimes accompany its breathless transports, are not deliriums like those produced by

erring passions, but they are caused by ineffable tenderness, and an inexpressible desire to be freed from the bonds of the body, and to love God where love triumphs for ever and ever, without any rival feelings. From this fountain Agnes drew her unwearied aspirations to the hidden treasures, the bright light of her faith, which guided her in the paths of justice, her perpetual vigilance by which she kept her heart free from every irregular tendency, and finally her extreme desire of making herself worthy of the words and the chaste embraces of her celestial Spouse. We can easily imagine, further, how deep the poverty of her spirit, and how beautiful and fragrant the flowers of her purity were, since detachment from the goods and pleasures of this life is an indispensable part of the laws of the love of God. Frequent acts of piety, and the continual exercises of every virtue, had, as is their wont, furnished Agnes with the method of collecting all her thoughts in God under every circumstance, so that everything she beheld became to her a book in which she read of truth and love, in fact, God Himself. Her desire of living entirely hidden in Jesus Christ, would have led her to conceal what she felt from the knowledge of men, unless the account of the sweetnesses which inundated her heart had been drawn from her by holy obedience.

Indeed, her reputation for virtue was very great, and widely spread. The name of Agnes was always spoken with respect, and cited whenever the speaker wished to give an idea of extraordinary

purity. Men who were illustrious for their dignity or their learning, were ambitious of keeping up a frequent correspondence with her; but it was very difficult to do this with one who sought to fly from every opportunity of gaining credit, and was intimately persuaded of her own littleness and unworthiness. On one occasion, however, her humility yielded to the just argument of the fitness, and the advantages of leaving her beloved Proceno for a short time. From the time that she left Montepulciano, twenty-two years ago, she had been regretted by her fellow-citizens, and now excited more than ever by the fame of her holy life, they asked her with anxiety to come amongst them for their universal consolation. At first she replied, that she would assist them by her prayers as far as she could, and thus show her gratitude for their benevolence towards her; and begged them to excuse her from leaving the abode to which God had called her, and making a journey which did not appear suitable to a virgin of her calling. These objections only increased the urgency of their request, which they supported by motives of piety, and added to their own the entreaties of the religious women, among whom Agnes had retired when she first left the world, and they did so much that at last Agnes consented, moved by a spirit of discretion and loving prudence, which is quite compatible with perfection. Thus as the laws of enclosure in cloisters were not then made, Agnes went to her native town in the company of some of her reli-

gious sisters, and was received there, as may be supposed, with unusual demonstrations of joy and satisfaction. The short stay which she made there, was an uninterrupted course of holy and charitable works. Her exhortations to the fear of God, to concord, and to the works of justice sowed seeds of the best promise in many of their hearts. The sorrow they felt at her departure, was proportionate to the universal joy and contentment inspired by her presence; but mindful of the promise of returning speedily, that she had made to her religious daughters at Proceno, she turned a deaf ear to the tears and entreaties of those who advised her to remain in her own country for ever. She went back to the place which might be called the fruit of her toil, and a chosen vine deserving of all her affection. The time she had spent out of her monastery had not obscured the least of her virtuous intentions, nor did tenderness for her friends and relations diminish by one iota the joy which that retirement and solitude caused her. Here she continued that chain of victories which, in her conflict for heaven, she gained over all the oppositions of this present life. She served her God faithfully, and desired nothing else on this earth. The only unsatisfied desire of her heart was for heaven, but she had a secret presentiment that she had to go over a long and weary road before she attained her reward.

PART II.

SECTION I.

Agnes is inspired to undertake fresh enterprises.—She returns to her country.—Revolutions in Montepulciano.—Agnes commences the building of a monastery ; of which she is made superioress.—She gives a bright example of perfection.—Her wisdom and prudence.—She introduces the rule of St. Dominic in her new monastery.—Her care to promote religious observance.—Her spirit of solitude and peace.—The walls of the monastery fall down and are rebuilt.—Agnes' journey to Rome, and the incidents of it.—Her return to Montepulciano.—Her internal lights.

THE designs of the Most High for Agnes, caused changes in her life which she never expected. She always regarded the monastery of Proceno as a home which she was never again to leave. Her private capacity was grateful to her in proportion as it was free from all cares, which were contrary to her inclinations ; and she flattered herself that she was to profit by it during the remainder of her life. Heaven seemed to approve of this desire by favouring her choice of Proceno in so many ways, but she nevertheless was quietly prepared to follow the will of God with all promptitude, whenever it was made known to her. In the mean time she began to experience sensations which seemed to lead to unknown consequences, and some rays fell on her soul which were like the forerunners of some novel event.

That house of infamy, which had been pointed out to her in Montepulciano twenty-two years ago, returned to her memory oftener than was natural. She was extremely afflicted that no one thought of purging that spot of such indecency. Once in the midst of her grief she seemed to say to herself, "Cast your eyes there where such an abominable vice reigns secure. Your country expects great things from you, and in that spot it will crown you with such glory, that the end of your days will be envied. Your delay in that place will perhaps cause others to suspect your virtue, which cares rather more for your own peace, than for the spiritual good of others. But no, your life and your name will not be a problem in history. Follow the call of heaven, and do not fear to be deceived." The tenderness which these inspirations excited in the heart of Agnes cannot be described; but as she was still uncertain what the undertaking was which she was to commence, they were only half perceptible landmarks in a doubtful path. Desirous of knowing clearly what the will of God might be, she implored, without ceasing day and night, that He would clear up these doubts. She frequently was heard to break out in her transports in an exclamation such as this; "Do not conceal, O my only Good, Thy adorable designs any longer from the eyes of Thy servant, this uncertainty is too great a torment to the love which I owe Thee; I do not wish to refuse this trial, my fidelity suffers greatly in it, but is quite prepared to go through it; but do Thou, most merciful

and just Lord, accept the sacrifice of my sorrowing spirit, and condescend to console Thy victim by manifesting the way in which she is to immolate herself to Thee." She concluded her prayer with the sign of the cross, adding, "May Thy will, O most merciful God, be done now and for ever."

It was seen in the case of Agnes that the prayers of the just pierce the sky, and rise like a sweet perfume before the Most High. She saw in prophetic symbols the road she should take to execute the intentions of Providence. She was once raised, by means of a hidden power, to contemplate things far above those we see with our senses. She seemed to stand on the shore of a vast ocean, whose raging waters appeared to challenge the clouds to a battle. The tempest was suddenly hushed and the wind calmed, when Agnes saw three ships approach the shore, each navigated by a person of lofty bearing, whose dress showed them to be St. Augustine, St. Dominic, and St. Francis. Each invited her courteously to enter his ship, thus to pass safely over the perilous waves; but the equality of their respective merits, kept her for a short time in reverential doubt, when St. Dominic put an end to the delay, and stretching out his right hand, assisted her to mount the deck of his bark. This vision might be taken for a natural dream, were it not that as soon as it vanished from the mind of Agnes an angel descended from heaven and unfolded its mysteries to her. "The life of mortals," said he, "on this low region of earth,

is precisely a sea agitated by a violent storm. Fly, therefore, from its perils, and leave those who serve the world to be shipwrecked. You have already separated yourself from it, by following part of the rule of St. Francis with the religious of Sacco, and embracing part of that of St. Augustine here in Proceno. But God further wills that you should return to your country, and consecrate yourself to the Institute of His servant Dominic, and build a monastery in that very place, where, as you well know, incontinence now reigns. This building is the work which the Mother of God told you to undertake, and for which she gave you the three stones, which you keep by you." Having said this, the angel vanished, leaving Agnes overjoyed at what she had seen and heard; and she very shortly put it in practice and set out for Montepulciano.

Thus led back to her own country by unmistakeable calls from heaven, in the year 1306, she exerted herself to the utmost to purchase the site which had been pointed out to her. Armed with faith she overcame with intrepidity every obstacle. She bought the spot for 1,200 *lire*, which she had received from her relations, and persons who were attached to her. Having obtained from Monsignor Ildebrandino, the bishop of Arezzo, permission to build a church and monastery, she occupied herself entirely in commencing the work, and in demolishing the old building from the foundations, to make room for the new one. The bishop of Arezzo entrusted the laying of the first stone to the celebrated

Father Bonaventura Forteguerri of Pistoja, at that time prior of the Servite convent at Montepulciano, whose piety, learning, and apostolic zeal, made him remarkable in the annals of his order. The church was completed at the same time as the monastery, and called Santa Maria Novella. The latter was exactly suited to Agnes' taste; it was built in the humblest and poorest style, the walls between the cells being even frail. She had no view in erecting it, except that of opening a school of humility, of retirement, and of detachment from all worldly pomp, and making a home for innocent souls who should adore the Father who is in heaven in spirit and in truth.

Some might wonder that this monastery, the most precious fruit of Agnes' labour, was built upon such a small, and it might be said, mean plan, when it might by conjunctures, not to be expected to return after that first period, be made more ample and secure. It must be confessed that that part of the building which was inhabited by the nuns was small, clumsy, and inconvenient; but when we reflect that all the religious houses which rose under the eyes of their saintly founders, were built without the slightest regard to either ornament, comfort, or convenience, we shall begin to understand the cause of this seeming negligence. Besides, the invasions of the northern nations had buried architecture, together with the other fine arts, under the ruins of the Roman Empire, where it had attained the highest degree of splendour, after having been cultivated by the Egyptians, and perfected by

the Greeks ; so that in the first part of the fourteenth century there was scarcely any elegance in the buildings of the proudest cities, and none in those of villages or small towns. Finally, as this digression is not useless, we will add that the restricted habitation which Agnes had laid out for herself, not only gratified her love of poverty, but was consistent with the sentiments which virtue inspired in the hearts even of the Gentiles. They respected a hut as much as a palace, when it was inhabited by justice, generosity, honour, and good faith ; and can any refuse to honour a house which was the permanent abode of so much virtue ? In the best ages of the Republic the ancient Romans did not think that the house honoured its owner, but that he was its ornament and glory. Plutarch tells us that Elius Tubero, a great and good man, possessed nothing but one small house in the city and another in the country, where sixteen near relations of the Elian family lived with their wives, and a great number of their little children. Besides, Pliny relates among the virtues of his Trajan that he thought it a part of true glory to build with modesty, economy and simplicity. Still the reasons which led Agnes to endeavour that her work should have nothing great in the eyes of men, were far higher than theirs.

She sought and deserved the approbation of heaven. Many young women assembled round Agnes offered in those walls the acceptable sacrifice of their hearts. The above-mentioned Father Forteguerra, by commission of the bishop of

Arezzo, received at their request their religious vows, to bind them still more to this manner of life, though they did not engage themselves to any particular institute. The holy works which are done in consequence of a vow are twice as meritorious as those which are done by choice, because the vow itself is the most excellent act of worship which is rendered to God. These engagements require, it is true, previous deliberation, but the obligation, or necessity, which they impose of doing good, in nowise diminishes the liberty which merit presupposes; on the contrary, St. Augustine terms it: "*Felix necessitas, quæ ad meliora compellit*;"—a happy necessity which compels us to good works. These bonds increased the fervour of the young nuns. It was necessary at this period to choose one who should have the management of the others. Father Forteguerra displayed great care about this choice, but he left it entirely in the hands of the religious, since it was but just that their voluntary obedience should be paid to one, in obeying whom they might be reminded of their vows. There was no necessity for long deliberation who would be most popular in this capacity, and Agnes was unanimously elected for their common mother.

A peculiar custom of the time is observable at this part of the history. As soon as the bishop was informed of the election made by the nuns of Santa Maria Novella, although it gave him great satisfaction, he ordered the rector of the church of St. Bernard at Montepulciano,

who was called Ser Bindo, to publish this election to the people, and to report to him any objection which was made by them. It gave general satisfaction to see a virgin so renowned for her piety placed at the head of that chaste company, and the bishop being thus assured of the public approbation, commissioned Forteguerri to put Agnes in possession of the monastery.

Her elevation, the desire of cultivating these tender plants newly consecrated to the Most High, a sentiment of profound gratitude to God for having opened to her a way of changing that contaminated spot into a habitation worthy of His most pure regards, were so many stimulants to her to pant still more after Christian perfection. Such was her example of retirement, of continual prayer, of modesty, and of love for heavenly things, that it was more possible to admire than imitate her. It is certain that no virtue is too sublime and unapproachable to be the object of our imitation, since our Divine Master exhorted His faithful companions to take the perfection of our heavenly Father Himself as the model of theirs: but still every one cannot aspire to certain heights which may inspire despair to common courage. He alone who from on high calls some to greater things, can give them gifts necessary to reach them. He showered them in profusion on Agnes, so that it is no wonder she reached that perfection which those who admired her found it difficult to follow. The precept of being perfect is binding on every Christian, as far as it requires the exact obser-

vance of the divine commandments, because that is included in the baptismal vow. But among these general kinds of perfection, well known to all, it is necessary to a full understanding of our subject that we define precisely what is meant by saying that just souls arrive at a heroic degree of perfection in this life.

Having begun by supposing that the love of God is its foundation and basis, we may consider perfection animated by love in three ways. The first is when God is loved as much as He is loveable; but this exceeds the power of a simple creature, and is only possible to God, for He is essentially the Sovereign Good, and necessarily loves Himself in proportion to the vastness of His infinite sphere. Then there is that perfection by which the loving soul is drawn to God with all its affections not excepting the least tendency, by an actual and unwearied aspiration which prevents it from living on anything but love. This is the condition of the blessed in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, but it is not attainable during our mortal pilgrimage, which of necessity occasions innocent interruptions to the habitual energy of love. The last kind of perfection is that which remains for the consolation of man, and consists in excluding from us everything which is contrary to the impetus of our love towards God. This last kind, however, has two states. In the first, the human heart puts from it everything which might extinguish or weaken charity which cannot exist together with sin; in the second, it removes every obstacle

which hinders it from consecrating its affections wholly to love. The soul lives in charity when it guards against the infection of sin ; but its charity is perfect only when it has no earthly rival to dispute the dominion of the heart. The more ready, willing, pure, and firm the heart is in the practice of only admitting love, the more reason there is to call it perfect.

These principles, borrowed from a most illustrious authority,* show us clearly how sublime the state of the just soul is in this present life, and help us to penetrate to a certain degree into the spirit of Agnes, who gave such extraordinary examples of virtue to others.

It would have been necessary to have made her progress to equal her perfection. She therefore gave her hand, as we may say, to help her companions by her advice, by her instructions and sweet manners, to attain all those qualities which might render the sacrifice they had made of themselves still more pleasing to the Lord. She frequently exhorted them to watch lest any attachment to earthly things should insinuate itself into their hearts which had generously renounced them, because such attachments are generally a hurtful plant, which destroys the most promising seeds. The voice of such a watchful and exemplary mother was attended to as it ought to be ; nay, we are told that Agnès was sometimes obliged to moderate the fervour of some of her sisters, whose voluntary mortifi-

* St. Thomas, 2. 2. q. 184. art. 2.

cations would have exceeded the just limits of prudence. Agnes was as full of wisdom and tenderness in her conduct towards others, as she was severe and inexorable towards herself; and used to guide them by such laws as they could not mistake, and have the additional disadvantage of suffering without merit. The maceration of the body cannot be acceptable to God, unless it has the signs which render it so; that is, unless it is used with due discretion, and obtains its end of stopping the fountain of rebellion without oppressing nature too much. It is a common and natural illusion to the irrational mind, which leads man almost to destroy his life; and to distinguish folly from virtue we must find the conditions just mentioned, to be sure that the works of penance are regulated by the laws of Christian discretion, and are full of gentleness, that they have the end for which they are done in view, and finally, that they do not pass the lawful bounds of this end. For this reason St. Paul, after having exhorted us to offer our bodies a living and holy victim, worthy of the Divine pleasure, added that the kind of worship required by God* ought to be reasonable in all things, and agreeable to the dictates of an enlightened prudence.* It does, nevertheless, not unfrequently happen that some beloved souls are led by supernatural instinct to afflict their own members in an extraordinary way. In such cases, God, who inspires this purpose, gives them besides the

* Romans, xii. 1. "Your reasonable service."

strength which is required to support such austerity which would otherwise be excessive; and as their strength is increased, their nature does not succumb, so that their service is always reasonable, and most worthy of praise and reward. Agnes was herself in the position to use the most exquisite kinds of voluntary mortification, while on the other hand, she was filled with very penetrating discretion in regulating the conduct of others when she perceived that they were inclined to an excess of misguided fervour.

The prompt and filial docility which St. Agnes always found in her subjects, did not fail when she convoked them together, and decided to announce to them her private intention of introducing and establishing for ever in the monastery the constitutions of the order of St. Dominic; and her desire that they should all unite to put on the habit and submit to the rule of this order. Mindful of the instructions of Heaven, Agnes was never satisfied until she had executed this project. It would be, in the face of the incontrovertible evidence in favour of it, an absurd and unseasonable criticism to raise a question whether Agnes really entered the order of preachers. This doubt, which never deserved to be broached, was settled by such sound reasons, that it would be too inopportune to recall this groundless objection. When Agnes found that her sisters' inclinations agreed with hers, after a few days of more fervent prayer, she carried out their desires. The monastery was submitted to the care of the Friars Preachers, and in the introduction of the

rule of that order, the religious virgins found no novelty which startled them. They were already bound by the vows of religion, and lived in the constant practice of piety, mortification, and fervour. The rule only brought these under a fixed and regular method, which did not entail any grave or particular obligation, and consequently did not impose any too difficult duty. Nothing, however, was proposed or concluded in this affair, without first obtaining the approbation of the bishop Ildebrandino, of Arezzo. As he had lent every assistance to enable Agnes to build the church and the monastery, he was much pleased that she took means to consolidate her work by establishing laws so wise and so suitable to this end. Besides, the laudable prudence of Agnes's whole conduct justly pleased a prelate of keen discernment, mature counsel, and deliberate judgment like Ildebrandino. This is not the place to praise him, but we must mention that he is remembered with honour in the history of the Church of Arezzo. The troubles and changes of those times frequently placed him in a critical situation. His death was regretted by the greatest part of his flock; he was succeeded in 1312 by the celebrated Guido of Pietramala, a warlike bishop. He was endowed with noble qualities of soul and body, but forgetful for the most part of the peaceful duties of his ministry, he became lord of Arezzo, and having pursued with arms the Guelph party, who recognized the Pope, John XXII., for their head, he called Louis of Bavaria into Italy, and together with Federigo de' Maggi, bishop of

Brescia, and Arrigo, bishop of Trent, crowned him with the iron crown, and his wife Margaret with the golden one, in the basilica of St. Ambrose, at Milan.

The spiritual advantages which the regular system just introduced brought to Agnes's daughters, are sufficient proofs of the propriety of her plans. All that certain customs of piety and tried wisdom can do to advance Christian perfection, concurred to help Agnes's labours in the cultivation of her monastery.*

She was accustomed to protest that the observance of the most minute rules of the institute had an indefinable importance, because, in no system composed of parts, can the smallest parts be separated from the others without altering it. Hence she was very careful that the most ordinary practices should be observed with the greatest exactitude, when they related to the primary laws of a monastic life.

But as she knew that the human mind, naturally prone to bondage and prejudice, is much weakened by allowing itself to depend on some of the minute externals of religion, without attending to the spirit of them, she sedulously inspired the minds of her sisters with those wise maxims

* In the course of time the number of religious in the monastery diminished greatly, as well as their original strictness, so earnestly inculcated by their glorious foundress, and Pope Eugenius IV., in a bull of the 19th of June, 1435, ordered that these nuns should be transferred to the convent of Dominicanesses of San Paolo at Orvieto, and their monastery occupied by the fathers of the same order, who for some reason only took possession of it, and removed to it from the hospice they had had in Montepulciano since 1276, thirty-six years afterwards; that is, on the 15th of March, 1472.

of discretion, which prevent virtue from becoming wearisome, and being full of misguided zeal, or the slave of a pharisaical attachment to small observances, which are generally only endeared to us by our self-love.

In order to succeed in the difficult task of obtaining her end, without making a mistake, or misusing any of her means, Agnes examined and judged her own piety as well as that of the others, by that light which shows us whether charity flourishes truly in our hearts, or not. Seeing that this charity helped them to live, always ready to suffer a perpetual want, almost of all earthly comforts, for the hope of greater and more lasting rewards, she concluded that all the other observances of their rule would be easy to those who sought to gain for themselves by sufferings a permanent abode in heaven. Indeed, the total alienation from all the goods of earth, and the love of mortification which reigned in the hearts of those virgins, animated by the instructions and examples of Agnes, could only have sprung from the strength of their love of God. Their habitations breathed the spirit of poverty; no more food was ever provided than was enough to last for the day's consumption, and the best part was set aside for the poor. Whatever had the least appearance of splendour or of luxury, was carefully excluded, and even in their principal wants they liked to feel some of the hardships of poverty. Austerity and patience seemed their common and their favourite portion.

Our saint's retirement in this poor abode was

like a sweet sleep, in which she reposed in the perfect peace of her heart, insensible to everything on earth. If the wise man can, even in the midst of the noise of the business and cares of life, make a happy solitude in the mind, while that of others is disturbed by their agitations, it is easy to conceive how Agnes happily lived, and free from all uneasy distractions, separated in mind, and we may say in body likewise, from the world. This may appear a paradox to those who, immersed in the delirium of their passions, cannot understand the true happiness of the soul which devotes itself to study and to know the sovereign truths.

We grant that the mutual assistance given in society, makes an immense difference between the state of a person in the world and the solitary state, a difference which is entirely to the advantage of the former. But without recurring to the superior principles taught us by faith, is it not true, that the pursuit of pleasure in the midst of the world, is almost always degrading to man, who has only the pleasure of parade, of which he is doubly the victim; first for the labour which it costs him; and secondly, for the appearance of pomp, which humiliates and tramples upon his own? Pleasures themselves generate a dulness and weariness, which forces the worldling, if he ever has an interval of light, to envy the calmness of him whose meals are frugal, and who sleeps placidly on a hard bed, after having spent the day in the company of his own thoughts, or in contemplating the truth,

or in making acts of homage to his Creator. The reason why we prefer social comforts and pleasures to a manner of life which will always be extravagant in public opinion, is, that we are attached to various conveniences and enjoyments, which habit has transformed into wants. It is necessary, however, that he who chooses this life of quiet and retirement, of which we have pointed out the advantages, should declare a perpetual war against idleness, and use every means suited to his condition, of doing good to his neighbour; otherwise his conduct would be a tissue of unwarrantable absurdities, against which religion would be the first to protest. A soul which is penetrated by true love of God and the excellence of its own duties, guards with great caution against placing itself in a false position.

The life which Agnes led, varied by the ineffable sweetness which the God of peace infused into her soul, and continually employed in pious exercises, gave her no causes for disturbance or self-reproach. If her calmness had been based on a less solid foundation than lively faith in Divine assistance, it would have been in danger of failing at this period. When it was least to be expected, a great part of the walls of the church and monastery, which had cost Agnes so much toil and anxiety, fell down suddenly. Their bad construction did not, it is true, promise a long duration, but no one could have even suspected that they would crumble in the course of four or five years. One historian attributes

the catastrophe to the shock of an earthquake, but whatever was the cause, it without doubt grieved Agnes, but she consoled herself by remembering that no one had perished, and by her unflinching resignation to the Will of God, who would give her the means of repairing the mischief. She decided to make known her necessities to the representatives of the community. A public council being convoked to that effect, on the 6th of April, 1311, Guglielmo del Pecora, a man of great experience and reputation, spoke with much warmth in favour of Agnes, and showed that it was a public duty to lend every assistance to the disconsolate virgins, whose monastery was in ruins. He met with no opposition, and some deputies were named to preside over the expenses, which the community should incur by this undertaking. The church and monastery were rebuilt in a remarkably short time on a far handsomer scale. Its completion was hastened by some private, in addition to the public, donations. A rich and pious woman in particular, contributed a considerable sum of money left her by her father. It said, that, knowing her father's wish that it should be spent in alms, and doubting how to employ it in the best way, a mysterious dream which she had three times put an end to her doubts. She dreamed that she saw a ladder, by which many angels ascended and descended, whose top rested on the clouds, and the foot on the little hill where Agnes had raised her humble edifice. When this fell down unexpectedly the pious lady was moved to spend

the legacy upon a spot which was consecrated by the angels who had appeared to her there; and indeed her dream had been thus interpreted to her by another woman of a holy life, whom she had consulted. This dream is recorded by all the old writers of this history, and we, while we reverence every trace of that Providence which is always rich in the means of bending men's wills to its own most wise ends, will leave it with its deserved reputation of probability.

It now appeared to Agnes that nothing remained for her but to end her days in the beloved shelter of the renewed monastery, without ever leaving it, and to give herself up entirely to her chaste affections which drew her to God. After some time, however, she felt inspired to make a pilgrimage to Rome. Distrustful and fearful of her own lights, she communicated her ideas to her director, who made no opposition, as they appeared perfectly just and well founded. This journey may seem to have been suggested by lightness, by useless curiosity, or by a mind impatient of too close retirement, but it sprung in reality from ardent piety, and the desire of seeing many august trophies of our religion which are kept in Rome, and its purpose was to have the establishment of her monastery confirmed by Papal authority. When she arrived in Rome she obtained everything she desired with respect to it from Monsignor Arnaldo, bishop of Sabina, Legate of Clement V., who was then absent from Rome. He was raised to the Chair of St. Peter from the Archbishopric of Bordeaux, on the 5th

of June 1305, and crowned at Lyons in the church of St. Just, on the 14th of November, in the presence of Philippe le Bel, king of France, and other princes. After wandering through France, he fixed his seat at Avignon in 1309, where the Roman Pontiffs resided, till the time of Gregory IX., for seventy years.

Although Agnes observed a rigorous retirement during her stay in Rome, in order to preserve herself from all dissipation, the conversations she had on her business with several members of that court, and her whole conduct, showed, in spite of her humility, what a noble soul was hidden under that poor and ignoble appearance.* Many illustrious persons sought her in hopes of hearing her wise discourses, but far from being seduced to trust in the protection of the great, she continued to repose all her confidence in God. With tender and enlightened piety she went to appease her longings in contemplating the relics of the martyrs and envying their triumphs. She wished before she left that city to obtain some relics of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, for whom she had a singular devotion; but her humility prevented her from making this request to those who could have satisfied her desire with ease. She was consoled in a supernatural manner. One day when she was in the Basilica of the Apostles, absorbed in a fervent meditation on their glorious actions, two small pieces of cloth fell into her hands, and it was revealed to her at the same time that those fragments of ancient robes were precisely

those she so much desired. The known existence of these relics removed all doubt of their authenticity, and the manner in which Agnes received them was clearly miraculous. We may hence easily imagine with what feelings of joy and pious thankfulness she left Rome, still more convinced that heavenly favours are always ready for the just desires of the heart, which regards God as its generous and tender Father.

She returned to her country and to her monastery, filled with fresh eagerness to make progress in the school of virtue. The gifts she received from heaven, children of a particular grace, helped each other to increase in her soul. She described the spiritual riches which she so happily possessed in unfolding the history of her heart to him, who, because of his sacred ministry, stood in the place of God to her. We will give some examples of them, though this is too high a subject for ordinary minds. The gift of faith was in her heart, so strengthened by love, that she knew and felt that God is the highest and sovereign good, and that it is the worst of evils to be separated from Him. This vivid and vigorous faith was united to that filial timidity, which is a portion of that sweet anxiety natural to a loving heart. Not that her mind was ever wanting in abundant light, which showed her how to balance all the tender agitation arising from the consideration of her natural weakness, with equal encouragements. She renewed her protestations and her acts of love almost every moment, and sometimes felt her

spirit raised to such sublime heights, that she had reason to doubt whether her nature was being changed, or whether she still existed in flesh and blood. It was the same feeling which one day caused the Apostle Paul to say that he knew not where he lived, and to protest that Jesus Christ alone lived within his heart.* Such a bright and splendid light shone upon our holy virgin's soul, that its rays dispelled every obstacle which might arrest her progress in the path marked out for her. It has been ascertained by holy doctors that the infused light of the Holy Spirit contributes rather to perfect the will than the intellect. Hence a soul rich in such inspirations runs with equal rapidity in the course of the science of the saints, and in that of the actual exercises of meritorious works. This soul cannot ignore its own progress without doubting the evidence of them; but the more reluctant she is in ascribing any credit to herself, the more anxious she is to return the glory of her merits, which she knows, to the beneficent author of them. This was the state of Agnes' soul. Filled with gifts, with light, with sweetnesses, with humble timidity, with faithful gratitude, her own state was a motive for her sacrifices, her worship, and her gratitude to the sovereign distributor of all good. She was not, however, entirely free from some doubts as to the conduct she ought to pursue. When they arose, she regulated herself by the safest principles, and

* Galatians ii. 20. Philip i. 21.

made her doubts an incitement to seek counsel . from the Father of lights, and to love Him with more fervour, the more she felt the misery and darkness of the present condition of man. A celebrated writer says, that what appears a pain, may become, by God's help, very useful to us, for if there were no darkness, man would never feel the depth of his own corruption ; and if there were no light, he would not seek for any remedy. Thus it is not only just, but advantageous, that God should show Himself in part, and conceal Himself in part from our thoughts ; for the knowledge of God in this present life without the knowledge of our own misery, would be no less an evil than the knowledge of our misery without the knowledge of God.

SECTION II.

Agnes makes further progress in piety.—The events of this period of her life.—Her confidence in God's help.—She delivers a possessed man.—Her humility.—She cures a nun who had lost her sight.—She multiplies the bread.—Her anxiety for the instruction of her Religious.—She receives a warning of future evils.—Her illness, and journey to the baths of Chianciano.—The wonders which happened to her there.—Her gentleness.—She returns to Montepulciano.—Her love of God.—She prophesies public misfortunes.—Her last sickness and death.—What occurred shortly after her death.

THE more we learn of Agnes' history, the more distinctly we see that she was destined to enjoy certain particular favours of heaven, which sweeten whatever is hard in living in the body according to the laws of the spirit. She did not remember, as she herself frequently protested, with sentiments of tender gratitude, ever to have desired anything that God, in His merciful condescension towards her, did not quickly grant. Although her piety was founded on the secure bonds of the holiest love, it was not above being promoted by some accidental motives furnished by things subject to the senses. If, as reason and the Scriptures teach us, we ought at the sight of created things to raise our minds to the contemplation of the invisible Maker of them, we have still greater reason for making the external symbols of religion an inducement and encouragement to fulfil our duties to God whom we worship: otherwise our worship would become pharisaical,

by being confined to exterior actions, or imperfect because simply limited to the heart. The heart is, it is true, the seat of piety, but the greatest saints of the Gospel invariably practised certain methods and holy customs, which the intolerance of worldlings strives to pass off for the weaknesses planted by superstition in the imagination of the multitude.

We are told that, besides reciting the psalms and other prayers which are sanctified by the use and approbation of the Church, Agnes was accustomed to exercise herself in the devotion of the stations, in visits to sacred oratories, and in many fervent preparations for the solemnities and feast days. Prostrations and other forms of worship not unknown in the first ages of Christianity, were familiar to her. The most solid piety, under the direction of the love of God, knows how to animate and to turn to the best end all that the eye of human wisdom despises as signs of littlemindedness. After this preface we shall not wonder that Agnes pressed the religious of Proceno to return to her the little cross which she had left with them, and which she obtained, as we have heard by a singular favour in a vision. These nuns had no longer any hope of seeing her return to them. She had begged them by letter to set their minds at rest on this point, for it was evidently the will of God that she should remain at Montepulciano, and at the same time asked them to send her the well known cross, which she justly prized. This last request was absolutely refused, for the religious could not

bring themselves to part with such a venerated object, which they preserved locked up with great care. Their intentions were however completely frustrated, for they soon discovered that the cross had left its reliquary, contrary to all expectations, and learnt that it had returned to those hands, which had had one day the privilege of loosening it from the neck of our Lord made man when He appeared in the form of a little Child. This transmigration is given as a miracle by the historians, and indeed we should have to suppose too many most improbable circumstances if we endeavoured to make out that it was an illusion caused by human artifice. The simple and ingenuous candour of Agnes' character is alone abundant proof that she was incapable of practising, or being an accomplice to, the smallest deceit, however innocent. Virtue never yields to an impulse which has the slightest appearance of irregularity, and flies, according to St. Paul's warning, even the shadow of evil.*

When Agnes was consoled by the possession of this treasure, in such a surprising manner, she wrote as follows to the nuns of Proceno: "Do you not see that when my repeated instances could not obtain what I wanted from you, a single prayer which I made to my heavenly Spouse was enough to triumph over all your reluctance? You had good reasons for refusing to deprive yourselves of that tender pledge of salvation; and now I have still better reasons

* 1 Thessalonians, v. 22

for telling you to trust always in the Lord." In fact, this was the favourite counsel which Agnes was always insinuating, namely, to keep their confidence in the Divine help alive and always firm in their hearts. She herself gave such a bright and unfailing example of this, that many said that by merely looking at her countenance they were filled with unusual courage in the midst of any severe misfortune whatever.

Full of this noble confidence, she sought whatever was most difficult in the practice of virtue, and in her accustomed works of religion, piety, or charity towards others, always chose the most difficult path, or the most laborious means of doing them. Nay, she often prayed the Most High to afflict her with all those evils from which she saw her neighbours suffering; so that her spirit seemed capable of suffering them with the greatest resignation. Her confidence in God's help, was that which inspired her with such courage and strength; because fear is a sign of a weak and distrustful soul, while the virtue of hope, which is certain of succeeding in the most arduous enterprises, is accompanied by magnanimity, which tends to undertake what is difficult. Hence we can perceive the reason why Agnes never feared any of the suggestions of the malignant tempter, who seeks indirectly and by many wiles to entice incautious souls to transgress the law. We have reason to conclude that he very seldom tried his strength against this virgin's heroism; and we know for certain that the number of her victories corresponds to that of his

assaults. Perhaps he sought to revenge his discomfiture by molesting the imagination of some of the religious women who fought for Jesus Christ under Agnes's direction. Her extreme solicitude for the peace of their souls, had made her beg them to confide their interior combats with openness to her, in the hope that this humble confidence would be a powerful remedy against the attacks of the tempter. She found that every time that a timid conscience applied to her for comfort and counsel in the midst of its conflicts, she succeeded in restoring the calm which seemed to have vanished entirely. While Agnes praised the Most High for this, she could hardly contain her joy, because she found that not only she herself overcame all the stratagems of the evil powers, but that God's consecrated virgins, who were under her care were a happy flock, whose blessed fold was not to be penetrated by any enemy. Perhaps the devil, who does not give up his ground so easily, changed his plan of attack, as we are told by the writers of that time, and not being able to disturb their consciences, began to assail the quiet of the monastery, with unaccustomed noises, especially during the hours of night-prayer, and their common repose. This last phantom was repulsed by Agnes, who convoked her religious together every evening, and blessed them in the name of God, and then sent them away, telling them to go securely to sleep, encouraging them with these words of Psalm 120, "Non dormitabit neque dormiet, qui custodit Israel." "He shall neither slumber nor sleep,

that keepeth Israel." It was always Agnes's business to repress the assaults of the devils, and the power which heaven had communicated to her words, to her advice, and to her prayers, shone out most brilliantly in this matter.

It was not long before she found herself again required to fight with and overcome the enemy of the human race. There was a man who showed every sign of being possessed by a devil. It is true that we are ignorant of many terrible consequences of physical derangement, and that experience and observation have destroyed many prejudices, and have proved that what has been often ascribed to diabolic agency, was caused only by natural illness, and ceased as soon as the transports of delirium were over; but it is undeniable, on the other hand, that the Church furnishes us with experiments by which we may test the reality of diabolical possession. This empire over the body, which God sometimes allows to devils, is shown by indisputable evidence in the revealed Scriptures, and by examples in every age. The unhappy man of whom we speak, was in punishment for his past sins, or as a trial of his patience, subject to the fierce attacks of a devil. He was taken to the monastery to be cured by Agnes, and he had scarce set his foot in it, when, by a sudden access of fury he broke his bonds, and running madly about the cloister, fell in with a young girl who was a postulant there. He seized her, and was hurrying to the well in order to drown her, but in this critical moment Agnes arrived. She placed herself courageously before

him and freed the girl from the imminent danger she was in. The maniac did not resist, but shuddering like one who stifles his rage, stopped short, looking at her with surly eyes. She raised her faith, made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and placed her hands on his head while she recited the symbol of St. Athanasius. Before she had finished it the evil spirit went out of him, leaving him entirely free, but very weak from the effect of his past agitation. The eyes of his benumbed mind were suddenly opened, and his feelings roused by the greatness of the evil he had suffered, and nothing remained but to express his thankfulness to his courteous deliverer. She replied by exhorting him to be grateful to God's mercy, to show his gratitude by his holy life. This miracle created as much astonishment as it deserved, and Agnes was always applied to in public distresses. Every body believed that her prayers were an infallible remedy for them: but she was not less anxious to escape from the crowds that came to visit her. Her charity made her on the one hand unwilling to refuse their prayers, but she had strong reasons on the other for feeling an extreme repugnance to appearing before men, and becoming the object of their praise. The life of Agnes was isolated, she placed her whole happiness in God, she fled from every breath of human ambition, and considered every moment of this present life as an unhappy drawback, which kept her from reaching her heavenly country; and she always kept the perils, snares, and natural inconstancy of men

before her eyes. Thus it is not to be wondered at, that, the more her works made her great before men, the more she buried herself in her own humility. Perhaps it suggested to her the way to escape from public applause by flying as much as possible from the conversation of strangers, but how could she prevent her religious from admiring her, if she displayed more than once before their eyes that power, which, with the help of God's omnipotence, breaks through the confines of the ordinary laws of nature?

One of those virgins suffered from a severe ophthalmia, which defied all the art of medicine, and at last deprived her of sight. Mite, as the patient was called, inconsolable for her blindness, begged Agnes to obtain some relief for her by her prayers. The saint said to her one day, "If you will promise to God never more to shed a tear from those eyes for whatever temporal misfortunes may happen to you, and to consecrate all your affections to Him, weaned from all earthly care, I promise you on His part the consolation of recovering the perfect use of your eyes."

The way in which Agnes foresaw and foretold this prodigy increases the wonder of it, and gives us greater insight into the nature of the fact, and it shows us the action of Divine omnipotence which moves the creature to become an instrument of its portents. In such cases there is a certain similarity between the state of the spirit of one who obtains the gift of prophecy, and of one who is enriched with the power of working

miracles. As the mind of the prophet is inspired from above with the knowledge of what it could never learn by ordinary means, so the mind of the thaumaturgus feels moved to perform some action which produces a miraculous effect, the result of the interference of Divine power, the author of all portents. Sometimes this power follows upon prayer, as we read of St. Peter praying before he recalled Tabitha to life;* sometimes it appears without any prayer being made, as when St. Peter punished the false and interested conduct of Ananias and Sapphira with a sudden death.† For this reason St. Gregory says that saints sometimes work miracles by power, and at other times by prayer. In both, God is the principal actor, whether He makes use of the words, or the actions, or the interior movements of man, or of any other created instrument; so that the power which He communicates to His creatures makes it almost seem as if He obeyed their voice, according to the expression of Scripture, "The Lord obeying the voice of a man."‡

The Most High was pleased frequently to magnify His servant Agnes by similar signs. The following circumstance is well worthy of being remembered. The nuns who lived under Agnes' direction came to her one day to tell her that there was no more bread in the monastery, nor had they any means of procuring enough to support them all. Agnes listened to them

* Acts ix.

† Acts v.

‡ Josue x. 14.

without giving any signs of diffidence or sadness, and said with a smile, to encourage them, "Nothing is impossible to God." In a few minutes a person unknown to all arrived at the monastery and brought them a few small loaves. The relief seemed very inadequate to their wants, but when Agnes had blessed them they multiplied and increased to such a degree, that a large portion remained, after they had all eaten enough, to their great astonishment. As we learn from the Gospel what is the virtue and power of a soul which does not admit the slightest perplexity to interfere with the strong life of its faith, we are not at all surprised at this miracle, the account of which, given us by the most genuine records, is confirmed by an authority which no one who considers it seriously can doubt for a moment. It is universally known, even in the age of the most enlightened criticism, what esteem and veneration are due to the writings of St. Catherine of Sienna, who will be admirable in every age, for God enriched her with wisdom which could only have flowed from a heavenly fountain. In one of her celebrated ecstasies the saint heard this fact from the mouth of her Divine Spouse, when He spoke to her of God's especial providence for His servants. For the satisfaction of the reader we give the very words, as they are reported by the saint.*

"Sometimes I provide for their wants, by multiplying a small quantity of provisions which

* "Opere di Sta. Caterina raccolte da G. Gigli," printed in Sienna, 1707. Chap. 149. pag. 279.

are not sufficient, as thou knowest of that sweet virgin saint Agnes. From her childhood to the end she served me with true humility, and firm hope. For she never thought with doubt about herself, or her household. Wherefore with living faith she began poor, and without any temporal property, to build the monastery at the command of Mary. Thou knowest that it was the haunt of sinners; she never thought, how can I do this; but she worked with my providence, and made it a holy place, and a fit monastery for religious. And in it she collected at first about eighteen young virgins, without having anything, except what I provided for her. Among the rest I supported them for three days when they had only herbs, and no bread.

“And if thou shouldst ask, why didst Thou keep her in such want? For Thou hast told me that Thou dost never fail Thy servants who hope in Thee, and that they never suffer any necessity; whereas it seems to me that they were in want of what was necessary, because ordinarily, and speaking of those who are not perfect, the body of the creature cannot live upon herbs alone; and if Agnes herself was perfect, the others were not in such a perfect state. I should reply that I did this and permitted it in order to inebriate her with my Providence, and that those who were yet imperfect, should, by the miracle which followed, have occasion to make their beginning and foundation in the light of the most holy faith. In those herbs, or in another similar case to this, I gave and can give

to the human body such a quality that it will be better supported by those few herbs, and sometimes by no food at all, than it was before by bread, and other nourishment, which is given and ordained to preserve the life of man: and this thou knowest for thou hast experienced it thyself. I say that I provide by multiplying: for having been, as I have said, that space of time without bread, casting the eyes of her mind by the light of faith on me, she said, 'My Father and my Lord, my eternal Spouse, and hast Thou made me take these daughters out of their fathers' houses to perish with hunger? Provide, O Lord, for their necessities.' Then I extended my Providence over that which, as well as her mind, stood before me, and I obliged a creature by a mental inspiration to bring her five small loaves; and I showed them to her mind, wherefore she said, turning to the sisters, 'Go, my daughters, to answer a call at the grate, and take that bread.' They brought it and sat down to table, and I gave her so much virtue in breaking the bread, that they were all fully satisfied, and afterwards took so much from the table, that it abundantly sufficed a second time to their corporal necessities."

It must be evident to all how the truth of the prodigy is certified by this testimony, which we consider an ornament to this life, while at the same time it brings out the tender and firm trust in God's help, which animated the heart of Agnes in her undertakings.

Encouraged by such free displays of the Divine

bounty, she communicated her spirit of faith to her sisters. How could those pious nuns resist the force of her example, when it was clear how tenderly God assisted their dear superioress. She was extremely eager for their spiritual advancement, and employed every means of preventing them from being weakened by tepidity. A long and complete experience, most discriminating judgment, and a special light from Heaven, were her guides in the delicate ministry of preventing her religious from being wearied or ensnared, while they pursued their career of religious perfection.

When a young woman who was determined to leave the world, came to ask to be received there to the monastic life, Agnes employed all her penetration to discover her disposition, and the motives which led her to this action; reminding herself, that not the inconsiderate wish of increasing her family, but the desire of finding true and faithful spouses of Jesus Christ, was to be her only end in admitting any one to the life of the cloister. She was extremely anxious, above all, that those whom she received into her monastery, should rightly understand how great is the happiness of those who are able to detach themselves completely from the world; and, on the contrary, how dangerous and deplorable is the lot of those who, having separated themselves from it by their dress, still continue to love its yoke and its precepts. She congratulated herself as if she had made a great acquisition when she succeeded in making any one understand the religious life.

This life should never be embraced as an expedient, or from weariness, or from a little-minded piety, but must be the result of generous devotion, superior to all earthly views. All men are not able to follow the world, because all have not the strength, the means, and the riches to do what the world requires of them, but all may think that they are able to fly from the world. This flight will be but a pretence, and of small value in the eyes of the Searcher of hearts, if it is accompanied with a kind of regret for having renounced all earthly pomp. It is therefore necessary, to prevent ourselves from inconsiderately losing some of the merits of our sacrifice, to consider it a special favour of God to have been chosen for the most beloved part of His flock. One thing have I asked of the Lord ; this will I seek after as one of the greatest blessings, said David, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life ; and such were the desires of our Agnes.

The diligent care to make discipline and the spirit of perfection flourish in her monastery, never failed to produce the desired effects. She could see them in the fervour of her companions, and she felt the most unspeakable joy and consolation when she thanked God for this success. This joyful state of mind was, for higher reasons, proved by hard trials. Agnes loved her God, and she had, like the just in every age, to resist in the trial of afflictions. She was warned of their coming in a most distinct manner by a vision. One Sunday, at the dawn of day when she was in

prayer, an angel appeared to her, and said, "Follow me, for I have to show thee a great mystery." Agnes followed the footsteps of God's messenger without a moment's delay. He went into the garden of the monastery, and stopped under an olive tree, then he turned to Agnes, and gave her a cup filled with a most bitter liquid, which he imperiously commanded her to drink to the last drop; "Because this," said he, "will make thee in some degree like the Redeemer of the human race, who in the Garden of Gethsemane did not disdain for thy salvation to accept a cup of immense sorrow from the hand of His Heavenly Father, and to submit voluntarily to inexplicable sufferings." Having said this he disappeared, but for nine following Sundays the same symbolical vision was renewed, and he repeated the same thing to her. It is most common in the lives of the prophets and saints, to find that God revealed to them with proportionate signs, things that were going to occupy a remarkable part of their lives; in order that, having foreseen them, they may prepare to endure them with magnanimity and intrepidity. It is enough to look at Jeremias and Isaias only, to see under how many symbols certain terrible misfortunes, which would call for an extraordinary degree of constancy, were shadowed forth to them by Heaven. The sheet filled with unclean and frightful animals presented to the apostle St. Peter, showed him how much he had to suffer in preaching the Gospel. Agnes was not slow to imagine the signification of these presages, and it would be

difficult to describe the alacrity of mind, and the fervent prayers with which she prepared herself to undergo the troubles which had been announced to her. In her anxiety to resemble in some degree her suffering Spouse in the Passion which He endured, she went so far as to entreat Him to make His hand heavy upon her, and to help her with His strong arm to become a perfect victim of love, through the most severe trials. She passed whole hours before the image of her crucified Redeemer, and while she went over in her mind the various ways by which divine love had entered to take possession of her soul, she said to herself, that as love had flowers, according to that saying,* "the flowers have appeared in our land," and that it also had wounds, which express sufferings, as is shown by many passages of the Holy Scriptures, she sought to choose for herself the wounds, in order that the energy of her love might make her like her only good, who was loaded and covered with them.

Her wishes were not disappointed. In a short time her strength failed very greatly, and she was soon reduced to such a state of weakness, that she expected to die. Such was, however, her courage and patience, that she concealed her pains and sufferings from her companions for a long time. Besides having the same placid expression of countenance, and observing all her religious duties, she continued to practise all her accustomed mortifications. The vigour of her

* Canticle, ii, 12.

spirit communicated its strength to her body, which was wasted by a painful and tedious illness, but at last this made such progress, that Agnes was obliged to have recourse to the physician's assistance. Her unvarying tranquillity never failed in all the sufferings of her illness, and in making use of whatever remedies were prescribed. The accomplishment of God's will was the only thing she was not indifferent to. As the medical men could not do her any good, they thought it best to send her to the baths of Chianciano, in hopes that the waters there, which are provided by nature with beneficial properties, would do her much good. Although Agnes had an interior conviction that the remainder of her life was to be passed in sufferings, she humbly agreed to do the will of others. She went to Chianciano, and observed most accurately the rules prescribed by the doctors; and she was the only one who showed no impatience, or fear, or surprise, at seeing that her illness grew worse and worse, and even joyfully encouraged the nuns and her confessor, a Dominican who had accompanied her, and were grieved to see the greatness of her sufferings. Whatever state the body may be in, if the soul knows how to rely without wavering on the dispositions of the Sovereign Mover of the world, who arranges all things for our good, it is always contented and tranquil. There were only two lines of conduct open to Agnes; the first was most meritorious, and conformable to the will of God; the second was lawful and plausible, but in it some earthly views might enter, and make it a

path which led away from holiness. The first was to suffer with unwearied resignation, without asking for relief; the second was to pray that God would condescend to restore her to health for His glory. Agnes only knew the shortest and the best ways of proving her fidelity to God.

If the Most High was pleased to prepare new crowns for her by this most painful way, He was also pleased to make her at this time a theatre of miracles, which showed clearly how great His goodness ever was to His servant. Once when she was on the point of entering the bath, a pure white manna fell from heaven, which covered the waters and the adjacent ground. The clear blue sky of that summer season made it impossible to mistake the manna for snow. While those who were there were collecting this manna in astonishment, they perceived a spring of fresh and bubbling water issuing from one side of the bath where there had been none before. Though this was not a supernatural event, its appearance at that moment made those people believe that, through the merits of Agnes, God had opened a new spring, and had given it an extraordinary power of healing the diseases of those who used it with faith. The result corresponded to their expectations, and the bath retained for the future the name of her who had left such a venerated memory, and was called the waters of St. Agnes.

The careful narratives of that period, which have been transmitted to posterity, relate many facts of her stay in Chianciano much more extraordinary than that. The power of her prayers

made her universally venerated, and her touch instantaneously cured a child who had made a bad wound in her knee by trying to cut a loaf upon it. Her blessing changed some vases of water into excellent wine, for the relief of some devout persons who were at table with her. But the following circumstance deserves above all to be mentioned, for the raising of the dead to life is a portent capable of confounding all the human reasonings of those who eternally doubt what is the essential character of a true miracle.

A little child who was playing at the edge of the bath, fell by accident into the water, and as there was no one by to give him any help, he was drowned, and his dead body was afterwards found floating upon the surface of the water. Our Agnes was moved to compassion by the tears of his mother, and, guided by inspiration, took the dead child in her arms into a solitary place, and made a long prayer. She joyfully returned to the crowd who were anxiously wondering what would happen, and laid the corpse down near the mother, then taking it by the hand, she raised it from the ground alive and full of the most flourishing health, and restored it to her who wept for its too early death.

Although we must not be too hasty in pronouncing that those who have fallen into the water are dead, and means have been discovered in modern times of restoring them to the use of their senses, which were before unknown, yet if they are left for any length of time in the water, or if the means of recovery are not adopted with

great speed, the accident is quite certain to terminate fatally. Such was the case of the child of whom we are speaking, and, indeed, all the circumstances of his misfortune, and his being delivered, prove that he had really lost his life, and recovered it miraculously through Agnes's means.

These miracles were considered by all as signs and wonders of God's bounty, and the extraordinary virtue which they perceived at the same time in Agnes, made her universally looked up to. She profited by their favourable dispositions towards her to promote the glory of God, to show them the deformity and evil consequences of vice, and to inspire desire for the unseen treasures of heaven. Probably, her words and her conduct, full of zeal, were annoying to the profligacy of some few, because the words of the just are a sharp dart which poisons and disturbs the false peace of the wicked. However that might be, it pleased God to give her an occasion to exercise the virtue of patience, which St. Gregory considers not inferior to that of working miracles. Every time that Agnes went to the bath, she was followed by some young men who ridiculed and laughed at her, and this scene continued for several days. She kept silence, but her modesty was not enough to check their violence. As soon as this became known in Chianciano, where Agnes was held in profound respect, it was decided to correct the impudence of these bad youths by a severe punishment. They, however, found a loving mediatrix in Agnes herself, and she employed

all her influence to protect them from any punishment. She even considered herself much obliged to them for having given her an opportunity to suffer reproach for the love of God, and one day when she returned to her lodging, she took the best part of her own dinner, and sent it to them as a present. They were still more confused and astonished at this further display of charity and benevolence, and took every pains to correct their fault, and went humbly to Agnes to assure her of their repentance. She received them in the most obliging manner, and employed all the time they were with her, in giving them animated and useful instructions about a Christian life. Whenever she was afterwards interrogated about this circumstance, she spoke of them as if they had been her greatest benefactors, and praised their docility in coming to ask her pardon for an occurrence in which they had committed no fault, but that of saying a few words which they really believed to be true, from a mere excusable want of consideration. The true spirit of Christian meekness has no other way of thinking about injuries and wrongs.

Agnes had now passed some months at Chianciano, and the doctors vainly hoped that the waters, and a less mountainous climate, would do her some good. But, perceiving that it was hopeless to expect any improvement in her health, she returned to her monastery at Montepulciano. She had been absent with pain from this peaceful home, where she hoped to end the days of her earthly pilgrimage. Every place is for the just, a

temple, where he may find his God, a harbour, where he may repose in all security, and a ladder, which he can mount to reach his end, but a place which was the theatre of the most remarkable events of her life is always dear to a pious soul. The remainder of Agnes's days, which were days of suffering and trial for her body, were made remarkable by her unwearied fervour. As if she had done no good before, she presented herself in her assiduous prayers to God, as a victim of infinite imperfection, hoping to undergo the most painful trials in order to glorify Him, and to give Him a part of that satisfaction which it was impossible to pay entirely. She meditated continually on the passion of her Divine Redeemer, and thus she kindled new ardour, and found fresh grounds for her compunction, for her hope, and for her love. She was never weary of weeping for the sins of ungrateful men, and would have wished to make herself a fence to stop the course of them, at the cost of any imaginable torment. So deeply was she impressed by reflecting on the connection of the vices, and the prodigious ramification of their poisonous roots, that she regarded this earth as an infected spot, from which it is desirable to be released. Hence her anxiety to join herself by love to her uncreated God increased, and she stirred up her fervour and her anxiety to honour Him by the highest acts which religion and fervour could suggest. This was particularly the case when she approached, as she very frequently did, the sacraments of penance and of the holy eucharist. It was enough to cast

one glance at her face, to see upon what flames of charity that soul lived and fed, to whom living for God was a treasure, and death was gain.

The light of prophecy which Agnes received from God, especially towards the end of her life, was a manifest sign of what great privileges she enjoyed. She knew everything that interiorly passed in the consciences of her religious daughters, and corrected them for their most hidden faults, so they took care to guard themselves even from wandering thoughts, knowing that nothing was unknown to their dear mother and superioress. Agnes sweetened her reproofs with such winning and courteous manners, and such useful advice, that they were much pleased at their interior faults falling under such enlightened and judicious eyes. Agnes gave some wonderful proofs of her extraordinary foresight, in prophesying their future lot to many people, which predictions were all justified by the event. On this subject we are told, that once when some citizens who feared God begged her to pray for mercy for their common country, which was menaced with great evils by the rising discords between some of the powerful families; she convoked her nuns and began to pray with them before a picture of the Mother of God. While they made supplication to avert the dreaded scourge, they all saw, without mistake, that our Lady's face changed colour, grew pale, and frowned, and at last broke into sweat and tears, like one who suffers from terror and grief. The pious virgins were motionless with fear, but Agnes said, sighing

deeply, "Redouble your prayers to the Most High, my daughters, for this is the time to seek His mercy; the wrath of heaven will not bear to be delayed any longer; and the signs of grief and sorrow on this holy picture are warnings of the woes which hang over our dear country, and many other cities of Italy." This speech was considered with reason as a prophecy of what was to happen in the following years. Agnes must have felt double grief in prophesying this calamity, for she was most sensible to the misfortunes of her neighbours, and knowing that she was shortly to leave this earth, it must have pained her to bequeath such evil predictions to her country at the end of her life.

Worn out at length by illness, she was obliged to yield to her weakness, and remained in bed. She had never been observed to be so joyful as she was when her life was despaired of. The burning desire of a better good had long occupied all her spirit, and made her anxious to hasten the moment of her passage. Her words showed the joy of her mind, and she exulted like one whose foot is on the threshold of a kingdom he has long desired. When the gift of perseverance is granted to a just soul it knows the fate of a moment, which includes in itself all the preparations of its happy predestination. The river of death brings unutterable sweetness and comforts to the just, for on its joyful banks they await a passage which is to end in an ocean of eternal bliss. Agnes thought in that moment of nothing but consuming herself in continual acts of faith

and charity: her hope suggested all the rest. She only asked for the holy sacraments. Afterwards seeing that her spiritual daughters wept without comfort for her approaching loss. "What," said she, "do you not love me enough to rejoice when you see that I am soon to go to God, who is the only end for which all creatures were made." When she heard their answer, that they were sad because they had to remain like a forsaken flock, deprived of such a faithful guide, she answered, "Do not be afraid of losing my assistance, I shall be your mother, your companion, and your sister, whenever in your wants you call on me to be so." She then cast her eyes to heaven and said most joyfully, "I go to Him who is my only hope." These were her last words. She died in the forty-ninth year of her age, on Tuesday night, the 20th of April, 1317.

The praises of Agnes ought to follow the history of her actions, and the kind of sanctity in which she shone would give us ample materials for it. But we think that the precise account of facts ought to be the only and the most legitimate praise required of an historian. All that we could add would only raise a suspicion of our having wished to give glory to our subject by borrowed artifices. Long declamations belong to the funerals of those who only were called virtuous by the voice of flattery. The death of the saints is precious in the sight of God, and is ornamented with such a kind of glory that God generally works miracles to make it shine wonderfully even before the eyes of men. So He acted with re-

spect to Agnes. A few moments after she had exchanged her earthly for a heavenly habitation, many young children woke at midnight, and began suddenly to cry out, "Agnes is dead! the saint is dead!" At that very moment she manifested herself in the act of flying up to heaven to a poor and pious woman who had been long ill, and told her to go to the monastery and place her arm, which was ulcerated, upon her corpse, for it would cure it. The woman obeyed, and the result justified her confidence. When the news of her death was thus spread in Montepulciano, extraordinary crowds came to venerate her honoured remains. A sweet fragrance issued from them, which was perceptible to all, and only vanished after a long series of years. The Dominican Fathers of Orvieto, who were summoned for that purpose by the nuns, celebrated the ordinary funeral rites, and the body of the glorious virgin remained exposed in its religious dress, to satisfy the piety of the people. They intended to preserve it from decomposition by embalming it, and sent to Genoa and to other towns to procure the most powerful unguents, but there issued unexpectedly from the hands and feet of the virginal corpse a quantity of liquid resembling melted gum, which was found on examination to be a most precious balm. They then entirely abandoned their intention of using any human means of preserving it. When it was published that this venerated body was about to be buried, all the young girls of the town made a subscription among themselves,

without its being suggested to them by anybody, and brought many wax candles, which they carried at her funeral, to give this last token of their love for their countrywoman. The Poliziani were much struck by this pious and grateful thought, and it was enacted in their ancient statutes that every year on the 1st of May all the great people should come to offer a wax torch weighing fifteen pounds, and that all the governors of the surrounding places should bring lighted candles. This offering was commuted in the course of time to the payment of fifty *lire*, and one hundred more as an alms, it was afterwards reduced to twenty-five *lire*, and is at present thirty-three.

The body of the saint was honourably placed in a wooden case, ornamented after the fashion of a sepulchral urn, which could be opened when it was thought fit, and was placed in a convenient place for the people who came to venerate these holy relics. They were juridically proved to be the true ones at different times. In 1554 they were removed to the cathedral to preserve them from being taken by the Siennese, who were devastating the territory of the Poliziani, and it is said that they returned without human assistance to their former church. In the year 1601 the body was solemnly ornamented with new and rich vestments, and laid in a shrine of walnut, most beautifully sculptured. Finally, when the marble altar which exists at present was finished, in 1690 the body was placed upon it, shut up in a shrine, which a uniform tradition gives us

reason for believing, also contains some valuable relics, viz., a small vase of balsam which flowed from the saint's dead body; the little cross which she took from the neck of the Infant Jesus, and another small vase full of the manna which fell miraculously from above. The present sacristy was the room where she lived for many years, and whence she was called to enjoy her immortal reward, when she left this dangerous banishment. The graces God gave to the devout persons who went to implore her intercession, especially in the times which immediately followed her happy death, were innumerable. It is not necessary for us to make a catalogue of these miracles, as that has been accurately done by other writers. We will only relate that Agnes once appeared to a man who was waiting in arms on the road from Montepulciano to Montechiello for an enemy, on whom he meant to revenge himself by his death; and he fell down half dead, nor was he able to move until he had promised Agnes, who, accompanied by an angel, reproved him for his guilty and murderous design, to forgive all injuries, and to reconcile himself sincerely with his rival.

SECTION III.

The body of our saint sweats blood.—Seditions in Montepulciano.—

Fresh tumults in the city.—Arrival of the Emperor Charles IV. in Italy.—This prince visits St. Agnes.

Bernardo Guidonis.—Revelation of the glory she enjoys in heaven.

St. Catherine of Sienna goes to visit her shrine.—The homage to our saint is confirmed and spread.

THE fame of Agnes' sanctity spread still more on all sides. It seemed as if her spirit still animated her members, and was touched by the prayers of the people. We are told that when the shrine was once opened at a time of public need, to expose the sacred body to the veneration of the faithful, a thousand eyes saw it sweat blood. But as some people were slow to believe this prodigy, it was renewed on Easter Day in the presence of a most numerous audience. This was a presage of terrible calamities. In fact, from the year 1352 there had been some serious quarrels which kept the people in a great state of agitation. Jacopo and Niccolò, of the family of del Pecora, or de' Cavalieri, were at strife, because the former wished to become the tyrant of his country, and the latter aspired to the honour of defending it. Pietro Sacconi, who had made himself master of Arezzo, had suggested this ambitious design to Jacopo. Niccolò found out the plot, and their mutual jealousy broke out. The quarrel had to be decided by main force. Niccolò in the meantime assembled the

greater portion of the people, and unfolded to them all the treasonable conspiracy, exhorting them with the utmost vehemence to be on their guard, and to prevent all danger by expelling Jacopo and his supporters. Jacopo's fury was increased by this, and he returned in November of the same year under the walls of his native town which had banished him. He brought with him a large body of armed men, who were given him by Visconti, Archbishop of Milan. In the dead of night he contrived to break down one of the gates, and corrupted the sentinels with money, so that he entered without resistance, and took possession of some of the most important posts. Fortune did not favour his next attempts. When Niccolò learnt what had happened, he hastened with several companions to surround the enemies; a fierce battle ensued, in which both sides fought with fury. At last Jacopo was obliged to give up all his advantages, and to take a hasty flight. He went to Sienna, where he found a friendly shelter without much difficulty. Their kind reception of him gave rise to suspicions lest the Siennese should intrigue in favour of his tyrannical designs. Therefore, policy, which is always ready to adopt a crooked course, suggested to the Poliziani to make an alliance with the people of Perugia, so as to have a resource if attacked. This league was a great offence in the eyes of the Siennese, and their army invested Montepulciano. When they measured their strength, however, they found that it would not be easy to complete their enterprise, and they

sent to request some troops from the commonwealth of Florence. They were refused, but the Florentines exerted themselves to set on foot a treaty for peace. The Perugians also entered into these amicable dispositions, and withdrew the troops which they had sent to help the Poliziani, thus taking from the Siennese one of their grounds for hostility, and proposed a plausible arrangement. Peace was thus concluded between all the parties, on condition that Montepulciano should be free to govern itself, but that the Republic of Sienna should keep a garrison there for twenty years, who were only to have the keeping of one gate and one of the bells of the city. With respect to Niccolò and Jacopo dei Cavalieri it was stipulated in the same treaty, that the Republic of Sienna should grant 6,000 florins to the former, as a reimbursement for the expenses he had undergone during the war, and a total immunity from taxes for ten years ; and the community of Montepulciano was charged with the payment of 3,000 florins of gold to the second, and the restitution of all his hereditary property. The convention was signed on the 15th of May, 1353, and the commonwealths of Florence and of Perugia were responsible for its execution.

But the next year, for some reason or other, the peace was again disturbed. In order to exempt themselves from the payment of the 6,000 florins the Siennese banished Niccolò dei Cavalieri, declaring him an enemy of the state. The ambassadors of Florence and Perugia complained

loudly of this injustice, and Villani says that they met with ill-treatment instead of attention. In the meantime Niccolò intrigued with his friends in Montepulciano, and when the Siennese garrison in the citadel least expected it, he threw himself into the town with two hundred horse, and five hundred foot soldiers. The Siennese, however, defended themselves gallantly, and reduced Niccolò to the utmost distress, having killed the greatest part of his troops. Not knowing what to do, he adopted the worst possible course, which his despair suggested to him, and set fire to his native town, and took to flight. The fire spread to a great number of houses, and as it was difficult to extinguish it in that tumult, it burnt all that part of the city which lay below the citadel, and the author of the mischief was able to escape unobserved in the general confusion. He had an interview with his brother after this flight, and as they were both wearied out by so many misfortunes, they agreed to be perfectly reconciled to each other, for fear of ruining their family for ever. The same spirit of peaceful reflection, produced by horror of the consequences of war, had also sprung up in many of the cities of Lombardy and of Tuscany, though these cities were always fighting and never reconciled to each other. Therefore, in common with the aristocracies of Venice, Verona, Padua, Mantua, and Ferrara, who were jealous of the excessive power of the Visconti of Milan, they supplicated the Emperor Charles IV. king of Bohemia and Duke of Luxem-

bourg,* to come to Italy, that they might have a mediator with enough authority to make himself respected and to guarantee their rights. In the same year, 1354, this monarch yielded to the entreaties of so many people, whose intestine discords, jealousy, and ambition had obliged them to seek the assistance of a foreigner. He gave his attention to setting in order the most serious affairs, and saw Jacopo and Niccolò dei Cavalieri in Sienna, who managed to plead their cause so well, that the Emperor placed them at the head of the government of Montepulciano, and to honour them still more took them with him to Rome in the following year, 1355.

Before leaving Tuscany, in the month of April 1355, Charles went to Montepulciano, which he had enriched with singular privileges,† on purpose to visit the relics of our Saint Agnes. As he approached the honoured shrine, full of faith and piety, accompanied by his highest officers, the dead saint opened her eyes, and fixed them with a living sweet expression on the pious emperor. This miracle touched his heart so deeply that he was never satisfied with giving signs of his religious tenderness towards Agnes. When he left the church where she reposed, he gave the richest decorations to it, which it was subsequently thought fit to sell, to provide for some pressing want. A manuscript appendix, which

* It was related of this emperor that he ruined his house in order to gain the empire, and then ruined the empire in order to re-establish his house.

† See the book of the copy of the Archives of the Commonwealth.

is attributed to Vincenzo Marotta Giffonese, doctor of laws, himself the author of a Life of the saint, written in hexameter and pentameter verse, and is kept with the original parchment of the Blessed Raymond, assures us of the truth of this fact, and produces incontrovertible witnesses. The devotion of Charles IV. to St. Agnes during the remainder of his life was remarkable, as well as his affection for her country, and the love he bore to the Order of St. Dominic, which is proved by the two edicts which he addressed to the General Chapter of the Friars Preachers, held at Prague by his request, and at which he assisted in person. These marks of benevolence were consonant to the generous nature of that prince, who rejoiced, as he himself said, to see the calumny destroyed, which imputed the death of his grandfather the emperor Henry in 1314, to his having been poisoned with the Host consecrated by Father Bernardo da Montepulciano, called Fra Bernardo Guidonis, a religious of that order. Charles IV. had investigated the matter to ascertain the exact truth, before the passing of time could make it difficult to collect all the evidence. Fra Bernardo, who perhaps belonged to the family of the Cavalieri, was very far from having deserved such a horrible accusation; he had on the contrary, an uncommon reputation for soundness of doctrine and holiness of life. He filled many honourable posts in his order, and enjoyed the esteem of the greatest men of his age. It is true that many authors have adopted the fable of the poison, but the wise

critic should not allow the number of writers to have any weight against more sure evidence, especially when it is known that they all copied each other. Many cardinals and prelates, who were the most attached to the Emperor Henry, wrote justifications of Fra Bernardo, and the Apology entitled, *Ad Prælatos Alemanicæ super assertionem innocentie Fratris Bernardi de Monte Politiano*; or, To the Prelates of Germany in assertion of the innocence of Brother Bernard of Montepulciano.

The Providence of Heaven seemed to employ itself in manifesting to mankind how dear and acceptable the intercession of His servant Agnes was to the Most High, by the continual wonders which it worked at her tomb. The height of glory to which this illustrious virgin was raised in the kingdom of the blessed is much above our comprehension, but we can notwithstanding relate a fact which will open a field of sublime meditations to the pious reader. Saint Catherine of Sienna assures us that one day when she was rapt in spirit, she beheld our Agnes seated on a lofty throne of most beauteous light, and an empty throne near her, which was reserved for a soul of equal merit. A humble desire of knowing for whom that vacant seat was prepared, made Catherine beseech the Lord to signify it to her, and she understood at that moment, that she herself was to reign in heaven in equal glory with Agnes. This vision increased the tender devotion which Catherine had long felt for our saint. In her one hundred and seventy-seventh

letter which is addressed to the prioress of the Dominican nuns of Montepulciano, she gives such a vivid picture of the virtues of Agnes, and represents so strongly the noble disposition of her mind, her love of God, her humility, and her attachment to the most sublime rules of heroic perfection, that her letter is an exact and minute account of her, and may take the place of any praise, however great. She was not satisfied with the just praise in her writings, and went herself to Montepulciano to venerate her body. Here, when she was in prayer before it, as she bent down to kiss her foot, Agnes prevented her from stooping by raising her foot, as a sign of affection. Some writers assert that, instead of raising her foot, she withdrew it, as if she would not suffer Catherine to humble herself before her. However that might be, it is universally allowed that she moved her foot, which caused great wonder in the minds of the spectators. The feelings of wonder and affection with which Catherine went away, brought her back to Montepulciano from Sienna her native place in a short time. During this second visit she once placed herself near the head of Agnes with the intention of kissing the cheek, and as she stooped to do this, a shower of manna, like that we have previously described began to fall, and covered them both, and the dress of each was made white by this pure cloud, whose particles were all small crosses.

It is clear from what has been said that the homage paid to Agnes dated from the time of

her death. The abundant graces which those who were devout to her obtained, increased their veneration and confirmed the name of Saint which the people gave her. The title of the church of Santa Maria Novella was very nearly changed into that of St. Agnes. In 1532 Clement VII. approved her cultus, and gave permission to the church in Montepulciano to celebrate the office of their venerable countrywoman according to the ecclesiastical rite. Many other Pontiffs were also careful to promote her veneration among the faithful. St. Pius V. granted ample indulgences to those who should visit her sacred body. Gregory XIII. inserted her name in the Roman Martyrology, with the title of Saint. Besides approving the lessons for her feast, which was fixed on the 20th of April, Clement VIII., in a Brief addressed to Henry IV. king of France, which was issued at the request of Eleanor of Bourbon, aunt of the king, and prioress of the Dominican nuns of Prouille, near Fanjeaux, in the diocese of Toulouse, he granted permission to the whole Order of Preachers to celebrate an annual commemoration of her. Clement X. was particularly anxious to extend and revive a devotion towards Agnes throughout Christendom, as we gather from his Brief of the 4th of April 1672. Finally, in a decree of the 12th of May, 1726, Benedict XIII. declared her worthy of solemn canonization.

