

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.***

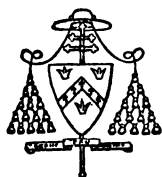


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M.DCCC.LII.**

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We hereby approve and sanction the Series of Lives of the Canonized and Beatified Saints, the Servants of God declared Venerable, and others commonly reputed to have died in the odour of sanctity, now in course of publication by the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, and we cordially recommend it to the Faithful, as calculated to promote the glory of God and of His Saints, the increase of devotion, and the spread of our holy Religion.

Given at Westminster, the Feast of the Nativity of our B. Lady, A.D. 1851.

N. Card. Wiseman

TO
THE NUNS OF ENGLAND,
WHO SHIELD THEIR COUNTRY BY THEIR PRAYERS,
AND BY THEIR MEEK AUSTERITIES
MAKE REPARATION FOR ITS SINS;
AND TO
THE SISTERS OF MERCY,
WHOSE CHARITY IS THEIR INCLOSURE,
WHILE FOR THE LOVE OF THEIR HEAVENLY SPOUSE
IN HIS POOR AND SUFFERING MEMBERS
THEY DENY THEMSELVES
THE PEACE AND PROTECTION OF THE CLOISTER.

Daughters of Mary! in retreats obscure,
Lost to man's thought and eye, amid the trees
And unfrequented fields, on bended knees
Sneing for England's pardon, lives so pure
Mingle in heaven and God's approval share
With that uncloistered love, whose willing feet
Are borne through jeering crowd and gazing street
To scenes of lonely want and pining care.
For you the holy past is now unfurled,
That with its bright examples you may feed
The spirit of devotion. While the world
Honours your goodness with its hatred, you,
Still to your high and calm vocation true,
May win fresh light and strength from what you read.

F. W. FABER.

ST. WILFRID'S,
FEAST OF OUR LADY OF REDEMPTION,
M.DCCC.XLVII.

PREFACE.

The present volume contains the Lives of four Saints of the Order of S. Dominick. The Life of S. Catherine of Ricci, the friend and contemporary of S. Philip Neri, is from the Italian Life, anonymous, but announced as *cavata de' Sommarj de' Processi*, published in Rome, 1746, with the usual permissions. The Life of S. Agnes of Montepulciano is from the Italian "*Istoria composta da un Academico Intrigato*," published at Sienna 1779. The Life of Benvenuta is translated from the original of "*Frater Joannes Franciscus Bernardus Maria de Rubeis, Ordinis Prædicatorum*," printed at Venice in 1757. It was principally composed from a manuscript in the convent at Friuli, which bore signs of having been written by "*Frater Conradus de Castellerio*," confessor to the Blessed Benvenuta. It has the imprimatur of "*Frater Joannes Thomas de Boxadors*," general of the order of preach-

ers, and that of the "Reformatori dello Studio di Padova."

The Life of B. Catherine of Raconigi is from the collection of Dominican Lives by Father Serafino Razzi, well known from his numerous biographies of the Saints.

Some readers may be startled at the story which is told in the Life of the B. Catherine of Raconigi, that S. Peter Martyr heard her confession and gave her absolution. There may of course be a difference of opinion as to whether this absolution was sacramental or not. Without determining this question, we subjoin the opinions of theologians. Suarez (De Sacr. Disp. 13. Sect. 1.) and Billuart (De Sacr. Diss. 5. Art. 2.) after S. Thomas, (Summa. 3. Qu. 66. 7. 2.) hold that blessed souls in heaven, supposing that they were reunited to their bodies, could minister the sacraments, and that, without any extraordinary dispensation on the part of God, on the ground that the state of a viator is not necessary for their administration. They add, however, that a blessed soul in the state of

separation from the body would require a special commission, even if it were that of a priest; because the sacraments require the presence of the senses. The conclusion of the whole we give in De Lugo's words: "We allow with S. Thomas and others, that supposing an angel or a blessed soul, whether in or out of a glorious body, were to administer a sacrament, it should be considered as valid; because in such a case it would in every way be right to believe that it happened by a peculiar dispensation of God, the sovereign Lord of grace and of the sacraments," (De Sacr. Disp. 8. Sect. 1.)

Something remains to be said in answer to the queries and suggestions of our kind correspondents. Some of our subscribers wish to see explanatory notes attached to each volume. It is undoubtedly true that this would be a very useful work, and that much interesting illustration might be brought to bear upon the difficulties of the Lives of the Saints. But it should be remembered, not only that to do such a work well would have to

be a man's sole occupation, but also that it is quite contrary to the very *idea* of our undertaking, as put forward in the original Prospectus, and upon which we obtained the sanction of superiors. We are not putting forward, rather studiously avoiding to put forward, our own work, or becoming the champions of any peculiar views. Our task was to be a humble one, though we trusted great fruits were to come of it. We were to be merely the editors of translations, to give to the Catholic public fair specimens, and in time a moderately good collection, of a certain literature which forms the spiritual reading of Catholic countries, and on which the spiritual life of Italy, Spain, and France is moulded. The works from which we translate have received the approval of superiors in the countries where they were published, and consequently, if the translations be faithful, they come to the reader at least with a respectable amount of authority, such as the comments of the editors would not have. The original question was, whether the publication of such translations was dis-

creet or seasonable in England; upon that head there was formerly a difference of opinion, which we are led to believe is now much less than it was, if, indeed, it exists at all. But for us,—superiors settled it, and the series was begun. To publish these Lives now with commentaries and explanations would be to start a new work on a different principle from the present series, not to continue it; and if we believed at starting that the idea we put forward was the safest and would work best, much more are we satisfied of it now that the series has had the experience of nearly six years upon its head; so far as ourselves are concerned, it is the only principle on which other duties and avocations would permit us to continue the work at all. The fact is, some of our friends will persist in looking out for a literary or theological work, which would be more to their taste, in spite of all our asseverations that we are aiming at no more than to supply “edifying reading for families, schools, and religious refectories.” When we have done more than this, it has only been in defence of

the series as it is. Yet our friends should not be disappointed at our not giving what we never promised. We have nothing to do with promoting literature or intellectual culture by means of Saints' Lives; but to furnish spiritual reading to those whose spiritual directors have made it part of their daily devout life. Perhaps it may answer that end none the worse because the intellectual interest is so little. All we have to regret is that even, as translations, the Lives are often below the standard which we had once aspired to reach. This literary defect has not, we trust, gone to the length of injuring the success of the volumes as spiritual reading.

Others of our friends wish that we would publish fewer of the "Mystical" Saints, and confine ourselves more to the saints of active beneficence and philanthropy. We fear we must first of all join issue on the facts. Up to the present volume, 30 volumes of Lives have been published, of which the following, it is presumed, can in no sense be called "Mystical:"

	VOLS.
1. Of S. Philip, and the Fathers of the Oratory	6
2. Of S. Alphonso and his Companions	6
3. Of S. Ignatius and Jesuit Fathers ...	5
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5. S. Jane Frances de Chantal	1½
6. V. Margaret Mary.....	2
	<hr/> 26½

This leaves S. Rose, S. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, V. Benedict Joseph, and about half the second volume of S. Jane Frances, that is at most $3\frac{1}{2}$ volumes to $26\frac{1}{2}$; and if the series is to be a fair representation of the body of Christian literature it professes to represent, no one will say this is an unfair proportion of "extraordinary" to "practical" saints. "But bring out those which will please Protestants most." This is not the object; the series is meant for a spiritual, not a controversial, end; though, as we expected, and indeed foretold in the Prospectus, the instances have not been few in which God has been pleased

to bless it to the latter use. If we were first to bring out all the most practical saints together, and then all the most extraordinary ones together, it is hardly necessary to say that we should never get the latter volumes in circulation, and so make no fair representation of modern hagiology; besides causing a great deal more prejudice and offence than by the present arrangement. The series, like all other "serials," and specially such as take in a wide range, must necessarily look unequal and irregular at first, and will gain symmetry as it gains bulk. Every one has his favourite volumes in a series, and people seldom agree in their favourites. A series seems to be tolerably well answering its end, when opposite charges are brought against it, and the charges on both sides equally kind and equally witnessing to the sympathy and interest taken in the work.

The Oratory. London,
Feast of St. Wilfrid.
1852.

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THE LIFE
OF
ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,
OF THE THIRD ORDER OF PREACHERS.



ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI.

THE LIFE
OF
ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI,
OF THE THIRD ORDER OF PREACHERS.

CHAPTER I.

ST. CATHERINE'S BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

SISTER CATHERINE DE' RICCI was born on the 23rd of April, 1522, in the city of Florence, which has ever proved a fruitful mother, not only of men illustrious in the world, but also of saints in heaven. It appears from the public registers kept in the city, that she was baptized by the name of Lessandra, or Alessandra, on the 25th of the same month, whence arose the mistaken opinion that she was born on the 25th of April. Her parents were Pier Francesco de' Ricci and Caterina di Ridolfo da Panzano, of the house of Ricasoli, both belonging to noble and ancient Florentine families. At the proper age, she received the sacrament of confirmation. She was scarcely

born before her mother passed from this to a better life, so she was educated by Fiammetta Diacetta, her father's second wife, a noble lady of great wisdom and virtue, who very soon perceived how much this infant was inclined to devotion and to spiritual things. She continually showed signs of her future sanctity, not only by her assiduity at prayer, but also by her rigorous abstinence from food. It was a subject of astonishment to the whole household, how she could live upon so little. From her tenderest years she shunned every childish amusement, and all the ornaments and vanities of the world, in order to dedicate herself only to works of charity, to prayer, and to contemplating the most holy Passion of Jesus.

As soon as she was able to articulate anything, she began to pray with so much and such intense devotion, that even her external actions showed that her heart corresponded to what her lips uttered, and continually went deeper and deeper in the contemplation of the sense of her words. It was a wonderful thing to see a child only four or five years old, remain silently and modestly retired in the most solitary part of the house, in order to be free from all distractions. Here she devoted her whole soul to consider the Passion of Jesus, and her tongue to recite the Lord's Prayer and the Angelical salutation. In order to produce in her mind a more real idea of those lofty mysteries, and to awaken a more lively desire of imitating, and participating in the bitter sorrows of those dolorous mysteries, she made the position of her arms correspond with the direction of her

thoughts. When she meditated on our Lord's Prayer in the Garden, she raised them towards heaven, and turned them behind her back when she considered Him tied to the pillar ; she pressed them to her head, looking at Him crowned with thorns, and finally extended them, standing in spirit before the Cross. Heaven was not slow to give her a share in its consolations. She enjoyed the visible presence of her Angel Guardian, not merely once, but very many times, and he always comforted her spirit. On this occasion he taught her how to pray, and explained and pointed out the mysteries which she ought to meditate upon. Most of them were of the most holy Passion, to which she retained a special devotion during the whole remainder of her life. He also instructed her in the method of reciting the Rosary, which she henceforward practised every day.

These fervent prayers kindled a desire, which ever increased in strength, not of earthly nuptials, according to her father's wish, but according to the inspirations of the Redeemer of the world, of celestial ones. Without manifesting this to any one, she repeatedly entreated not only her father, but her step-mother as well, to place her in some monastery. At last they satisfied her wishes by sending her to the Benedictine monastery of St. Peter, which is called Monticelli, in Florence, near the gate of San Fridiano, where her aunt Donna Ludovica de' Ricci was superioress. Here, as she grew in years, she grew more and more fervent in prayer and meditation, spending in these many hours of the day. The hours fixed in the mon-

astery for those exercises, seemed few and short to her love of God ; therefore she deprived herself of the recreation which children are usually allowed, and retired into the choir to pray. In order to be more at liberty, and more hidden from the eyes of others, she used to conceal herself under the curtain of a grating, which faced a painted crucifix in the church. In this position she was able to feed her tender gaze on the figure of her divine Spouse, while the meditation of His most holy Passion caused her to be entirely dissolved in tears. A holy curiosity induced some of the nuns to watch her, who were moved to devotion by seeing a young child so enamoured of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, accompanying Him with her gestures, as we have described, and always entreating to be made worthy to serve Him in a monastery where the rules were strictly observed, in which she might save her soul. She never would have given over these prayers of her own accord, so that her aunt had very frequently to call her when it was time she should take her meals or go to sleep. Seeing her eyes red and tearful, she enquired the reason of it, and the child answered in holy simplicity, that when she moved the curtains the splinters and dust fell into her eyes. A cautious wisdom taught her to assign this cause for fear of betraying the tears which sprung from the love that was in her heart towards her suffering Spouse.

It was not long before our gracious Redeemer testified His satisfaction by appearing to her, and giving her many internal and external consola-

tions. It is a common belief even at this period, that she frequently heard His voice in that figure which she gazed upon so tenderly. It is exposed above the chapel of St. Antony, and held in great veneration, and is called the crucifix of Sandrina, which was the name she then bore.

However, this Divine Spouse, who wished to enrich her with the same gifts and graces with which He adorned St. Catherine of Sienna, did not inspire her to remain in that monastery, but to go and examine others, until she found one in which she might fully satisfy her desire of suffering a strict poverty in company with Jesus. Our holy child well understood these inspirations, and in her conversations with her aunt and the other nuns, showed her disposition to follow them. It grieved them much to see that she was so little inclined to remain with them, and that they were likely to lose such a great treasure. They, nevertheless, resigned themselves quietly and humbly to the Divine will, still flattering themselves that, perhaps, some day they should have the consolation of seeing this wish change. She, on the other hand, feeling her desire of trying some other monasteries daily increase, perceived that it was not God's will that she should pass her life here, and resolved to speak openly on the subject to her aunt, beseeching her to persuade her father to accede to her wishes. This request pierced her affectionate aunt's heart, but knowing that her spirit was specially guided by God, she not only did not oppose it, but spoke about it to her brother. He willingly agreed to take her away from that monastery, and

to bring her home, since his intention was to settle her in honourable earthly matrimony. He was resolved not to grant the other half of her request, which was to place her in another monastery ; but we shall see in the next chapter how vain it is for the creature to oppose itself to the Divine decrees.

CHAPTER II.

THE SAINT RETURNS TO HER FATHER'S HOUSE, AND ENTERS THE MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT AT PRATO.

SANDRINA, on her return home in the 9th year of her age, asked her step-mother to let her have some place in the house, separated from her brothers and sisters, where she might retire at certain times, to make a devout prayer in solitude. Permission being given, and a room allotted her, she adorned it with several holy pictures, and very often resorted to it to pray, spending in that employment whole days and nights.

Our saint had four brothers and a sister ; they were all younger than herself, but they loved her so much for her goodness and gentleness, that they would have liked to be always by her side. Perceiving, however, that the love of relations was a hindrance to the liberty of the spirit, she was accustomed after dinner and supper, in an ingenious and winning manner, to take leave of her parents, and having obtained their blessing, she withdrew herself

from childish amusements, and went away into her oratory. Here she immediately began to pray to God that He would open her a way to the seclusion of some monastery, that she might give free vent to her love towards Him. She so burned with this Divine Love that human conversation was almost insupportable to her, being accustomed to the company of angels, which she often enjoyed even in her father's house. She often entreated her step-mother with great earnestness, to take her to see other monasteries, where the rule was truly and holily observed. This wise lady readily agreed, and shewed her several, but although many pleased her, she did not find one in which there was that strictness in observing the rule which she desired.

While she was agitated by this holy anxiety, her father, Pier Francesco, removed to one of his country-houses not far from Prato, with his whole family. In that city of Prato, then one of the most celebrated places in Europe, there was a monastery dedicated to St. Vincent Ferrer, which was built in 1504. It belonged to the Third Order of Preachers, commonly called Sisters of Penance, and the lay-sisters used to go out to seek alms, for the monastery was very poor.

As soon as the nuns knew of the arrival of Sandrina's father, who was a very charitable man, they sent two lay-sisters to his villa, which was called the estate of St. Paul, to ask for some assistance. When Sister Catherine, who this time accompanied the family saw these nuns at a distance, she ran out to meet them, and wel-

comed them with great joy. Afterwards, having stopped to speak to them, and having observed their remarkable modesty and piety, she persuaded her father to detain them there for a few days. Nothing had ever been seen to delight the child more than conversing with these sisters. She talked with them at length about the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, their rules and constitutions, and the mortifications which they practised; and having learnt from them that she could find in that monastery all that her burning love towards her Divine and chosen Spouse required, she found herself moved by an unspeakable satisfaction, such as she never felt before or after, and a desire to consecrate herself to God among them. She therefore resolved, and gave a promise to the sisters, that she would retire from the world with them. They willingly received this promise, as they were struck with admiration by the goodness which her words displayed, but they dared not mention it to any one in the house, seeing how tenderly they all loved her. The fear which prevented the sisters from speaking to her father, did not restrain Sandrina, who had set her heart on that monastery; he repulsed her demand with a decided manner, and was so much annoyed at it, that he forbade her to speak to him again on the subject; and having given some alms to the sisters, he dismissed them from his house. On their return to the monastery, they described their intercourse with our blessed child to their superioresses and the other nuns.

Father Timoteo de'Ricci, her father's brother, who died Prior of Saint Dominic's at Perugia in 1552, with a great reputation for sanctity, was then confessor to the monastery, and the nuns related to him what the lay-sisters had said, begging him to intercede with his brother, that he might send the child there, at least for a few days. The good father undertook this task, and went to the villa, but in vain, for when he explained the wishes of the nuns to his brother, he gave him a positive refusal; and told him that his daughter had too much inclination for a religious life, whereas he was determined by her marriage to make a good connexion, and had every reason to fear, as the sequel showed, that if he allowed her to go there for a few days, it would not be so easy to bring her back again, and to change the resolution she had begun to form, which refusal greatly afflicted Catherine.

Nevertheless, neither she nor the nuns despaired of the accomplishment of their wishes, and they began to make earnest prayers that God would condescend to soften her father's heart. In effect Mother Margaret de'Bardi the prioress, when she went to Florence on business, for the rule of enclosure was not then made, renewed the entreaty to Catherine's father, who, in consideration of the great esteem she was held in at Florence, and her courteous manner of asking, could not, although it pained him deeply, refuse her request, as he had that of others, and he permitted his daughter to go with her under the express condition that she returned after ten days. When

Catherine heard this, she understood that she was not forsaken by the right hand of God, which had opened a shorter way to the accomplishment of her desires; and after offering her humble thanksgiving, she bade farewell to her parents, brothers, and sisters, and on the appointed day set out with the prioress from her father's house, full of joy and satisfaction.

CHAPTER III.

THE SAINT'S CONSTANCY IN REMAINING IN THE MONASTERY.

THE following fact, which happened on Catherine's first entrance into these long-wished-for cloisters, ought not to be omitted. As soon as she was in the monastery, she went to the church to adore and thank Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. On her way she met Sister Costanza de'Borri, who, on seeing her, exclaimed, "Here is our little directress, here is our guide," words which were probably inspired, for they were verified in process of time, when Catherine was made prioress, and governed the monastery for many years. She found almost all the sisters assembled in the church to receive her, and to return due thanks to God; and after conversing with her for a little while, they accompanied her to the cell destined for her, and each retired to her own. In spite of the great poverty of the house,

and the number of the nuns which, according to Father Tommaso Neri, amounted to one hundred and thirty, Catherine was able to practise among them, in all their fulness, charity, obedience to the constitutions, fervour, mortification, and religious simplicity, with all that is necessary to a perfect community life.

By practising these things she became more and more convinced that she ought to execute her resolution of consecrating her virginity to God in a convent, and she solemnly promised in His presence that, if she could possibly help it, she would never more return to her father's house; which resolution she strictly adhered to when her constancy was put to the test. When the ten days which her father had named were expired, one of her brothers arrived to reconduct her home, but she answered boldly, that he should tell her father that she refused to return, because the Lord had brought her there, and she had promised Him to remain there for her whole life; and she charged him to make her excuses for not obeying him in this matter, because in the choice of a state of life she could obey God alone. When her brother heard this firm and decided answer he returned to Florence, and reported the whole to his father. On hearing it he became furious, and without loss of time, set out for Prato, being resolved, if necessary, to employ force to bring her home; but all was in vain, for when his daughter appeared before him, she listened submissively to his menaces and his cruel reproaches, but did not yield in the least, repeating that it was God's will that she should be

there, and that she had resolved and promised Him that she would execute it; therefore he ought to excuse her, since she could not and ought not to give her obedience to him, when God, to whom she first owed obedience, had shown her that she ought to remain.

When he heard her reiterate this firm reply, he changed his angry language and spoke with a father's kindness, beseeching her not to afflict him so grievously, by refusing to return with him to Florence. She, however, relying on the apostolic precept, that "we ought to obey God rather than men,"* remained firm as a rock in the midst of such a fierce tempest, and continued to make excuses to her father for not obeying him in this, because that monastery was the home where God had decreed that she should serve him, and where she would remain to receive the habit of the Third Order of St. Dominic, if, by the mercy of God, the sisters would grant it to her; and she told him that all his efforts were useless, because of the promise which she had made to God.

Her father replied that God Himself insisted in the Gospel on children obeying their parents, and threatened the disobedient with heavy punishments; but she, who had been well instructed by her guardian angel that eternal happiness is promised to him who leaves his father's house for love of God, answered that he was only losing his time and trouble, for, she said, "I am resolved to give up my life sooner than leave this monastery." This answer pierced her father to the heart, but

* Acts v. 29.

being convinced of her constancy, he had recourse to a stratagem, and begged that since she was resolved to become a nun she would return for at least eight or ten days, to take leave of her step-mother and her family, and promised after that, to bring her back to the monastery. This subterfuge did not shake in the smallest degree the child's determination never to return to her home, but when the nuns and her uncle and confessor begged her to satisfy her father, and pledged themselves that he would be faithful to his promise, she consented, but to be more certain of her return, she made the condition that her father should swear, in the presence of all, to bring her back after ten days. For the sake of enjoying her presence for those few days, he agreed to do this, and when he had made the oath, sister Catherine, having received the Superioress's and the Confessor's blessing, bade farewell with tears to the sisters, and arrived at Florence after a prosperous journey, to the great satisfaction of all her relations.

CHAPTER IV.

HER RETURN TO THE MONASTERY—HER CLOTHING AND PROFESSION.

EACH hour that she passed in her father's house seemed a thousand years to sister Catherine, and she made incessant and tearful supplications to the Most High, that He would bend her father's

heart to taking her back to the monastery, where she might put on the habit of Penance or of the Third Order of St. Dominic ; but in proportion to the increasing vehemence of her desires, her father's apparent forgetfulness of his promise increased, and he put her off with fair words whenever she reminded him of it.

This grieved her so much, that it caused her to fall ill, like St. Catherine of Sienna, when her entrance into the same order was deferred. Her recovery from this illness was not less extraordinary than that of St. Catherine of Sienna. While she suffered as much from the separation from her sisters, and the fear that her weakness would postpone her return to the monastery, as from the fever itself, she spent her whole time in beseeching the Almighty with tears that she might rise from her bed and go to the monastery. Jesus presently consoled His afflicted Spouse by appearing to her with His most holy Mother and her kind patrons St. Cecilia and St. Thecla, holding a precious ring in His hand, and enquired why she grieved so deeply, whereas He who had commenced the work was ready to finish it ; to which she answered with deep humility, " Thou, O my Redeemer, who readest the secrets of hearts, knowest well that my tears are only caused by seeing the time of my being consecrated to Thee, deferred." Then our Lord answered, " Therefore am I come to heal thee," which promise He fulfilled by giving her His blessing, adding that she must prepare herself to endure many troubles in the religious life, and to suffer many disturbances and infirmi-

ties, many assaults of diabolical stratagems, and many rigorous examinations of her conduct, which her superiors would make, fearing that her ecstasies might be diabolical allusions, but that He would always give her His assistance, with which everything should turn to her good; lastly, having shown her the ring He held in His hand, He promised to give it her, when in His own good time He should declare that she was His spouse. Then, the most Holy Virgin, with the two other saints, comforted her, and the vision ceased, leaving her full of unspeakable joy. When Sister Catherine saw that she was cured, she rose from her bed, and after returning humble thanks to the Giver of all good, went to see her relations that were in the house, particularly her father, whom she again entreated to allow her to go to the monastery or St. Vincent. When he saw that she had thus unexpectedly recovered her health, he understood that it was the will of God that she should be there, and this, joined to the remorse which he felt for breaking his oath, and the powerful arguments of Federigo de' Ricci, another of his brothers, made him determine to fulfil his promises and satisfy his daughter's mind; so without any delay, he took her back to the monastery, leaving her with full power to execute all her promises to her Divine Spouse.

The great joy felt by her and all the nuns on her return, was a presage of her future sanctity. All her father's opposition having quietly ceased, she laid aside every other thought but that of endeavouring by devout prayers and rigorous mortifica-

tions to prepare herself to receive the holy habit, with an ardent desire of imitating the holy patriarch, St. Dominic, whose Third order she wished to enter; and St. Catherine of Sienna, whose holiness was one of the great ornaments of that branch of the order.

When she entered her fourteenth year, she entreated the nuns to receive her among them, which they, with reciprocal love consented to do, and on the 18th of May, 1535, which was kept that year as Whit-Monday, she had the happiness of receiving the holy habit at the hands of Father Timoteo de' Ricci, her uncle and confessor, who, having observed how exactly she followed in the footsteps of S. Catherine of Sienna, changed her name of Sandrina into that of Catherine. While a girl named Maria Raffaella Buonamici was receiving the habit after her, she retired to one side with a lighted taper in her hand, and as she waited on her knees during the clothing of her companion, she fell into an ecstasy in which she received many spiritual consolations, and many graces, from Jesus and Mary, who told her that since she had repudiated the company of mortals, she should have that of the immortal inhabitants of heaven. She was also shown in that ecstasy the fervour and devotion of several of the nuns of that house, and the fire of Divine love which burned in their hearts; and the Lord pointed out sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, as her guardian, and commanded that soon as the superiors assigned her as such, she was to obey her even in the smallest things.

The sight of so many celestial favours inflamed her spirit more and more with the love of God, in which she made such progress, that she could think of nothing but of Him, and the unusual graces which He of His mere bounty heaped upon her. On fire with this love, she frequently lost the use of her senses, absorbed in ecstatic contemplations, which at that time were not recognised as true ecstasies, but were considered to be fainting fits occasioned by some illness, especially as her humility assisted in hiding them from every one, calling them fits of drowsiness.

It is not easy to express the joy which filled Catherine's heart as soon as she returned to her senses, on seeing herself clothed in that much-desired habit which she had obtained by so many conflicts, and she henceforward increased her devotions, prayers, penances, and fastings, and macerated her flesh still more with disciplines, which did not however prevent her from being ready to fulfil all her regular duties and those imposed by obedience. She was affable and benignant towards every one, amiable in conversation and manners, and humble in exercising the lowest offices of the house, thinking and frequently calling herself the vilest and most useless of all, while she sought with all her might to learn quickly all the ceremonies and regulations of the holy religion which she professed, so that for her virtues she was not less admired than beloved by all.

Her Divine Spouse continued to console her by frequent ecstasies and visions of spiritual things; but she hid these graces from every one with

much caution, having determined not to manifest them to a single living person. She did not know at this tender age the great danger there is of being deluded by similar visions and ecstasies which proceed from the infernal enemy, unless the person who receives them is directed by another, who with real wisdom can discern the true from the false and the good from the evil, which she afterwards confessed when obliged by obedience to manifest them.

Every one believed, according to her own assertion, that they were fainting-fits, and hence arose a fierce storm in her mind. The nuns, thinking that as they now happened so often in process of time, they would make her altogether unequal to the duties of the monastery, repented of having received her, and conferred upon the subject with the confessor, who also repented of having assisted in bringing her here, and protested that since his niece had succeeded so ill, he would never again take part in the admission of girls. This discourse was heard unseen by Catherine, who without ever showing that she knew anything of it, retired secretly full of grief at the danger there was of their refusing to let her make her profession, but praying for God's assistance in a matter so important to her, she resigned herself entirely to His will, and placed her sole confidence in His aid.

When the time of her profession drew near, remembering the discussion, and considering herself utterly vile and useless, she earnestly begged all the nuns, with tears in her eyes, that they

would not exclude her from their company, for she trusted that the Divine Mercy would give her strength and enable her to make more progress in the service of the house than she had in the year of her probation.

Her great humility and the other virtues which they remarked in her, pleased the nuns so much, that they allowed her to make her solemn profession without objecting to her faintings, after which she thanked each of the nuns separately for their great charity in admitting her. Although she much wished to postpone it to the Assumption, she willingly obeyed when desired to make it on the 24th of June, 1536, the feast of St. John Baptist, in the hands of Father Angiolo da Diaceto, prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Perugia, who was afterwards bishop of Fiesole.

Many years had not passed, however, before her uncle and confessor, seeing the great degree of sanctity to which she had attained, blamed himself very often, to use his own expression, for the aforesaid conversation with the nuns, and begged pardon of our Lord for those words, which had troubled His spouse and afflicted that heart so dear to Him

CHAPTER V.

ON THE SAINT'S GREAT FAITH AND HOPE.

As soon as Catherine beheld herself consecrated by vows to her Divine Spouse, she began to go in search of the perfection required by the religious state, and was an example before the eyes of all of those virtues which are more admirable than imitable. Their number is so great, that laying aside the narrative of her life, we will collect them into different chapters, beginning with faith, the basis and foundation of all holiness, without which, as the apostle says, "It is impossible to please God."* After Catherine received it in holy baptism, she loved and prized it to such a degree, that in order to show the world how much she longed to suffer for God, she would willingly have shed every drop of her blood, and given up her life; and although her state of life did not permit her to go and spread the gospel among the infidels, she encouraged this burning desire by meditating on the Passion of Jesus, which she did with such earnestness, that she burst into burning tears of compassion, and endeavoured to suffer as much as possible from the positions in which she placed her limbs, as described above. Nor was she satisfied with this, she despised all the riches,

* Heb. xi., v. 6.

luxuries, and ease, which the world offered her in an earthly marriage, and cast aside her parents in order to acquire by perpetual poverty the treasures of heaven ; and as if all this seemed a small thing to her ardent spirit, she carried her prayers, mortifications, and corporal penances so far, that she at last became worthy to experience in herself the passion which our Redeemer suffered, as will be related hereafter, nor would she, in the whole course of her life, which lasted sixty-eight years, accept any other consolations than those which Heaven imparts to its favourite souls.

This lively faith enabled her to overcome all the snares that the world, the devil, and the flesh could contrive against her soul, and to live with such purity of manners that she never committed one grave sin that might obscure the glory of her heroic sanctity, which Heaven attested by pouring on her head a multitude of gifts and graces which are bestowed only on the most innocent souls.

The virtue of hope shone in her with no less brightness than that of faith, and by means of it she strove during her whole life to obtain celestial riches, and to overcome with free resignation to the will of her Divine Spouse, all the tribulations and persecutions which came in crowds from the beginning of it, to deter her from the true following of Christ. She ever trusted to His grace, which had power to preserve her from shipwreck, as we have seen hitherto, and persevered in this holy confidence during the remainder of her life, particularly when they sought to distract her, and divert her from the ecstasies which were the chan-

nels by which God communicated to her His most signal favours.

This firm hope in the Divine Mercy animated the prayers which she continually made to God, whether in her own necessities or those of the monastery which she governed for many years, or in her illnesses, by which she always obtained the wished-for consolation for herself and for her neighbour; indeed, many through her intercession were cured both in soul and body, and fortified by this, she prepared with a joyful heart to die, trusting through the mercy of God, whom she thus loved, to go to enjoy Him for all eternity.

Not content with exercising herself in acts of these two theological virtues, she made the greatest efforts that others should exercise them as well, exhorting all to fix their hopes on the Divine Mercy, and never to grow weary of asking from it whatever they desired, in the assurance that if it was withheld from them, it was more for their good, and if, after some delay, the favour was granted, the very delay would be beneficial to their own souls, as we shall see more distinctly by and by.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SAINT'S GREAT LOVE OF GOD.

If the other two theological virtues shone so brightly in Catherine, the lustre of her love of

God was not less, which, according to the apostle, is the instrument of faith, "It is faith that worketh by charity,"* for it is the origin and foundation of all our merits.

This love began in Catherine's heart when she first received from her guardian angel the knowledge of God, for she no sooner heard what He had done for her, and for all men, than like a thirsting hart, which traverses every meadow in search of a fountain where it may moderate its heat, she, although a child, fled from every lawful conversation that she might, alone in her oratory, give free scope to her love of God; and she sought the sacred cloisters only because she knew that in them it is easier to give expression to this love; and when her feet were stayed there she never ceased from praying with her mind or her lips, when she worked, moved, or employed herself in different ways, thus preserving and increasing this exceeding charity, without which she could not perform a single action. And, indeed, her actions were done in such a strange and extraordinary manner, that all easily perceived that her mind was quite rapt in God; for if she heard the divine mysteries mentioned, or spiritual books read, she immediately remained ecstatic, and quite unconscious of sense; and her soul was so drawn by love of her divine Spouse, that everything which she saw brought before her all the favours she received from God; and she meditated all the time that she recited the divine office in church with the other nuns, or assisted at mass; and it

* Ep. Gal. v 6.

seemed to her that multitudes of saints and angels were present, accompanying their supreme Lord. She was so inflamed by this holy love, that neither corporal movements nor the business of superior-ess of the monastery, could divert her thoughts for one moment from her Creator and Redeemer, and it so possessed her soul that it seemed impossible to her to live without God, and without making acts of fervent love of Him. She very often alleviated her love before her divine Spouse in the Blessed Sacrament, by shedding a flood of tears, and considering the excessive love of God, who found a means of remaining with us, concealed under that white species, for which she never could return sufficient thanks ; she always hungered after that Eucharistic food, and almost every day was fed by it, with such extreme joy of her spirit, that she was then always rapt in ecstatic alienation from the senses, and confessed to her Spouse that her heart was so inflamed with His love that it was become nothing but love, and that she felt herself consumed and fainting from the heat of the fire which burnt within her ; in fact, the nuns heard her exclaim, " O infinite love ! O my Spouse, I have not deserved to love Thee so much, but from Thee, my Jesus, I have received such immense love. Yes, Thou, my God and my Redeemer, hast espoused this soul, inclined to all evil, full of all deformity, buried in every sin. My God, I am confounded at having received so many gifts from you."

In meditating the most holy Passion of Jesus, she frequently broke out in words of compassion

and tenderness, such as these :—" How is it possible that I can behold such a cruel spectacle? how can my soul, O my Spouse, O my Love, endure to see Thee so cruelly tormented? Thou bearest it for love of me, I desire to be also tormented, and that Thou shouldest stand by to see how willingly I should suffer for Thee." Then she turned full of pity now to that sacred Head, now to that sacred Face, and now to the precious Blood, which she saw streaming from His veins, and was very often heard in her ecstasies to reproach the cruelty of the executioners who crucified Him, so that the compassion she felt for the sufferings of her and our Saviour was visible and intelligible to all, especially in the following circumstance :—

" Our Lord, intending to renew in Catherine the imitation of the mysteries of His most holy Passion, by making her experience it in part every week for twelve consecutive years, began to prepare her heart by a vivid representation of His torments, in the exact likeness of His death upon Calvary, which she saw on the 1st of April, 1541, when she was nineteen years old. After dinner, she went into the garden of the monastery to gain the indulgence granted by Paul III., the reigning Pontiff, to whoever should visit a holy crucifix in a little chapel in the garden once a week. As she approached it, she saw, to her great astonishment, three crosses in it, and our Lord Jesus Christ hanging on the middle one, covered with wounds and blood, and so bruised and suffering that she fainted away, and did not dare to look on Him ;

however, she raised her courage, and drew near to that sacred tree, and fixing her eyes on Him, she saw that it was indeed her Beloved who hung there ill-treated and disfigured ; she saw His head pierced with sharp thorns, leaning forward so much on His breast that it seemed that the joints of the neck being broken, it rested on it alone. His sacred face was overshadowed by the paleness of death, foul with spittle, and covered with blood ; His hair hung down on each side, full of blood, of which a quantity dropped upon the ground. His beard was dyed with blood, which fell from it, or congealed upon it. His breast was so much raised that all His ribs appeared dislocated, sweating blood all over, and in it there was a large open wound, made by a lance, which, as well as the hands and feet, pierced by the nails, poured forth so much blood that it formed a lake in the ground around which there stood some women weeping and mourning exceedingly, but the darkness, representing that which followed the death of Jesus, prevented her from recognising them. When Catherine saw this cruel spectacle she felt her heart burst with sorrow, and would have gone away, but the agony of her feelings had taken away all her bodily strength. After some time, her Spouse, to whom she recommended herself with the greatest fervour, renewed her vigour, and she returned trembling and sorrowful, to her cell, but her mind had received such a lively impression of the vision, that in unceasing grief and terror she remained in bed for ten days, unable to move."

This vision was so clear to her, that she thought, in her simplicity, that all the nuns had also seen it, so she spoke about it to some of them, and wondered how they could approach such a spectacle without falling ill ; but when they answered they had not seen it, she perceived that it was a vision, granted by her Spouse, to her alone, and, therefore, she was filled with confusion at having disclosed it, more especially when, on returning to the same, she no longer beheld that piteous sight.

Some time passed before she could recover her strength, and on Holy Saturday, having made a great effort to leave her bed, she felt a little better, and was able to assist at the ceremonies of that day.

The following morning, the feast of the Resurrection, which was the 18th of April, in that year, 1541, she remained in the choir after matins, to pray, but she was attacked by such a violent and prolonged cough, that she was forced to go away, for fear of disturbing the other nuns, who were there in prayer ; and when she was close to her cell, she saw a most beautiful lady issue from it, dressed in red, with her hair floating on her shoulders, who beckoned to her to hasten her steps, which she did, although at first frightened and anxious at seeing secular ladies in the monastery at that hour. As soon as she was in her cell, it was revealed to her that that lady was St. Mary Magdalen, her patroness, and that of the order ; and she led her by the arm into the cell, where she had the happiness of

beholding her beloved Spouse, with wounds, no longer open and bleeding, but all resplendent with the brightest rays issuing from them. This vision filled Catherine's heart with joy, which greatly increased when she found that she was thought worthy to kiss His Sacred side, His hands, and His feet; and after the risen Redeemer had consoled her by discoursing upon His Passion and Resurrection, and given her various blessings for various graces which she had asked, and especially that neither she, nor any of her companions should be deceived by the devil, her shattered strength received so much support, that she felt perfectly healed, joyous and strong, and as soon as the bell of the choir rang, Jesus bade her farewell, that she might go to praise Him with the other sisters.

One of the effects of her excessive love of God was, that, as her mind was always united to Him, when a question was put to her she remained silent, or if she did reply, made an answer that was not to the purpose, which gave her the appearance of stupidity to the nuns, who had not yet penetrated the continual elevation of her mind to God, when the real cause was that which she explained herself to sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, to whom her confessor commanded that she should disclose whatever she asked. After having enquired over and over again what she was thinking of while she spoke to her, Catherine replied, "I think upon the excessive love which God has borne to all of us, and upon His immense favours, for which I continually thank Him, and I pray for myself and the benefactors of the monastery, for

our nuns, and for all those who have recommended themselves to my prayers, who am but a poor sinner."

In fact, she never spoke but of God, or with Him, or about Him, and every thing which presented itself to her eyes suggested the contemplation of some of His mysteries, as an event which happened on the Epiphany, 1565, clearly demonstrated. The Prince of Bavaria, who had been enjoined by the Duke, his father, to visit Catherine, entered the monastery with a numerous suite, and she went with him to the representation of the Crib at Bethlehem, and other pious places of the monastery, and reconducted him to the gate. The nuns who had been with her, perceived that she had been in ecstasy, and unconscious the whole time, for when they reminded her of the answers she had made to the Prince, she said, showing great astonishment, that she could not remember any thing of his visit, for she imagined that she had accompanied to the Crib the three Holy Kings whose memory was celebrated that day by their Holy Mother the Church, and she had never thought of any thing else.

Another time, when sister Catherine went with her guardian, sister Mary Magdalen, into the garden, she saw an apple, and upon that began to discourse, from its union with the tree of how close our union with God ought to be; for, as every apple owes all its taste and smell to the tree, we owe all that we have of good to God, from whom, if we separate ourselves before death, we have great reason to fear for our salvation, just as the

apples wither immediately, if they fall from the tree before they are ripe. Lastly, she observed, that if God preserves and nourishes the plants, He much more preserves and nourishes us, not only by creating every thing for our service, but also by sacrificing Himself for love of us.

On another occasion, one Friday, when she had returned to her senses, after her long ecstasy of twenty-eight hours, which we shall speak of in its proper place, she went down to the garden with her guardian, and the purple colour of a violet which she saw, recalled to her mind so strongly the most precious blood of her Redeemer, that, beginning to speak of it, she immediately went into an ecstasy, and remained for two whole hours in the position she was in when it began, although so little time had elapsed since her recovery from her great one, which astonished not only her guardian, but the other sisters as well, who remained with her till it was night, and then, seeing that she did not recover, grieved very much, because they knew that she had not eaten any thing since dinner, on Thursday, and had taken no rest after the other ecstasy; however, at the expiration of two hours, she returned to her senses, to their great satisfaction, and went back with them into the monastery.

In fine, she not only exhorted all until she died, to love God with their whole souls, by her words, her prayers, and ecstasies, but still more by her aspect, which breathed devotion and heavenly love, and inflamed the hearts of others, with the desire to give themselves entirely to Him.

CHAPTER VII.

HER PRAYERS, DEVOTIONS, FASTINGS, AND
PENANCES.

As soon as Catherine had made her profession, she devoted herself to following the Apostolic precept,* “Pray without ceasing.” Her fervour was not satisfied with the community prayers, which she made in choir with the other nuns, but she incessantly recited prayers, hymns, psalms, rosaries, and her other devotions, as was seen by the perpetual movement of her lips, in all her actions, no matter whether she worked or exercised herself in any manual employment, or whether she spoke with others on the things which were necessary to the monastery, (she never spoke on other subjects,) or whether she went about the monastery on business; and she paid so much attention to her prayer, that when a question was put to her, she continued it after having given an answer, which fact was remarked by several nuns.

Neither did any occupation divert her mind from the devotion and attention required by prayer, because she had embraced from her childhood, and persevered in it till her last breath, a perpetual and devout prayer, which was her only study, not at intervals or with interruptions,

* Ep. 1. Thess. c. 5. v. 17.

but so continuous that it had become, so to speak, part of her nature.

Not content with practising herself in these holy exercises, she invited the others to the same by devout exhortations and discourses, and to facilitate it, she got an oratory made at the head of each dormitory, and a beautiful chapel in the garden, built after the model of the house of Loretto. By these holy methods she enriched her soul in the contemplation of the Divine bounty and benefits, which excludes all presumption, makes us live in fear of falling into various faults, and reminds us how earnestly and incessantly we must pray God to keep us from them.

These holy exercises made themselves known by the numerous raptures and ecstasies which she had in almost every time and place, and the shortness of the repose which she allowed her body, that she might, as she confided to her faithful guardian, spend all the remainder of the day in prayers for herself and her neighbours, and principally for sinners.

And because abstinence and fasting greatly assist in making the spirit freer to follow its devotion, she inured herself to them from her earliest years, leaving a part of those dishes which pleased her most, and often depriving herself of what was necessary, and this she managed so skilfully that it was hardly to be perceived by others. After she had taken the religious habit she observed the fast days of the rule with such rigour, that she would not accept any dispensation offered her by the superiors, unless

forced by obedience, as was the case in her illness, when the physicians and superiors ordered that she should eat meat on Monday and Wednesday, which is prohibited by the Constitutions of the Third Order.

Still she was not satisfied by simple abstinence from flesh on those days, and she abstained from all food as often as possible, and left the common table without having broken her fast ; and if she did touch anything, it was in such a small quantity that her fellow novices, who were near her, were much astonished ; those at a distance could not perceive anything, so much art did she use in concealing her abstemiousness.

Knowing how very little nourishment she took, they could not understand how she could be so ready to fulfil all the duties of her state, and the first of all in alacrity ; and they began to suspect that she satisfied her hunger in secret, and mentioned their suspicions to Sister Margaret, mistress of the novices, who charged them, and some of the other novices, to watch her carefully in her cell, and even in the oratory, whither she frequently resorted to pray, and she did the same herself ; but all these observations only exposed the hollowness of their suspicions, and made them quite certain that she lived upon the little she took in the refectory. The mistress of novices was next moved to compassion at her sufferings, and fearing lest this rigid abstinence might bring on a severe illness, or incapacitate her for the duties of the monastery, ordered her companions to bring her some food, of which

she refused to partake, but did so as soon as the mistress commanded her to take it under the name of breakfast or luncheon. After having eaten a part, she entreated the mistress not to force her to go on eating, and then having obtained her permission and her blessing, she withdrew into the oratory, to return thanks to the Lord for the kindness of her mistress.

On the 7th of May 1542, when she was 20 years old, the Redeemer of the world appeared to her, and commanded her for the future to abstain entirely from flesh, eggs, and things made with milk, and to live only on Lenten food and common bread, and because God never imposes commands on us which are above our strength, He told her that He would give her all the assistance necessary for its execution.

Catherine received and fulfilled this command with great joy, and lived solely on herbs and vegetables, or a little very common fish during the remaining forty-eight years of her life, nor would she dispense herself from it even in her illnesses, when the only thing she would take in addition was turtle-soup.

She would not impart this precept to any one, and by her strict adherence to it, even when she was ill, brought upon herself the charge of caprice, superstition, and ignorance, and even of being deluded by the devil.

Catherine's zeal was much pained by the murmurs and evil opinions of her, not indeed because she who allowed and confessed that she was a great sinner, grieved at being blamed, but

because the uneasiness which her rigid abstinence caused in the convent was the occasion of several faults committed by her companions, and the more because her humility prevented her from revealing the command of Heaven, therefore she threw herself in great distress at the feet of her Spouse Jesus Christ, praying with great earnestness that without revealing that it was His command she might no longer be an occasion of sin to her sisters.

Her Divine Spouse did not delay His consolations, for the nuns, more irritated on the one hand, because in spite of all reproaches, she persevered in her abstinence from the food which our Lord forbade her to eat, and, on the other, considering her great goodness, began to think that the case might be what it was in reality, and communicated this idea to each other, in order to be certain of it, persuaded the superiors to command her to eat meat at least when she was ill ; and it was not difficult to insinuate the same wish to the doctors, who, on one occasion, pronounced it necessary for her. She executed the order punctually, merely protesting that this food would be very dangerous to her health, and ate it with the certainty that she would have to suffer the sharpest pains in swallowing it, while radishes, cabbages, or other ordinary vegetables would have done her a great deal of good. This was proved by the event, for as soon as the broth reached her stomach, her face was all inflamed, and her breast was so swelled, that it was evident she suffered the greatest pain till she threw it up,

and the doctors and sisters having seen this, perceived that her abstinence was the will of God, and never again ordered her to break it.

In spite of all this evidence, some of the nuns who were not quite satisfied, continued to hide a little pounded meat in her food, but when it produced exactly the same effects, they were convinced by their own proofs, and left off disturbing her for ever.

God confirmed this truth by signs, as, for instance, on one very rainy day, when the cook had nothing to give her, and was very unhappy about it, she went to the well to draw some water, and pulled up a great fish hanging to the bucket, which sufficed for the saint and for several others, and this caused great astonishment, for no more fishes were ever found in the well, and it was generally considered a work of the Divine Providence to help Catherine, who returned thanks with the others to the Giver of all good.

Besides this abstinence on Wednesday and Friday, and on the Vigils of Feasts, she often fasted on bread and water, but her superiors finally commanded her to give it up, her strength being so exhausted by the penances she performed.

Catherine added night-watchings to these fasts for the mortification of her flesh ; she did not sleep more than three or four hours, and even this seemed too long to her spirit, enamoured of God, because it prevented her from giving vent to her feelings by praying and performing works

of charity for the nuns who were ill, and so she gradually diminished her sleep to one hour in a whole week, as was observed by her guardian; and once as Father Tommaso Neri attests, she passed a whole week without any sleep, which would have been impossible without the hand of God, which showed its great power in Catherine, as she herself told her guardian, who interrogated her on the subject, replying, "God is able to do this, and He wills that so little sleep should give me more support than the seven hours every night, which the order allows you."

Beside the aforesaid penances, Catherine tormented her limbs with sharp sackcloth, and the prickles were so sharp, that although she put a quantity of doubled linen over it, the woollen clothes which she wore were often stained with blood, which was seen by the lay sisters who washed them. She moreover disciplined herself to blood every night with an iron chain, and to the confusion of her profound humility, the noise was heard by the sisters who had adjoining cells, but was particularly manifested one night, in which, while she was scourging herself, the devil attempting as usual to frighten and deter her from doing so, began to mimic her, striking underneath the floor of her cell with such a noise, that it awakened and terrified her two neighbours, sister Maria Cini, and sister Speranda Pandolfini, who ran into her cell, and when they heard the servant of God's lamentation, brought a light to see who was there. They found no one, and enquired from her what was the reason of such a noise, and

she answered that it could not have been caused by any one but the devil, and therefore begged them to sprinkle the cell with holy water, which they did, and recited several prayers with her ; but the noise still continuing, and evidently proceeding from the floor, one of the nuns, by the advice of this blessed servant of God, prostrated herself at full length upon the spot whence the noise came, and the proud slave of Lucifer not being able to endure such humility, went away howling and covered with confusion, not only at having failed in gaining his end, but at having made manifest Catherine's penances, whose mangled appearance moved the two sisters, and all those who ran there when they heard what was happening. The monastery still keeps the disciplines which were formally recognized to have belonged to her, at the processes upon her virtues and miracles, and which were found quite bloody.

CHAPTER VIII.

HER ECSTASIES AND RAPTURES.

CATHERINE's heart burnt so warmly with the love of her Divine Spouse, that like the spirit of Ezechiel, it frequently raised itself to heaven to enjoy the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, which

is indeed, as the angelic doctor St. Thomas, taught the effect of perfect charity.*

She had similar ecstasies and raptures so often, that her life might almost be said to be a continued ecstasy; they began when she was a little child in her father's house, as she affirmed to her uncle and confessor, and went on till her last breath; they lasted many hours, sometimes six, eight, or ten, besides one occasion, when she was in a rapture for twenty-eight hours.

Her spirit was immediately absorbed in God, and she became ecstatic whenever she heard God spoken of, or when she placed herself in His presence, in choir or in church, or in an oratory in the monastery, so that her superiors were obliged to give her her meals in a separate place from the others, and to make her receive the Holy Eucharist apart from the others, for she always was an impediment to them in these functions; she would become unable to move to the grate to be communicated; she would be absorbed in an ecstasy, so to leave her corporal food untouched for several hours, on hearing spiritual books read in the refectory.

She was surprised by an ecstasy in the same manner when she heard the *Salve Regina* sung after Complin, or when she kissed the crucifix or relics of saints on solemn festivals, and invariably

* *Ezechiel viii. v. 3.* And the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the vision of God into Jerusalem. *S. Thos. 2, 2, qu. 171, art. 1 in cor.* The mind which is united in the bond of perfect charity, is raised by the Holy Spirit to supernatural things, and by being abstracted from sensible things, arrives at the highest contemplation of divine charity.

when a nun was in her agony ; in fact, there was no place or time when she was free from them, but as she ever kept her mind raised to God, and exercised herself in fervent acts of love towards Him, her spirit was ever and in all places ready to be ravished to God. Her spirit was totally carried away by these ecstasies and seemed to desert her body altogether, so that when they occurred she remained without sense and perfectly immoveable, not feeling anything, and not even yielding to any attempts or force used to move her ; her eyes were always open, and fixed with motionless eyelids upon heaven, or some sacred picture; her face was sometimes rather pale, but was generally of a beautiful red colour, and it always shone and had such a venerable appearance, that it seemed more like the face of a seraphim than of a mortal, and excited great devotion in those who beheld it.

The Duchess Leonora of Toledo, wife of Cosmo the First, with her court, witnessed this in the following manner. The great fame of Catherine's sanctity having reached her ears, she went to Prato to see her, and arrived in the monastery with some of her ladies at the time that sister Catherine was in her ecstasy of twenty-eight hours. As soon as they heard that she was in that state, they went to see her, and watched her for some time with great astonishment. Then the duchess wishing to see whether her body was really immoveable, tried with all her might to shake her neck and her hands, but could not succeed, and turning to her ladies, and to the nuns who were present, she said, " What one sees

one must believe, but if we relate all that we have seen, and have ourselves proved, to my lord the duke, he will say that it is only feminine piety and devotion, although we see it with our own eyes, and touch it with our own hands." And in order to be able to attest the fact more certainly to her escort, she begged the prioress to allow her to bring the Bishop of Forlì, Don Pietro Angiolo Morsi, her cousin, master of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, and her major-domo, Baccio Lanfredini, who were in her suite, into the monastery, to be witnesses to this prodigy, to which the prioress consented, with the approbation of the prior and the confessor, who were present, because at that period there was no strict enclosure. These persons were struck with admiration and astonishment when they beheld her body motionless, her eyes fixed, and the brightness which issued from her face, and at the same time an effectual desire was aroused in their hearts of amending their lives, as they explained to the nuns: they congratulated them on the possession of such a treasure of sanctity, and did not fail to carry their resolution into effect. Nor was this the only time that the immovability of her body was proved, it was already known to the nuns who had experienced it on many occasions, one of which we will describe. Catherine was one day in an ecstasy behind the door that opened into the outer church, which was afterwards shut up. She was in the habit of resorting thither to pray, that she might be nearer to the most holy sacrament of the altar, which she adored and looked

at, and more hidden from the eyes of others. It happened that some young girls were bringing a portable ladder into the church in a great hurry, and they pushed at the door with violence, so that it struck the saint's head and shut to again, and when they found that they could not open it, they looked to see what prevented them, and to their great distress found that it was sister Catherine in an ecstasy. They were much confused at having given her such a blow, and went to relate the whole matter to her guardian, that she might go and see whether her head was hurt. She went directly to see, and found that her head was not wounded, but livid from the blow, and when she returned to her senses after some time, she felt a pain in her head without knowing the reason, so that she might justly say with the apostle, when he was rapt in spirit to the third heaven, "Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell, God knoweth."*

Another wonderful part of Catherine's ecstasies was, that she always remained in the exact position she was in when they came on; thus, if they began when she was standing she remained standing, if she was kneeling she remained kneeling, and if she was walking she went on walking. In these ecstasies she was made a partaker in the joy and in the sight of the principal mysteries of our holy faith. She frequently saw the Incarnation of the Word, but more particularly once in her cell, on the 25th of March, 1542, where she remained in this condition for three hours, when

*Cor. 2, ch. xii., v. 2 and 3.

some doubts of hers were made clear, and it was revealed to her how the archangel Gabriel entered to announce our Lord's birth to the virgin at the setting of the sun, and when about the sixth hour of the night she consented, the Eternal word became incarnate; and how the archangel remained until morning in holy conversation with the B. Virgin.

In the same year, on Palm Sunday, after Catherine had received a palm, she fell into a rapture which lasted during the remainder of the Divine office, and she accompanied our Lord, in spirit, through all the mysteries of Bethphage, and that of Mount Olivet, and rejoiced greatly at beholding those holy places at Jerusalem, as she herself disclosed to her confessor and her guardian.

On the following Feast of St. Vincent Ferrer, she was introduced into our Lord's presence in heaven, who showed her all the saints and beatified members of her order.

On the Assumption she had the happiness of beholding the B. Virgin, accompanied by a crowd of angels, who carried her up to heaven; she also saw her on her Nativity, Purification, and Presentation in the Temple, besides others of her festivals, which we pass over for the sake of brevity.

But the most striking feature of Catherine's supernatural gifts was that, when an ecstasy came on, while she walked, she went on walking without the slightest impediment; for instance, during the Prince of Bavaria's visit, which we have related above; and as we are going to describe, while she

carried the crucifix in the three processions commanded by our Lord, on the 21st of August, 1542.

On that day, after communion, she fell into an ecstasy, which lasted two hours ; and after that, she returned to her cell. On entering it, she heard a voice say, "My spouse," and, turning to see whence it proceeded, she was surprised and confused by seeing the crucifix in relieve, which she kept, about the height of a *braccio* above her little altar, leaning forward to her with open eyes, and unnailed hands, whereupon she knelt down, and stretched out her arms to prevent its falling on the ground, and the crucifix embraced Catherine in that attitude ; she immediately became ecstatic, and remained thus, in its embrace, a long time. Her guardian came in and found her in this posture, and called the other nuns directly, who informed the prior and confessor. They all shed tears of joy and tenderness at this sight, and at the sweet odour which filled the room ; they had the great pleasure of kissing her hand, and then, by the advice of her guardian, who well knew how much it would grieve her humility to find them round her when she returned to her senses, retired. Jesus shewed her in this ecstasy how pleasing her prayers were to Him, and commanded her, on that account, not to cease from praying for sinners, against whom He was very wrathful, and added, that to appease His anger, she was to inform her superiors that it was His will that all the nuns should assist at three processions that should be made in the monastery. As soon as Catherine returned to her senses, she

manifested this command to her superiors, who without losing time, fixed the following day, the 12th of August for the first procession, at which the prior and the confessor assisted, as well as another father in sacred vestments, who carried the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

Catherine carried this same crucifix, and she had hardly taken it into her hands when an ecstasy began, which lasted all the time of the procession, as the nuns carefully remarked; she seemed to their eyes rather to be carried by an angel than to walk, and, indeed, it was wonderful to see her going in procession round the whole monastery and further, for, without ever stopping, she went into the room of a sick nun, and blessed her with a crucifix. Still, in rapture, she went down again with them into the church, and knelt down taking care to place the crucifix on one side, so as to allow her to see the Blessed Sacrament. Benediction was given by the prior, after which Catherine returned to her senses, and addressing herself to her guardian, said, "What are we doing here; why do we not begin the procession?" and when she heard that it was over, she went to her cell full of joy at the accomplishment of the will of God. This question confirmed the nuns' belief that she had been in ecstasy during the procession.

She was similarly rapt in ecstasy in the other processions on the two following days; she thought she was unworthy to carry the crucifix, and tried to be exempted from that office; but her guardian, who knew her humility, told her that it properly belonged to the lay-sisters, which was enough to make her carry it with great joy.

When she was prioress, she was in a rapture at the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday. Before she girded herself for this function she knelt down, and, raising her eyes to heaven, thanked the Eternal Father who had brought her to this hour, and then she placed her arms on her breast, and humbly bent down to the earth for some minutes ; she made the sign of the cross over it, and kissed it ; and then prepared herself for the washing, at which she immediately fell into an ecstasy. Although the sight of her in this condition gave great joy to the nuns, they never could get over the confusion of seeing such a beloved servant of God at their feet.

Her most wonderful and astonishing ecstasy was repeated every week ; it began about two on Thursday afternoon, and ended at six o'clock on Friday evening ; and she passed these twenty-eight hours on her knees, raised however from the ground, without moving, and without food or rest. To hide this favour from the eyes of others she used to retire into a separate and solitary cell, and shut the door ; but this was not enough to prevent the nuns and many of the nobility, whom the fame of the great ecstasy drew to the monastery, from seeing her in it very many times. A great number of persons were very desirous of seeing this prodigy, and went to Prato for this purpose ; but the superiors were unwilling to allow any one to enter, and only made exceptions in favour of persons of very high rank. Catherine continued to have this remarkable rapture weekly for twelve years, from the month of February,

1542, when she was only nineteen years old, until she was thirty-one, in 1554. It ceased at the repeated prayers of herself and the nuns, who could not endure any longer the great concourse of people whom its fame brought to the monastery. It was evident from her words and actions in this ecstasy, that she beheld the whole passion of Jesus Christ ; her actions showed it by conforming themselves to its mysteries ; she was seen to move her shoulders, her arms, and all her members, as if she received the blows of the scourge ; she moved her head from side to side, as if she were crowned with thorns ; and she stretched out her arms, and put her feet one upon the other, as was done to Jesus on the cross.

But her words were the strongest confirmation of this supposition, which shewed which mystery she contemplated, and by which the series of the revelations that were made to her on the Passion was known. They began with the words spoken by Jesus to His Virgin Mother, when He bade her farewell, and ended at His being taken down from the cross. This was all described by her guardian and the nuns who witnessed it, but we omit it for the sake of brevity.

In this and her other ecstasies, Catherine often spoke in the person of Jesus, or of His most holy Mother, or of St. Dominic ; sometimes in her own person, as did S. Frances, S. Catherine of Sienna, and S. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, and she always exhorted the nuns to observe the rules and constitutions which they professed, and to fulfil their vows, with such profound reasoning, with so many

quotations from Holy Scripture, and such lofty ideas (these are the expressions of those who heard them), that it was easy to see that they were not the sentiments of a woman who did not understand Latin, and was still less versed in the sacred Scriptures, and in theology.

At other times she was heard to break forth in words of tenderness and compassion towards her Spouse Jesus ; and sometimes it appeared from them that she suffered the Passion with Jesus, for she often prayed the Lord to dispense her from these sufferings, and then immediately resigned herself to His most holy will, as she did with a loud voice in the year 1542 ; and went on to exhort the nuns in the person of Jesus, and reproved them for their tepidity in serving Him, and encouraged them to fly to Him in all their wants ; to be humble and obedient to their superiors, and grateful to God.

She was once heard to say in an ecstasy, " O my Spouse, I faint under the weight of the cross, help me ; now what will become of Thee who dost feel it, and art so delicate ? O my dear nuns, you are not all devoted to Jesus," and she went on to excite them to acts of compassion towards Him, and afterwards addressed herself to sinners, reproaching them for their great ingratitude towards Jesus.

In another she was heard to thank the Lord for the gifts He had granted to herself and to the nuns, and asked pardon for her own faults and for those of each of the others, and ended by recommending many others in particular. She always

prayed for the remission of sins ; in one of her ecstasies she begged of God to give her adequate words to thank Him for the great gift He has made to the world in being pleased to leave Himself on the earth in the Eucharistic species.

She never forgot to pray her Spouse Jesus to have special care of her lest she should be deceived, and she said that although she had received many gifts from Him, she feared being left to the devil's stratagems, in punishment for the sins she might have committed. On the 13th of October, 1553, she exhorted the nuns in the person of Jesus, to take up the cross of regular observance, which they seem to have thought little of ; for it was this neglect which prevented Him from conferring the same graces on them as He had on her, and not to be frightened at His corrections. After a short pause she continued to speak in her own person, and exhorted herself and the others to abandon their peculiar faults by way of preparation for the feast of St. Ursula. She made another discourse on the 3rd of December following, giving them a preparation for Christmas.

It was her custom in these discourses, and in many others which she made in her ecstasies, but which the space of this book does not allow us to relate, to vary her voice according to that of the person she represented ; and all these discourses were taken down and registered by some of the other nuns who copied them into the manuscript we shall speak of by and by. In fine, it is clear that she suffered the passion with Jesus ;

when she was in ecstasy, the nuns saw in her the marks of the scourging of the crowning with thorns, the crucifixion, and the marks of the nails, and they could see when the crown of thorns was taken off her head and the ropes were loosened, as they were from the body of Jesus when it was taken down from the cross; and some of these were never after effaced.

It is obvious from all this, and from her great humility, the virtue most hostile to Lucifer, the zeal for the salvation of souls with which she spoke, her untiring admonitions to the nuns, and the passion of Jesus which she contemplated and experienced in a rapture twenty-eight hours long, added to the continual prayers she made, that God might not allow her to be deceived, but rather take away these visions and ecstasies if they did not proceed from Himself, and that He would forgive her sins and those of others, that these ecstasies were not the effects of a diabolical illusion, but, on the contrary, were favours and graces granted by God's great love for her. Besides, the nuns never ceased to pray that God would be pleased to show whether they were delusions or not.

Their truth is, moreover, confirmed by this fact, that when our Saint was in ecstasy, she neither heard nor saw anything; if any one approached her and asked her for a spiritual favour, she blessed them, as a pledge that she would obtain it, and what was still more astonishing was, that when there were five or six or more persons in the room, she gave each her blessing as they each asked for

a grace, without once moving her eyes, as was experienced by many of the nuns and some fathers. Once Father Michellozzi, Father Strozzi, and Father Cini were in her room together, and the two first received her blessing, once their having asked for a favour, but she blessed Father Cini twice, because, as he explained, when the others showed surprise at her apparent partiality, he had demanded two favours. Many of the nuns testified that if she did not bless the person who entreated her intercession, she sought her out when she returned to her senses, and told her that she had prayed to God for the grace she wished for; and she also understood what the favours were, which were only asked for mentally, without using words or actions, to which sister Raffaella Cini bore the most convincing testimony, as will be seen from the next chapter.

CHAPTER IX.

EXAMINATIONS OF CATHERINE'S SPIRIT.

MANY years passed before the nuns and their confessors attributed Catherine's extasies to their real source. In order to hide the true favours of Heaven, she called her ecstasies in her humility drowsiness and sleepiness, and indulged a hope, which she confided to her companions, and particularly to her guardian, that she would be able

to hide them until her death. In order to confirm her words, she was in the habit of begging the sisters who saw her in that condition, to excuse her when this sleepiness prevented her from being as alive and prompt as they were in fulfilling their monastic duties.

Her strict silence, as to their true nature, gave free scope to the doubts of the sisters and of the confessors, who thought that they were fainting-fits, or a failing of the heart, caused by the delicacy of her constitution, while many among them, considering how pre-occupied her mind always was, and what incoherent answers she was in the habit of making, attributed them to stupidity, produced by her excessive abstinence from food and sleep.

But God, who would not allow his favours to remain any longer hidden under a bushel, wished to place her upon a candlestick, that her virtues might be universally recognized, and be a light and a guide to all. Thus, in the year 1541, the many graces she had received, her numerous ecstasies, and the splendours which frequently issued from her face during them, made the nuns begin to doubt whether their suspicions were not empty, and the more they weighed the fact, that in her ecstasies and raptures she never grew pale, or livid, or fell on the ground, and shut her eyes, as people usually do when they faint, neither did she struggle or foam at the mouth, as she would have done had they been epileptic fits, but remained standing, kneeling, walking, or in whatever posture she was in when her spirit was lifted

up from the earth, quite insensible, but with open eyes, a shining countenance, with a brilliant and burning colour, inspiring devotion, in all who beheld her, the more they were persuaded that they were rather divine than human, and more like privileges granted by God's love, than faintings, stupidity, or sleepiness.

Nevertheless, the sisters, well aware how much caution is necessary to decide on such a case, resolved together to declare all they knew on the subject, to Father T. Ricci, their confessor, who, although he knew the purity of his niece's conscience was also aware how easily any one can be deceived in this discernment of spirits, and resolved to make an examination. In the first place, he commanded them to conceal from every person external to the monastery, the signs that they noticed in the saint during her ecstasies, and to make devout prayers to the Most high, in public and in private, that He might condescend to reveal to them, whether sister Catherine's were true ecstasies or diabolical illusions.

Then he sent for his niece, who came immediately, and reproved her severely for having concealed these facts, noticed by the nuns, from him, and when he had explained to her how easy it is to be deluded by the devil in the case of ecstasies, commanded her to manifest clearly and distinctly, to him, all she saw in these ecstasies. Catherine's humility was much distressed by the command she received and by the fear that was suggested that they might be diabolical illusions; but she obeyed, after having asked pardon for having concealed

them from him; she ingenuously confessed that she had never so much as doubted that they might be a stratagem of the devil, and described minutely everything she saw in them. She said that she was frequently conducted into the presence of God, where she saw wonderful and celestial things, and that she beheld the whole series of the sufferings of Jesus, all the ill-treatment and the torments He endured; all the contempt and injury, and every circumstance of the Passion, until His death and taking down from the cross, adding, that the Passion was felt by her, and that many mysteries were revealed to her in these raptures, and the state of souls for which she prayed. Further she informed him that she was frequently awakened or called, and the B. Virgin, with her Divine Son, appeared to her, and remained to speak with her, and to instruct her in the spiritual life, that their first appearance terrified her greatly, but that afterwards she was much consoled.

When her confessor heard this, his fears were changed into extreme joy, for having been instructed in the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, S. Thomas, he was convinced that they were not diabolical deceptions, because they are always followed by terror, yet he would not make known his judgment to his niece, but gave her a grave and charitable admonition, to impress on her mind the great danger there is in false visions, which would, under borrowed forms, be nets and precipices by which the devil might make her his slave.

He also enquired at what period of her life she

began to participate in these visions, ecstasies, and raptures, and she answered that they began when she was a baby, in her father's house, and related them to him one by one, and when he had heard them, he told her that whenever she went into an ecstasy in future, she was to make the sign of the cross, and spit upon whatever object presented itself.

Catherine was surprised on hearing this, and said, with the greatest humility and reverence, "Must I then spit upon Jesus, and Mary, and other saints who appear to me? Oh my father, how can I do so? I beseech you to change this order, or to give me some other means of ascertaining whether they proceed from God, or our infernal enemy." Her confessor severely blamed this speech, and assured her that if her visions were in reality of God and His saints, they would not be offended by an act of simple obedience, which is a virtue dear to God, and to the saints, but that if the visions proceeded from the devil, who detests and abhors obedience, it would be insupportable to his pride, and he would fly in confusion and shame. He repeated his injunction, and added, that she should relate to him each day whatever she saw in ecstasy, and to her guardian, but to no one else, and more particularly to no one out of the monastery.

The confessor was not satisfied to rely on his own prudence, but when he had given these instructions to his niece, he communicated the whole to Father Tommaso Masi, the existing prior of the convent and monastery, who approved of what he

had done, and agreed with him that a singular vigilance should be used in observing the saint's conduct and virtues, the perfection of which was the only certain proof of her receiving favours from heaven. They directed the most experienced nuns to keep a careful and minute watch over her life and manners.

It is impossible to describe the exactness with which these zealous mothers examined every step, word, and action, and they weighed and considered them in the most rigorous manner, but they were much consoled to find her simple, abject, humble, despising herself, obedient, most careful in observing the constitutions, and filled with charity towards God and her neighbour, and persuaded themselves with good reason that they were celestial gifts, the more so because in proportion as the prayers that God would make manifest the truth were multiplied, Catherine's ecstasies and heavenly visions increased.

The saint was very soon relieved from all fear of being deceived by the devil, for in the same year, 1541, soon after she had received her confessor's directions, when she was in her cell on Christmas night, before going to matins, the most holy Virgin appeared to her, accompanied by S. Mary Magdalen and S. Thomas Aquinas, holding the Divine Infant in her arms, and she said to her, "Catherine, I have brought thee thy Spouse, whom thou desirest so much to behold." Catherine was so terrified lest it should be an illusion of the enemy, that she fell trembling to the ground, but reviving her courage, she raised herself again

and made the sign of the cross in obedience to her confessor, then she prepared to spit, but did not venture for reverence to do so, until the Virgin told her that she was to execute what she had been told, and when she found that the vision still continued, she was filled with consolation, being assured it was a true one, the more so as the B. Virgin assured her that it was not an illusion of the devil, and exhorted her to fix her eyes on her divine Spouse, and to consider that He willed to be born for the salvation of sinners in a rough and cold season, and in a hut where He had no shelter from the frost of the season. When Catherine heard this, not content with gazing most tenderly upon Him, she entreated His most holy Mother to give Him into her own arms, which she did to Catherine's exceeding joy, and thus Catherine gave way to her love for the Infant Jesus, and asked for many favours, which He bestowed ; then turning to the Virgin, she begged her to tell her how she might best please her divine Son, and the Virgin replied that she should conform herself with profound humility to His will, and obey her superiors blindly, which were the two virtues that shone most conspicuously in that Redeemer whom she held in her arms, and then asked Catherine to give her back her Infant, and the vision immediately disappeared. Catherine went straight to the crib to return thanks for all the favours she had received, particularly in that holy night, and was in an ecstasy for many hours after receiving Holy Communion.

All these, added to her obedience, and the vir-

tues so entirely opposed to the proud maxims of Lucifer, which she learnt in them, are proofs that the visions and conversations she had had were not illusions.

In spite of all the caution used, and the nuns being forbidden to speak of Catherine's privileges out of the cloister, it was impossible to hide them from the world, for the young persons who were educated there, and other persons necessary for the service of the monastery, who went to and fro were not bound by the prohibition, and they spoke occasionally of the ecstasies they had seen her in ; for she had them continually in every place, so that the fame of them began to spread.

Father Francesco Romeo da Castiglione, who was Prior of the Roman Province, and subsequently General of the order, and distinguished himself by his learning and prudence at the Council of Trent, was much displeased when he heard of it, fearing that if these visions were false they would bring discredit on the monastery, and on the order, and went without delay to Prato, in February, 1542, and desired at once to be informed of the whole affair, by the Prior and Confessor. His uneasiness increased when they told him of her visions, which required a very advanced state of perfection unless it was a most special gift of heaven, and that she was between nineteen and twenty years old ; for he suspected that they had by too much indulgence allowed her to be far advanced in a diabolical deceit, and resolved, at any cost, to remedy the evil by punishing sister Catherine severely in case he found her deceived

on the smallest point. He therefore sent for her and blamed her severely for giving credit to these ecstasies and visions, saying that they were novelties and charms, and that unless she ceased to have them he was resolved to punish her, for they appeared to him entirely false. The servant of God was not at all shaken by this, but answered with great humility and gentleness, that for her weakness and imperfections she well deserved to be deluded by the devil, wherefore she always entreated the Divine Majesty to give her his holy assistance that she might not be deceived, and to cause these ecstasies and favours to cease entirely unless they came from His hand, but that if they were from God, she might be deprived of light and intellect wherewith to reject them ; and, in fact it was not in her power to stop them ; that she had prayed also that if they were His gifts He would multiply them interiorly, and hide them from the eyes of others ; and because she knew that she did not deserve to be heard, she had repeatedly begged the sisters to obtain by their prayers what hers could not. It was commonly reported at the time that these answers were suggested to her by her special advocate St. Thomas Aquinas.

The provincial clearly saw the spirit of truth in these words, but would not show it, leaving her in expectation of further trials. Nevertheless, the servant of God never lost her meekness and placidity at the threats which were made of putting her in prison ; indeed, she said, with respect to them to her guardian, that if the provincial put her in prison to stop her sleepiness, for she still called

them by this humble name, it should be a narrow and bad one, as her faults deserved, and she only prayed her not to confine her in a dark one, lest she should be frightened. The provincial examined her over and over again, and always finding her more humble and mortified, and entertaining the lowest ideas of herself, was strengthened in the opinion he had lately formed of her goodness ; for he knew that persons deluded by the devil are proud, and by no means enamoured of God, nor of suffering for Him, as the answers of the servant of God frequently showed her to be ; and he was quite satisfied after he had seen her sometimes in ecstasy, and had heard the exhortations she then made, which could not have been suggested by the devil.

He did not tell her that he was undeceived, so she asked him to tell her plainly what he thought of her sleepiness and dreams, because he ought not, being superior, to leave this his sheep in the claws of the infernal wolf, and the father whose mind was inflamed by the love of God, which he felt to be exhaled from her words, could not help telling her, that a soul which loved God as much as he saw she did, could not be deceived in any way by Satan, and he gave her, as his parting advice, a recommendation to persevere in blind obedience to her superiors. He left Prato, and spoke kindly of her to all, confessed to several persons that he had acquired great spiritual profit in talking to her, and praised the bounty of God, whose hand he clearly recognized in this matter.

When the provincial returned to Rome, he

made an exact report of Catherine's virtues and ecstasies, and of the favours she had received, to the father general of the order, who was then the Padre Maestro Alberto Casaus, who, in order to be sure of the truth of the provincial's report, went himself to Prato, and had the consolation of finding her in an ecstasy, and of speaking to her after it, and having thus assured himself of her holiness, he published it in Spain, where he next went, as appeared from the letters which came from thence to ask for her prayers.

The same thing happened to Father Angelo Diaceto, vicar general of the order, whom St. Pius V. subsequently created Bishop of Fiesole, who when he heard of Catherine's wonderful works, went to see her, and examined her rigorously, and after a long scrutiny was much edified by her humility, obedience, and piety; he had also the good fortune of seeing her stigmata, and from that time spoke of her with much reverence and devotion.

In the same manner Monsignor Jacopo Nacchianti, of the order of Preachers, Bishop of Chioggia, who was incredulous at first, was convinced by a strict investigation, and proclaimed her to be a vessel of the Holy Ghost, as did Father Tommaso da Samminiato, in 1545, who became prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Prato, and although he thought that his predecessors had been too lenient in their examinations of her, after having examined her himself, was so convinced of the truth of her spirit, that he recommended himself to her prayers in all

his necessities ; and because a great concourse of strangers came to the monastery to speak to her, he advised the nuns to make her sub-prioress, which they did, in spite of her youth, she being then only twenty-six years old, that she might in that capacity be seen by many, for it was the sub-prioress' duty to accompany the prioress every time a stranger came to the grato.

Father Vincenzo da Fivizzano, Father Tommaso da Siena, and Father Vincenzo Ercolani, who was afterwards Bishop of Perugia, after a mature investigation, also retracted their suspicions, and regarded her as a saint. God did not fail moreover to confirm this opinion by prodigies, the first of which happened to Father Niccola Michelozzi, Provincial of the Roman Province, who still doubtful of Catherine's sanctity, tried a new experiment, which was the following one. He gave orders that he should be informed when she went into an ecstasy, and when Mother Eufrosia Mascalcioni came to inform him of it, he was inspired by God to go and tell her to go into the oratory where Catherine was, to kneel down before her, and observe what she did, and to return and tell him of it. The mother went to execute the command, and she had hardly knelt down before the saint blessed her three successive times, and kissed her forehead thrice, which was precisely the proof that the father had mentally asked God to give him of the truth of Catherine's spirit. When he heard sister Eufrosia's account, he thanked God for having con-

vinced him of it, for even angels cannot penetrate the unuttered thoughts of the mind.

But what happened to Sister Maria Gabriella Mascalzoni was, beyond comparison, more wonderful. Although she loved our saint much, and had heard her sanctity declared by so many eminent men, her mind did not seem at rest concerning the truth of her ecstasies, wherefore on one occasion, when she found her alone in the oratory in an ecstasy, and no one was by, she knelt down before her, and earnestly prayed that the Lord might quiet her doubts, when raising her eyes to the saint's face, she saw it changed into that of our Lord crucified, with hair and beard like His. She was frightened at this, and would have fled, but the saint, still in ecstasy, stopped her, and placing her face near her breast said to her, "Which do you think I am, sister Catherine or Jesus?" Still more frightened at this speech, she broke into a flood of tears, and answered in a loud voice, which was heard by many persons, "You are Jesus;" and when the same question was repeated three times, she gave the same answer, and not only was her fear changed into joy, but also her doubts into a certainty, that Catherine's ecstasies were the work of God, and not of the devil, as she herself asserted afterwards to the other nuns; moreover, when sister Catherine was asked by her guardian, to whom she was obliged to answer the truth, how such a change of countenance could happen, she replied according to

the teaching of St. Paul, "Do you not know that God abideth in whoever abideth in Him?"

This was not the case with Father Ginnesio da Lucca, the Provincial of the Roman Province, in the year 1567, who not believing the truth of the saint's ecstasies, resolved to put her in prison unless she publicly confessed that she had been deceived and deluded. As she could not with truth say this, she always kept to the same answers that she had given to the other provincials; but they did not satisfy this father, who was already determined to imprison her, but while he was considering how to fulfil this design he was called to Rome in great haste, which prevented him from putting it in execution. He told the saint as he went away, that she must make up her mind either to be imprisoned or to confess that her ecstasies were false, a threat which afflicted the sisters very much, for they had had evidence of her goodness, with the exception of Catherine herself, who was not only undisturbed but rejoiced at being despised. But God, who ever increased His favour for her, caused her to prophecy with holy simplicity the death of the provincial; for while the sisters expressed to her the grief which they felt, she answered: "Do not fear, the Lord will provide for us, *e finirà nella paglia*," a speech which they then interpreted to mean, that all these threats would end in chaff, according to the proverb;* but it was not so, for on his return to Prato he had

* i. e. "Finire nella paglia," which means to end in chaff, to end in nothing.

to pass the torrent of the Paglia, below the mountain on which the castle of Radicofani stands, which was much flooded ; he fell into the water, was taken out half dead, and died shortly after ; and thus the sisters discovered that the above-mentioned speech was prophetic, and the sanctity of Catherine remained still more certain.

Father Francesco Graziani, who was vicar of the province in the year 1570, was more fortunate. He went to Prato with the intention of making fresh trials of her virtue, and happened to arrive at the monastery when it was her duty as prioress, to open the door to him, and as she did this, he saw her face all shining and surrounded by a bright cloud, which remained for a good while, until as his eyes could no longer endure such brightness, he threw himself at her feet to ask her pardon, and the glory disappeared, and Catherine went to call the nuns to come and welcome the Father Provincial, who was quite confused, and withdrew to one side with the Mothers, to whom he related with much tenderness, and almost with tears, his doubts respecting her sanctity, and exhorted them to reverence her, and to show their gratitude for the great privilege of being governed by a saint, by imitating her holy life.

These successive prodigies revealed Catherine's sanctity more and more, till the fame of it reached the Sovereign Pontiff, Paul III., who, although he was aware with how much caution and prudence the superiors of the order had conducted themselves towards her, gave Cardinal Roberto Pucci,

a commission to visit the monastery under some pretext, being Bishop of Pistoja, and to verify with great care the reports which had been circulated about Catherine. The Cardinal executed the supreme commands, and went there accompanied by some other bishops and prelates, and after a minute examination of the fathers' conduct and of Catherine's goodness, they sent an answer to the Pope, in which they greatly commended the fathers' circumspection and caution in keeping secret as far as they could the gifts that God showered upon Catherine, and in only allowing with great repugnance a very few persons to enter the monastery; and spoke great things of her holiness, which might be brought forward to confound the heretics which then infested Christendom, by showing them what wonders God works in true Catholics who are in the obedience of the Church of Rome. Thus her sanctity became more conspicuous and certain, not only at Prato, but also in Tuscany and in Rome.

CHAPTER X.

ESPOUSALS, STIGMATA, AND OTHER FAVOURS WHICH
ST. CATHERINE RECEIVED FROM JESUS.

THE great and unbounded munificence of God was not satisfied with rewarding Catherine's great love towards Him with the above-mentioned ecstasies and raptures, but He wished to manifest to the world how much He loved her in return; "Ego

diligentes me diligo—I love them that love Me.”* And having decreed to declare her His spouse, He first purified her heart, in order that still more inflamed by His love, it might be entirely His. On the 6th of June, 1541, she earnestly entreated our Lord to change her heart, which her vows had consecrated to Him, that she might say with truth, that as she no longer had a will of her own, so she had no heart of her own, a grace which she had so many times requested, and first obtained on this day, when, after holy communion, she was happily taken in spirit into heaven, to behold the celestial joys and the felicity of the blessed, and was presented by the most holy Mary at the throne of her Divine Son, with the entreaty that he would change her heart, from an earthly to a heavenly one.

This was granted, and she was purified from the least attachment to created things, and solely enamoured of God, so that, as she confessed with her own lips to her guardian, Sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, she could give her mind without the smallest difficulty to heavenly contemplation.

This change of her heart prepared her for being very soon declared by Jesus to be His spouse, and receiving the ring which He had promised her before she took the habit,† on her reception, as we have related.‡ This took place on Easter Day, April 9th, 1642, at the dawn of which she beheld the Redeemer of the world, accompanied by His most holy Mother, by the angelic doctor

* Proverbs, viii. 17.

† Chapter iv.

‡ Chapter v.

St. Thomas, St. Mary Magdalen, and a multitude of angels, in her cell; she was frightened at first, but as soon as she had made the sign of the cross, and spit upon them according to her confessor's directions, her heart was filled with joy at being thus favoured by Heaven, and the more when the Blessed Virgin assured her that it was not an illusion but a true vision; and she began to return most humble thanks for such favours; then the Virgin turning to her Divine Son, prayed Him to espouse Catherine, which He immediately did, and took a rich and precious gold ring, enamelled with red, with a most brilliant diamond in the centre, off His left hand, and placed it on the first finger of her left hand, which the Blessed Virgin held up for the purpose.

This precious ring was not visible to all, though many saw it under the same appearance which it had when Jesus gave it to her; to others it looked like a circlet of raised flesh on that finger, with a small lump in the middle; others saw a great splendour which surrounded the fingers.

The nuns were not the only persons who were thought worthy to see it in its true form; it was also seen by Filippo Salviati, who attests the following fact in a letter to Sister Maria Jacopa Cini, which is kept in St. Vincent's monastery. He doubted whether Sister Catherine had been really espoused by Jesus, and when he was in his villa of Majano asleep, she appeared to him, saying that she was come to show him the ring which her Spouse Jesus had given her, and he saw a gold circlet

enamelled with red, containing a most precious diamond, and after he had examined it, Catherine said, "Lest you should doubt to-morrow morning of the truth of this, and think that what you now see has been a dream, I will prick your lip with the point of the diamond," which puncture gave him so much pain for many months, that although he felt the greatest delight at the warning, he frequently said that it would have been better for him not to have been so distrustful and curious.

And her guardian, Sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, seeing only a red circle which resembled a ring with a square stone in the middle, and doubting whether it had been made by artifice, with her confessor's consent, tried whether she could produce a similar one on her finger with varnish or vermilion, but she never could make one that had the slightest resemblance in colour or in shape to Catherine's; and she further attempted while she was in ecstasy to efface it with water or by friction, which failed, and she repeated her experiments, when Catherine, who let her do just as she wished, was in her senses, but she never could succeed even in deadening the red colour. Catherine grieved to see herself the cause of so many doubts in her sisters' minds, but she consoled herself by submitting to the will of God, and used to say to her guardian, "You tell me that you see a red circle on my finger, and I am obliged to believe what you say, yet I see a real diamond set in gold."

It was seen by several sisters, after her death, when she was on the bier, under various aspects

but, during her lifetime she hid it as far as was possible, always keeping that hand under her scapular, except when in ecstasy, and then being deprived of her senses, and unable to conceal it, every one was at liberty to see it ; they also saw it on the three days after Easter, the same year when she received an obedience to pray, that Jesus would make it visible to all the sisters. It is not surprising that every body could not see it as it was, because, being a gift from heaven, it was only visible to those whom God thought worthy to see it, as was the case with the ring with which our Lord espoused St. Catherine of Sienna, which, as St. Antoninus relates, was only seen by herself ; and also with those received by St. Catherine, virgin and martyr, St. Theresa, St. Rose of Lima, and lastly, St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi.

The Saviour of the world who had espoused Catherine, made her like Him, in the wounds He received, and though she had felt and represented His passion, every week, with various gestures, in her rapture which lasted twenty-eight hours ; a few days after the espousals, He impressed the exterior marks of His passion on her hands, feet, and side. This happened on Friday, within the Octave of Easter, namely, April 14, 1542, when in her long ecstasy, she arrived at the contemplation of the crucifixion of Jesus, and her compassion for her Crucified Love was so intense, that she prayed Him to let her share His sorrows, and He satisfied her, by inflicting His wounds on her hands and side, with this difference, however, that His right

side, and her left side, was pierced by the lance. She told her guardian that, so violent was the pain of this wound, that she seemed to fall dead on the ground, although Jesus had assured her that she should not die of it.

She suffered as much from the wounds in her hands and feet, so that the nuns could easily perceive what pain she felt in walking, and she continually thanked her Divine Spouse for having given her these wounds, which increased and strengthened the compassion she felt in meditating His bitter passion.

These wounds, from which she suffered cruel pains until her death, always appeared to her eyes to be open, and pierced, from side to side, and sometimes dropping blood; for example, on Christmas night, 1542, when the most holy Virgin Mary returned to the saint's cell, about five hours after the Ave Maria, accompanied by St. Mary Magdalen, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Thecla, and many angels, bringing her the Child Jesus, as she had promised her the preceding year, and also three crowns, one of gold, another of silver, and a third of thorns, which latter she promised to give her, and did so on another occasion, which we will describe further on. After exhorting her to exercise the virtues of patience and charity in a special manner, in the following year, in order to meet every adversity with a courageous heart, and to love God alone, and nothing else, she gave her the Child. But the saint, with much humility and devotion, entreated her to accommodate Him in her arms, so that He should not be stained by the blood

which fell from her wounds. Our Lady grante her request, and after a short time required her to give back the Child, which Catherine did, with this one request, that she would deign to carry Him to her guardian, and this also was granted, but she being asleep, only enjoyed His presence in a dream, as she informed St. Catherine after she was awake.

The same precaution was not necessary on the other occasions, when the most holy Virgin granted her the favour of placing the Child Jesus in her arms, as her wound was not always bleeding, which will not surprise those who remember that, as St. Bonaventure relates, the wounds of St. Francis of Assisi were seen to drop blood only a few times.

These wounds, impressed by Jesus on the body of the saint, and which she herself felt, and saw, during the remainder of her life, were seen by others only when it pleased God, and only by those whom He willed and made worthy to see them, nor did they appear the same to every one, as the lives of St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi relate of the stigmata of those saints.

Some persons deposed, that they saw them pierced from side to side ; others, that they saw them dropping blood, so that they feared she would stain whatever she touched, with blood ; others, and among them her guardian, Sister Mary Magdalen Strozzi, asserted that they had seen them so resplendent, that they could not fix their eyes upon them ; the greater number, how-

ever, deposed that they had seen those in her hands swollen red, but with the skin entire, and not pierced, only in the middle there was a livid circle, of the size of a small piece of money, in which blood seemed to float.

This was their appearance when the sisters saw them from the eighteenth hour, on the vigil of the feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, until sunset on the following day, when she was in one of her accustomed ecstasies; and again, on the 4th of April, of the same year, when they were seen by Father Angiolo Diacieti, then Provincial of the Roman Province, and Father Modesto Masi the Prior of the convent.

In like manner, her confessor, and uncle, saw them on another occasion, when the servant of God was in ecstasy, and held one hand outside her scapular, and the nuns perceiving this, ran up confusedly to see and kiss it, but the Father Confessor, who was present, reproved them for crowding up, with some severity, which was punished, to his great confusion, by her withdrawing her hand, when he also wished to kiss it, and he perceived that she did so because he had not profited by a charitable admonition which she had made him, to be more gentle in reproving, for as soon as he had perceived his error, and asked pardon of God, she removed her hand from under her scapular, that he might kiss it. These were not the only occasions when the sisters and other superiors of the order, and of the convent, had the happiness of seeing them, and it was also granted to her step-mother,

Fiammetta Diaceti, and a few other persons living in the world.

Those of her feet were not so often seen, nor by so many of the sisters; and on one occasion, by twelve or fifteen of the senior mothers, when she was surprised by an ecstasy, as she rose from her bed, and her feet remained uncovered, nor did the superioress judge it prudent to inform the others, lest her modesty should be pained by hearing of it, and they attested that they saw them pierced through, as if they had just been unfastened from the cross, with the flesh more swollen on one side than on the other, and filled with circulating blood; that the sight of them inspired terror and amazement, and that a most fragrant odour issued from them.

The wound in her left side was only seen at one period of her life, by her guardian, who had to anoint her stomach for some illness, from which she suffered, nor did she see it more than ten or twelve times, although she had to anoint her breast very often. She was much mortified when she found that she was deprived of such a grace, and complained of it to Jesus, resigning herself, nevertheless, to His Divine Will. She said that this wound was larger than the others.

Likewise, after her death, many of the sisters and secular persons saw those in the hands, and smelt a most sweet odour when they kissed them. Also those of the feet and side were seen by those who clothed her body, though not by all, and perhaps God punished the excessive curiosity

that some felt to see them, by concealing them from their eyes.

Some time after, the most holy Virgin fulfilled the promise that she had made of giving Catherine her Divine Son's crown of thorns, (which favour was also granted to St. Catherine of Sienna,) and the intense pain which was caused by the punctures of the thorns in her skull and forehead, threw her into an agony of pain and love. The crown, and the small holes which it made in her head, emitting fresh blood, were perceptible to many persons, especially to the lay sisters, who cut her hair during her life, and to the sisters who arranged her veil after her death. The grace of seeing them was not granted to all, nor could those of St. Catherine of Sienna, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, be seen by every one; but those to whom this favour was accorded made a faithful report of all their peculiarities, stating, in the process of her canonization, that the punctures encircled the whole of her head.

And in order that none of the most painful wounds that her spouse endured should be wanting in Catherine, she had a large aperture, about the width of three fingers, from her right shoulder down to her waist, caused by the great weight of the cross, which she carried after her Divine Spouse, to Calvary. Some of the nuns who had the care of her when she was ill, received the grace of seeing this mark.

CHAPTER XL

ON THE VISIONS IN WHICH CATHERINE SAW JESUS, THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN, AND OTHER SAINTS OF THE CHURCH MILITANT AND TRIUMPHANT.

As our Lord Jesus Christ had promised S. Catherine from her childhood to declare her His Spouse, He poured out upon her, from her earliest years, many treasures of grace, of consolation, and of comfort, ever augmenting her love for His most holy Passion, and favouring her more and more frequently with His conversation. He animated her to suffer His Passion with Him, and to pacify His anger, in the way we have related above, and gave her various holy instruction on the manner of life which was most pleasing in His eyes, and this He did not only once, but very many times ; for instance, on the 8th of June, 1542, when she was kneeling in her cell with the crucifix, which she kept there to satisfy her burning love, in her arms, praying with great fervour that He would teach her how to live quietly without offending Him ; and it, to correspond to hers, with equal affection, opened its eyes and stretched out its pierced hands towards her neck to embrace her with great love and familiarity, calling her His Spouse, and assuring her that her works were pleasing to Him ; finally, He gave her a great deal of advice for her-

self and her sisters ; and she, overflowing with grateful tears, knew not how to cease returning thanks for this favour.

Similarly, when she was lying in bed overcome by some infirmity, and fixed her eyes on that most holy image of Jesus crucified, manifesting the bitterness of her sufferings to Him, and offering them as a satisfaction for her sins, she felt that our Lord answered that she should console herself by reflecting on the great torments which He first suffered for her, and for the whole world, with such unwearied patience ; then on the infinite difference that there was between Him and her ; and thus she felt comforted.

This crucifix, which so many times condescended to speak to her, and to bestow on her such singular favours, was placed with her consent in the oratory of the monastery ; that the other nuns might be able to adore it, and to pray before it in their necessities ; at present, it is with all the relics presented by various personages, and inspected and registered by Monsignor Caccia, Bishop of Pistoja, when he made the process of her canonization, in her own cell, which, with the addition of the contiguous one, was converted into an oratory.

She was equally favoured by the Blessed Virgin, who gave the Infant Jesus into her arms on several occasions, only two of which we have mentioned, for fear of prolixity ; but we must add that this happened ordinarily on Christmas night, and on the feast of the Purification. Catherine would never have left off caressing the Divine

Child, and giving vent to her immense love for Him in devout ejaculations and tender words, unless the Virgin had asked her to give Him back to her.

Sometimes on the Assumption, the Blessed Virgin showed her how she was accompanied by angels into glory, and at others the depth of her humility on the day of her birth, and on the day of the happy announcement of the Incarnation of the Word in her most pure womb. She was always accompanied by some of the saints, and made her various exhortations to humility, obedience, and patience, and the other virtues, which were also directed to the sisters, as she told her confessor, saying, that when she was awake she very frequently saw some of the saints, even the glorious Virgin and our Lord Himself, who remained with her, instructing her in the spiritual life.

The Blessed Virgin admonished her to tell the nuns that after they had finished their night office in the dormitory, according to the custom of the Dominican Order, they should not retire with so much haste, but should conclude the Ave Maria, and implore her Son's blessing and her own in these words: "Nos cum prole pia benedicat Virgo Maria." She also taught her a new mode of praying and commemorating the Passion of her Divine Son, showing her how pleasing the recollection of it was to Him. It was a canticle composed of sentences of Holy Scripture, which was to be sung in the monastery every Thursday evening, to remind the nuns how much the Son

of God had suffered for man on that night and the following day.

This canticle was transcribed from the dictation of the servant of God, by Father Timoteo de' Ricci, and sent to Father Francesco Romeo, general of the order, who not only approved of it, but sent circular letters to all his provinces, ordering that it should be sung in all the convents on Friday evening. It begins, "Amici mei, et proximi mei," and has been inserted for the satisfaction of devout persons at the end of this Life.

In these visions St. Catherine prayed with great devotion to the Infant Jesus, that He would extend His protection to herself, to our holy mother the church, and to her sisters; she always prayed for the conversion of sinners, and begged the most holy Virgin, and the saints who accompanied her, to intercede for her with God for the accomplishment of her desires.

Thus it will not create surprise when we state that in her afflictions she was frequently consoled by angels, and particularly by her angel guardian, whom she had seen from her childhood, as has been described. She sometimes received warnings from him, for instance, on the vigil of St. Bartholomew, 1542, when he stopped her as she ascended a staircase, and said that she was to go immediately to console sister Ludovica Niccolini, who was so tormented by a long and grievous malady, that she was almost on the point of despair, and the saint urged by her love for her neighbour's souls, and for the sick nun, went to her immediately, and by her fervent exhortations

induced her to return to herself, and ask God's pardon for the crime that she had begun to think of committing. Catherine exhorted her to receive the Holy Eucharist to gain strength to bear that painful infirmity, and though the invalid remonstrated that she should not be able to prepare herself as fully as she wished for the reception of so great a sacrament, Catherine trusting in God's immense mercies, encouraged her to receive it, and promised to assist her. On the strength of this promise sister Ludovica consented, and communicated the following day with great devotion. Catherine was present, and when the Blessed Sacrament was brought in went into an ecstasy, weeping continually. It lasted a long time, which the nuns thought she employed in praying for the sick sister ; and the relief which she felt after receiving Holy Communion, was a proof that God had heard the prayers of His servant.

Her spirit enjoyed the sight of her angel-guardian on many occasions ; sometimes he, and sometimes other angels, were her guides when she was lifted up to heaven, and they explained many divine mysteries to her, and this filled her with such joy, that it is no wonder she henceforward loathed all earthly consolations.

Nor was she less favoured by the saints reigning in heaven, especially by those of her own order, for instance, by the Patriarch St. Dominic, St. Thomas, and St. Vincent Ferrer, and others, who were usually present when she received graces from heaven, and continually gave her advice for herself and her sisters.

The witnesses agree that the saint who encouraged and assisted her most was St. Thecla, virgin and martyr, whom she chose for her particular patron, who used to speak familiarly with her, instructing her very often in heavenly things, and often lending her assistance in temporal matters, such as in sewing, in embroidering, and the work that was given her to do. She was not visible to others, although the saint saw her, but it was discovered by the long undertakings which she finished in a few hours; for example, when Sister Clemenza Quartucci, who managed the nuns' clothes, gave her a hundred pieces of linen to make up, she returned them to her finished the next morning, having sewed more in one night than the quickest worker could have done in five days, and yet she had not neglected any of her usual prayers. Sister Clemenza and the nuns to whom she showed them, knowing that she had not had any assistance, persuaded the superior to command her to tell them how she had contrived to do them so fast, and thus compelled by obedience, she told them with great reluctance that St. Thecla had assisted her, and she made the same reply on a similar occasion, when she finished some curtains in a few hours; and lastly, when she was embroidering a corporal with red silk, the nuns remarked that the other side of the corporal was embroidered by an invisible hand, so that as she made one stitch on one side another appeared on the other, and this veil is kept in the monastery for the veneration of the faithful.

Catherine conversed with the saints who were pilgrims on the earth, as well as those in heaven, as is proved by her intercourse with St. Philip Neri. Besides her correspondence by letters, which are still preserved at Santa Maria, in Vallicella, commonly called the Chiesa Nuova, they saw and spoke with each other, although Sister Catherine lived at Prato, and St. Philip at Rome, as appears from the processes on St. Philip Neri's canonization, and Gregory the Fifteenth's Bull respecting it, in which these words occur, "Also while he remained in Rome, he conversed for a long time with Catherine of Ricci, a nun under the rule of St. Augustine, living at Prato, in Tuscany." This does not state that our saint appeared in Rome to St. Philip Neri, but it appears in the depositions of the witnesses examined about his canonization, that she appeared to St. Philip during the lifetime of both; and her constant correspondence with him who is universally allowed to have had the gift of the discernment of spirits, furnishes an additional proof of St. Catherine's great sanctity.

The declaration of the Rota assures us that the same thing occurred to St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, for we read there, that "distant things were present to her, and sometimes she saw a nun in Prato named Catherine of Ricci, a virgin as glorious as she was conspicuous for the brightness of her holiness, writing answers to her letters, and giving them to a courier, and when the nuns had examined the date of the letters, they found that they had been written at the very time that

this had been supernaturally seen by St. Mary Magdalen." The history of her life gives the following account of the matter. "In the year 1586, the Blessed Mary Magdalen was one day in a rapture in the hall of the noviciate, and dictated a letter to Sister Catherine of Ricci, a nun of great virtue and goodness in the monastery of St. Vincent at Prato; it was sealed and signed by a nun who was present at that ecstasy, and sent by the steward to Prato, which is ten miles distant from Florence. A few hours after, the saint still in ecstasy, showed that she was looking at the steward giving her letter to Sister Catherine, and soon after with her eyes fixed, appeared to read the answer, which disturbed her countenance a little, because it was not what she desired, and again she saw Sister Catherine committing her letter to the care of the messenger. He returned after four hours, and they learned from him that he had given the letter to Sister Catherine, and received her answer at the exact times that this had been observed by the saint."

But what deserves our particular notice is that St. Mary Magdalen stated to her confessor, and he to Father Guidi, who wrote a Life of our St. Catherine, that she had seen her soul in the triumphant company of the blessed in heaven.

Finally St. Pius V. ordered his nephew, the Cardinal of Alexandria, whom he sent as Legate to Spain to negotiate the famous league against the Turks, to stop at Prato on his way there, in order to see our saint, and recommend the success of his mission to her prayers; and when

he reported the conclusion of the league, he received a command to return to Prato to thank St. Catherine, which he did with remarkable satisfaction.

CHAPTER XII.

ON CATHERINE'S GREAT CHARITY TOWARDS HER NEIGHBOUR.

As we are taught by the Apostle St. John, the love of God in us cannot be said to be perfect, and to have attained the divine object of its desires, until it leads us to direct all our efforts to the good of our neighbour; *Si diligamus invicem, Deus in nobis manet, et charitas ejus in nobis perfecta est.* If we love one another God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us;* and, therefore, Catherine's heart, which was so inflamed with love towards her Spouse, desired and sought no other employment than to exert herself for the spiritual or temporal good of her neighbour. The poor had only to show themselves to her in order to obtain relief; as soon as any one asked for alms she ran to her superiors to seek something for them; and sometimes she begged secular persons to help them; with her superior's blessing, she willingly deprived herself of her own food to distribute it among them; and when she was prioress

* Ep. 1. of St. John, c. 4, v. 12.

she forbade the portress ever to send away a poor person without an alms. When her great charity towards the poor became generally known, she received sums of money for them from different parts besides those she collected herself, so that she was able to give portions to a great number of girls, to enable them to marry or to become nuns, in case God inspired them to do so, usually exhorting them to enter a convent. As the fame of her charity was more spread, the number of persons in Florence and Tuscany who sent her large sums of money to distribute at her pleasure increased ; among the noble Florentines may be mentioned Federigo dé Ricci, Alberto Bardi, Antonio Gondi, and especially Tommaso Ginori, who left a farm of great value to the monastery, with the express condition, that during Sister Catherine's life, the produce of it was to be disposed of at her will for the benefit of the poor ; she managed it with great exactness, and rewarded the generosity of her benefactors by the assiduous prayers of herself and the nuns for their welfare and that of their families.

She was also very charitable to the fathers of S. Dominic, at Prato, and assisted them, both separately and in common, whenever they wanted anything ; and in the same way she always relieved her own nuns, particularly when, as prioress, she had the care of them ; she could never bear to see them suffer in any way, always providing them with all that was necessary ; and as she knew the poverty of the monastery, she prayed her Divine Spouse to provide for it, and her prayers were

heard, for the great fame of her sanctity induced many persons to leave contributions to it, as we shall relate hereafter.

She was not satisfied with succouring them in their necessities, but waited upon and consoled them in their illnesses, watching them with great zeal by day and particularly by night ; she was always ready to comfort them in their sorrows, and to pray for them, which she did every night, however tedious the sickness might be ; and her charity also extended to the nuns who were obliged to attend upon the patients ; she used to send them to rest themselves, while she did the lowest work of the infirmary, even that which properly belonged to the lay-sisters ; and she never shrunk from any illness, however infectious or disgusting ; once she applied the remedies to a lay-sister who had a complaint as repulsive as it was contagious in her head, with her own hands, continually exhorting her to be patient, for God would reward her for her sufferings, and after five days she was perfectly well again.

She redoubled her visits when she saw that the disease grew worse, so that when the sick nuns perceived this, they inferred, and always rightly, that they were likely to die ; and when that time drew near, she recommended them to God with such fervent prayers, that she was always rapt in ecstasy during their agony, and did not return to her senses till the sick nun had passed from this life. It was a common opinion in the monastery, based upon the statement of her guardian, who had been told so by Catherine herself, that

she accompanied their souls to paradise, or to purgatory, and obtained a prosperous passage for them by her prayers; so that the nuns never ventured to touch her until they knew by the slight cough which she always had at the end of her ecstasies, that she had returned to her senses. She then closed the eyes of the corpse, and assisted the others to dress it, and to take it into the church.

Catherine's charity to sinners was not less conspicuous, and very often when she saw them, her eloquence and the power of her words produced feelings of zeal and contrition in their hearts, and, with tears and sighs, they gave themselves up to her guidance, inquiring what they should do to obtain a free pardon from God for their grievous faults. Among others, Francesco Mazzinghi, Filippo Rospigliosi, and Biagio Menocchi, who, having given themselves up to evil in their youth, could not find the means of escaping from it, on approaching her were filled with horror of the sins they had committed, and immediately began to seek the path of true virtue, persevering in it with the assistance of her continual prayers, which her Divine Spouse exhorted her to make in the same way that He had exhorted her to cause the three processions to be performed in the monastery.

Her ardent charity for the souls of sinners was not satisfied with exhortations and with perpetual prayers for their conversion, but caused her to receive, and even to pray for the sufferings which were due to them in punishment for their sins.

One of the most liberal benefactors of the monastery lived without a thought of God, and she first gave him many fraternal admonitions; but he was so obstinate and hardened in vice, that he laughed at her instead of amending his life; and once, in the hearing of another nun, he told her, very angrily, to be quiet and go to spin, for if he chose to go to hell it would be his misfortune, and not hers. The obstinacy that the answer of this miserable man betrayed caused the most acute sorrow to Catherine's charitable heart, and she began to pray for his conversion with greater earnestness and renewed tears, until, to the detriment of her own health, her Divine Spouse heard her petition, and inflicted on her the punishment which that hardened sinner deserved: she suffered many severe corporeal pains; and after his death assured the nun who had heard the perverse answer that he made her, that his soul had been preserved from the infernal chastisements, adding, "N. N. will see now whether I know how to spin."

She acted in a similar manner on the 12th of September, 1542, when a notorious thief was sentenced to death in Prato. He flattered himself that he should be able to commute his condemnation into a sentence to the galleys, which he had often tried before, but the failure of this hope threw him into such despair that he would listen to no one who spoke to him of conversion, whereupon those who comforted him sent to Catherine to request her prayers. She immediately rose from her bed, though she was lying ill, and

went into an ecstasy in the act of praying for him, during which she was led into the presence of her Divine Spouse, and implored Him to take compassion on that soul with all the fervour she was capable of, but He at first refused, on account of the great obstinacy which had led him to reject all His holy inspirations, and which had rendered him unworthy of pardon. Catherine, not discouraged by this pursued her entreaties that He would not abandon that soul for which He had suffered so much, and offered to undergo any punishment that He was pleased to inflict on her, if He would only show mercy to that soul. This heroic act of charity moved the pity of the Divine Redeemer, and when she obtained the favour she returned to her senses, and sent word to his comforters* that the thief was converted, and so entirely was his heart changed, that he not only confessed his sins with many tears, and received absolution, but made a public acknowledgment of them on the scaffold, and exhorted the people to fly from and to hate them, unless they wished to expose themselves to that ignominious death which he so fully deserved, and still more to the obvious danger, which he had narrowly escaped, of losing their souls for ever. Catherine suffered a most violent pain in her head for the three following years; but the knowledge of the conversion of the thief, and the salvation of his soul was sufficient to make her bear that expiatory pain with real joy, as she told sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, her guardian.

Besides this pain, she suffered cruel pains in

* The name given to those who accompany criminals to the scaffold.

her side, to free the soul of a religious from despair, to which a long and heavy malady, that tormented her until she died, had caused her to give herself up. Catherine blessed her with the ring with which God had espoused her, and she died contrite, having obtained eternal salvation. When her exceeding charity was known in Prato and in Tuscany, every one was in haste to recommend the souls of their deceased friends to her prayers; and when she knew by revelation that they were in Purgatory, she offered all her penances and prayers for them, that they might soon be free to enjoy eternal glory. She was often heard in her ecstasies to implore her Divine Spouse, who granted all her requests, in their behalf, and many of them appeared to her to thank her for her charity; moreover, once on the feast of her purification, the Blessed Virgin showed her in an ecstasy, all the souls which through her prayers had ascended to the joys of heaven.

When her prayers and penances were not sufficient to liberate these souls from purgatory, she used to offer herself with readiness to suffer their penalties, that they might go at once to enjoy the Beatific Vision; and these penalties are most awful when they are inflicted by an Omnipotent hand to purify souls from the guilt that they would not atone for by earthly penances.

One of the souls in purgatory for which she suffered a great deal, was that of a great prince and ruler, for whom she had offered during his lifetime a great many prayers, fasts, and pen-

ances, lest he should be condemned to hell ; they had evidently been accepted, for before his death he gave great signs of a change of life, and a firm resolution to spend the remainder of it in the holy fear of God, and he passed in this excellent frame of mind from this world to purgatory, and as soon as this fact was revealed to Catherine in answer to the prayers she made to that effect, she offered to suffer in her own person all the punishments that the Divine Justice was about to inflict on him. Her petition was granted, and the prince's soul raised to enjoy God's glory, but at the same time Catherine's torments began ; they lasted forty days, and were so extraordinary, that the doctors perceiving them to be beyond the range of their art, concluded that they were sent by God, to enable her to atone for some soul in purgatory. The account given by those who witnessed them, was that her body appeared as if it were covered by a number of blisters full of serum, which boiled as though it was over a fire. They also emitted such excessive heat, that the cell seemed on fire, and no one could remain in it many moments without going out to take breath. It was easy to see that her flesh was burning, her tongue was like a red hot iron, and after the effervescence subsided, it had the appearance of having being roasted ; but after a short interval the blisters rose again, bringing the same heat with them, yet they could not impair the joyousness of her face, or the serenity of her mind, which rejoiced in the midst of these fiery torments. Although the doctors were aware that

her illness was out of the common course of things, they ordered her to take some baths and cooling remedies, more from a wish to show that they had prescribed something, than with the hope that they would do her any good. The Saint took them from motives of obedience, though she knew that they could not give her any relief, for, as she confided for their consolation to two nuns who lamented the death of the above-named prince, she could not recover till she had atoned to the Divine Justice for his sins. Although her humility prevented her from disclosing her sentiments, she rejoiced at having those remedies, because they only increased her torments; sometimes to such a degree that she lost the power of speech for ten or twelve minutes. The nuns seeing her in this dreadful state, said that she seemed to be in a furnace of fire, and she simply answered that it was so, and she said to those who were in her confidence, when they begged her not to take such atrocious sufferings upon herself, "Forgive me, mothers, for replying to your reproofs; my beloved Spouse prizes our souls so much, that He has exhorted and charged me to pray for sinners, that they may repent of their faults; and I not only accept with readiness every torment for their eternal salvation, but I long to suffer all imaginable pains that they may be able quickly to see and praise their Redeemer." She recovered her former health at the end of forty days, and answered with freedom the questions made by various members of the prince's family, respecting the state of his soul, saying, "Have no fear, for

he is in the enjoyment of eternal glory ;” whence it was evident that what she had suffered was to atone for his faults.

Many were the pains that she endured for other souls, but we shall not run the risk of prolixity by describing them here, for the above examples afford abundant proof of her vehement charity towards her neighbour, which attained such an heroic degree, that the mere sight of her was enough to convert many persons who led bad lives. Among these, a mason who was in inveterate habits of sin, happened to see her carrying the crucifix in the three processions, and was filled with such contrition and detestation for his sins that he immediately sought a priest and confessed them all, with a firm resolution to amend his life. The same thing happened to a bishop who found her in a rapture, and to people of every rank and condition, who by seeing her were changed from sinners into penitents.

CHAPTER XIII.

ST. CATHERINE'S EXACT OBSERVANCE OF HER VOWS, RULES AND CONSTITUTIONS.

THE great charity towards God and towards her neighbour, which, as we have said, always burnt in Catherine's heart, not only rendered her unshaken in the exact fulfilment of the Divine precepts as our Saviour said, “On these two command-

ments dependeth the whole law," but also guided her in the perfect observance of the three vows which she made at her profession. It was enough for her to hear or to be able to know the wishes of her superiors, to make her do what they wished; and her life was so spotless, that she seemed in the eyes of all those who had intercourse with her, rather an angel on earth, than a mortal creature. It was this that compelled her, though with great repugnance caused by her humility, to publish all the favours which Heaven had imparted to her, relating them not merely to her confessor and to the guardian assigned her by God, and confirmed by her superiors, but to all the other superiors who came to make different trials of the holiness of her soul. Thus we are all indebted to her great obedience, which was the means by which all the favours showered upon her by Heaven, have come to universal notice.

Her Divine Spouse frequently exhorted her to build and to found all her other virtues upon this perfect obedience and profound humility; her holy protectors also did so, when they encouraged her to spit upon the apparition of her Divine Spouse, an act of apparent contempt, but in reality most pleasing to them, because it was the result of obedience to her confessor.

It was this obedience that made her govern the monastery for the space of forty-four years, either as prioress or sub-prioress. She accepted these dignities with so much reluctance, that she used to say that if she could have escaped them by being placed in a small prison, loaded with fetters

and chains during all the time that she had to hold those offices, she would have gone there willingly. And she did not neglect to use all possible means to obtain the general's leave to refuse them, but always in vain, as we shall mention by and by.

Obedience alone had power to withdraw her from her raptures. Once when the other nuns sought all over the monastery for her for some necessary business, they could not find her, and knocked at the door of her cell, but as she was in ecstasy within she did not answer, until, since the affair was one of great importance, the prioress came, and the sound of her voice was sufficient to bring Catherine back to her senses, and perform immediately what she told her.

If on one occasion, after receiving communion at the hands of the provincial, Father Francesco Romeo, she remained in ecstasy at the grate, without obeying his injunction to retire and leave room for the others; it was so ordained by her Divine Spouse, (for she was entirely alienated from her senses at the time,) that the great fragrance which then issued from her, and the humble and loving words which she used to the most Holy Sacrament, might dispel all doubt of the truth of her ecstasies from the provincial's mind, as he publicly attested afterwards.

The ecstasies which she had when she went to communion, and heard the spiritual reading at the community meals, on account of which, while a simple nun, she was dispensed from communicating and going into the refectory with the

others, were a great objection to her exercising in a proper manner the office of sub-prioress of the monastery, which Father Tommaso da Samminiato, prior of the convent of St. Dominic, conferred upon her, and he commanded her, and the rest of the nuns, to pray specially that God would make those ecstasies cease, adding that if He did so it was a sign that He blessed her election ; she obeyed, and entreated God to take away the joy that these ecstasies gave her, and He granted this favour to their prayers.

She was most obedient to the doctors as well as to the superiors, even when violent pains were the consequence of it, which was the case whenever they gave her any medicine for an infirmity that she had taken upon herself for the relief of sinners, or of souls in purgatory ; and not only this, but she obeyed her equals and inferiors with invariable alacrity, so that they got the habit of telling her what they wished her to do.

Her obedience was so pleasing to God, that He showed His approval of it by a miracle, and this happened when the monastery was reduced to want, because the wheat was all rotten. They called upon the saint, such was the opinion of her sanctity, and without informing her of the circumstance, ordered her to take off her shoes and walk upon the wheat with bare feet ; she obeyed without enquiring the reason, and as soon as she had done so the corn became good, and although there was originally but a small quantity, it so greatly multiplied, that it supported the monastery for a long time, and a quantity was

given away to the benefactors of the monastery, who having heard of the miracle, asked for some out of devotion.

She was such a lover of this virtue of obedience, that when she was superioress, to prove themselves very obedient was the surest means that her subjects could take to appease her zeal ; in this way they took out of her hands any penance, however just, that she might have imposed ; and she continually exhorted them with holy zeal during her ecstasies, to cling to obedience as a secure anchor, if they wished to reach the port of eternal glory.

She practised with equal zeal the poverty and total renunciation of all earthly goods, which she professed by vow, having given up everything when she left her father's house in her earliest years, with a mind always free from the least affection for them, as perfect poverty requires, only prizing and wishing for those treasures which heaven confers on the souls it loves. It was this that made her wish to live without even necessary furniture, as her poor and mean cell, and coarse bad clothes, plainly showed. She distributed everything that was given her by her friends to the poor, with the superior's leave, without keeping the smallest piece of money ; and never would use or keep in her cell anything but what the community supplied her with, thus instructing all by example, as well as words, to observe an austere poverty, and to put everything they possessed into their superior's hands ; and because the monastery was too poor to provide each with what

was necessary, she exerted herself a great deal to induce rich and pious persons to provide for it in such a way that it might then, and in future, be rich enough to enable all the nuns to live a perfect community life.

She observed her vow of chastity with the greatest jealousy, keeping herself free from every vain thought, so that she was pure in soul, which she ever kept united with God, employing her mind in meditating the Passion, and her will in making acts of love of Him ; pure in her virginal body, pure in words, which she never used except to speak of God or with God, and pure, in fine, in her works, as was evident to all, for they breathed nothing but holiness and purity ; and the Lord, who had chosen her for His spouse, was not content with preventing the smallest shade of fault from staining her pure body and her beautiful soul, but moreover never permitted the devil to tempt her to impurity, or to present one single impure imagination which might darken or disturb, in the smallest degree, the white lily of her purity. It was His will that she should give many external indications of this grace ; the first was when she was making an address to her nuns during an ecstasy, enumerating it among the favours which God had bestowed upon her, in the following terms : "Thou, O my God, hast given me purity, humility, and uprightness ; they are Thy gifts, for I know that I am not capable of having anything good in myself ; preserve and strengthen them in me, my God, since they are pleasing to Thee ; my Jesus, I am certain that in

my words and works I have endeavoured always to act uprightly ; and Thou knowest, O my Spouse, that I may say with truth that I have never done anything that I thought would displease Thee."

Her purity displayed itself principally in the strong and sweet fragrance which frequently issued from her virgin body, and proved its celestial origin by being only perceptible on certain occasions, especially when she was in prayer or in ecstasy, and to certain persons, among whom were Father Angiolo Diacceto, and Father Vincenzo da Fivizzano, besides many of the nuns.

Although the Lord did not allow her to suffer any temptations against chastity, she fled from all occasions which might inspire the smallest impure thought, and was ever averse to allowing her body either delicacies or repose, keeping it in the midst of the thorns of rigid penitence. She always hid herself, if obedience and the obligations of her offices allowed it, when she was likely to see or be seen by men ; for example, once when a strange father was to come with their confessor to a procession in the monastery, in order to see her, she heard of it, and begged sister Lucia Rilli da Poppi, the lay sister who was in charge of the doves, to shut her up in the dovecote, that she might be safely hidden ; and God showed how pleasing this conduct was to Him, by raising her to her usual ecstasies, and causing the doves to encircle her head like a crown, in which position her guardian, sister Maria Maddalena Strozzi, the lay sister, and

some more nuns who came to behold this prodigy found her; and she seemed so beautiful and resplendent, that she was more like an angel than a mortal woman. When she awoke out of her ecstasy, she said, "Do you see these little doves, they have all come round me," and returned joyfully to her cell.

She was equally exact in her observance of the rule of St. Augustine and the constitutions of the Third Order, and never failed to assist in choir by night or by day, and in the refectory, unless she was hindered by her ecstasies, by obedience, or by illness. She preserved perpetual silence, only speaking when her office of superioress obliged her, for her mind was always raised to God, and her mouth employed in vocal prayers.

She was most rigid in abstaining from meat on the days when it was prohibited by the rule, and when she had received a command from God to abstain from meat, and things made with meat, she never touched them more. In fact, she was most precise in observing the smallest clauses of the rule, though they do not bind under sin, and her example gave great edification to all the other nuns, and led them to correct themselves, and be more faithful to it for the future. Her continued admonitions on this point, both in ecstasy and out of it, which she made in the names of Jesus and of Mary, and ended by saying, "Daughters, you must treasure up the things that Jesus and His most holy Mother have told you," contributed to produce this effect;

and further, whenever the nuns asked for any advice, she instructed them to observe the constitutions, and to be humble and obedient to their superiors.

She showed the greatest repugnance to go to the grate before she was superioress, frequently concealing herself to avoid it, as we have described; and after a life of the most perfect obedience to the Constitutions, and an ardent zeal for their observance, she rallied all her energy on her death-bed, to recommend the nuns to keep them with regularity.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE SAINT'S PROFOUND HUMILITY.

ALTHOUGH the deepest humility is conspicuous in all the actions of Catherine that we have hitherto related, because she ever united a total contempt for herself to her burning charity; it is necessary to dwell particularly on the former virtue, at the same time, taking care not to repeat what has been said before.

She entertained such a low opinion of herself, that she thought she was unworthy to wear the habit of her holy religion, and used to say from her heart, "I have given a great deal of trouble and annoyance to this monastery, and I believe that if the nuns had to admit me now they would refuse to do so." She was asked by a

person who was in her confidence, if she really thought so, and replied: "I believe it firmly, because I have brought nothing but vexation and annoyance to the nuns."

She attributed the trials and tribulations of the monastery, and of the whole world, to her sins, saying, that she was the greatest and most miserable sinner in existence, and this idea grew so strong, that she very often called herself the scandal of the universe, especially when she heard that her ecstasies caused a great deal of disturbance in the monastery. She was accustomed to utter these humble sentiments when she was in ecstasy, and to say to God, "Thou knowest, that both in the world and in religion, I have been always full of iniquity, yet I may say with certainty, that I have never done any thing that I thought would offend Thee, not by my own strength, but because Thou hast guided and preserved me from sin, whom Thou knowest to be more inclined to evil than any of Thy other creatures." Thus, the greater and more signal were the favours which Heaven conferred upon her, the more she feared that they would be despised, being found in a person so vile, and full of imperfections, in fact, a vessel of sin and foulness, as she said herself. Her great humility led her to fly from everything that might be a motive of vain glory, one of the most powerful of which is, without doubt, personal credit, and her letter to St. Philip Neri shows how much she dreaded it; the autograph of this letter is preserved by the Fathers of the Oratory at Chiesa Nuova.

"JESUS, MARY.

"It mortifies me to think, that you, who are continually occupied in doing great things, for the glory of God, should have written to me, a vile woman, and a miserable sinner. May God reward your great charity. I asked God to give me health wherewith to serve Him this Lent, and He heard me, and all my ailments disappeared at once, but I do not appear to have deserved it, for I have done nothing since. However, I have applied all my actions for you, and have prayed His Divine Majesty to cure you, and to preserve your health, because you are so much needed by the Church. Have the goodness to pray to Jesus for me, that I may not throw away by my own fault, the graces which he gives me every hour. Live happy as to your end, for God, who is most just, cannot deny the reward of Paradise to a servant who has been so faithful as you have been all your life. Prostrate on the ground I ask your holy blessing.

"Your unworthy daughter, Sister Catherine,
a sinner at the feet of Jesus. "Farewell."

Some more words follow, but age has rendered them illegible.

She always spoke and wrote in this way, and took the lowest offices, especially in the infirmary, as we have related, to show, by her works, that she was the vilest person in the monastery.

When it was her turn to read any thing, in choir, or in the refectory, she was in the habit of

asking one of the nuns beforehand, frequently junior to herself, to see if she could do it right. She conversed more willingly with those of low and humble condition, than with greater and more illustrious persons. Hence it was impossible for her to hear herself praised, or called a saint, with patience and quietness, for instance: once when she was sub-prioress, she was standing at the door, giving some orders to the stewards, and a poor countrywoman, who had come to be cured of the dropsy, had the good fortune to find her there. She did not know her, and told her to call the saint, but Catherine could not contain her humility, and answered: "Saint, indeed, saint! all the nuns are good to a certain degree, but there are no saints here, the saints are in Paradise," and having said this she locked the door. But Sister Lena Nardi, the Porteress, and other nuns who happened to be there, awakened her charity by begging her at least to give her blessing to the poor woman, lest she should go back disappointed, and Catherine opening the door again, called the sick woman, and made the sign of the cross on her forehead, telling her to go into the church, and recommend herself to St. Vincent, from whom she would obtain her cure, which she did, as the servant of God immediately began to pray for her.

The Lord sometimes revealed the evil state of the souls of others to her, that she might assist them with her prayers and penances, and showed her that it was those sins which had nailed Him to the cross, and caused His passion, which made

her burst into a flood of tears, and her grief was increased by thinking of herself, and reflecting that she wept for the sins of others, when she ought not to have ceased for an instant from lamenting her own.

The great concourse of people who came from Prato, Florence, and other parts of Tuscany to speak to her, gave extreme pain to her humility, and unless she had been prevented by obedience, she would generally have hidden herself. Once when she had a presentiment that some ladies were coming to see her, she concealed herself behind a bush of fennel in the garden, and another time in the wardrobe where the silk was kept, in which the nuns subsequently found her in an ecstasy, and lastly, in the dovecote, as has been described.

When our saint found that the concourse of people who came to see her in her ecstasies did not diminish, but, on the contrary, increased, and that the superiors could not refuse leave to many great personages who wished to see her to enter the monastery, because there was no enclosure observed in those days, she told her guardian that she had prayed the Most High with great fervour, either to take her out of the world or to cause her long ecstasies of twenty-eight hours, and the appearance of her stigmata, ring, and other favours to cease, and not to allow her to speak when she was in ecstasy, lest they should write down her words, and ended by begging the help of her prayers. She was frequently heard to express these sentiments in the follow-

ing manner, whilst she was in her ecstasies :
“ O my Spouse, veil these gifts which Thou hast given me, and cover them from the eyes of others, or hide me in the earth : I do not say this because I wish to conceal Thy gifts and graces, but because I think that it seems dishonourable to Thy Divine Majesty to have placed them in such a vile creature.” Another time she said, “ O Jesus, my love, I beseech Thee to take away Thy visible gifts from me, for I cannot bear them to be seen any longer in such a vile creature ; I cannot, O Lord, endure such confusion any more. Thou art able to console me, and what does it cost Thee to do it ? Thou knowest what a heavy cross these visible favours are to me ; give them, therefore, to another, and I will not fail to love and serve Thee every moment, if Thou dost continue to give me Thy grace, without which I cannot do anything, and with which I can do everything.” Believing herself utterly unworthy of being heard, she begged the nuns to obtain this from the Divine clemency with their prayers. The feelings of her superiors who found that the ever-increasing crowds who came to see her, particularly on Friday, was no small disturbance to the quiet and holy retirement of the monastery, coincided with hers, and they ordered the nuns to pray fervently that God would remove His evident favours ; in the confidence that He would hear them, as He had heard the Blessed Gertrude, Helena of Hungary, and Lucy of Narni, and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, when He took away

the outward signs of their ecstasies, stigmata, rings, and crowns of thorns, with which He had favoured them.

After some time the Lord heard the prayers of His servant and the nuns, and from the year 1554, her long ecstasy never returned, although she continued to experience it mentally, and to have the shorter ecstasies as usual, nor did the stigmata or ring disappear, but were visible after her death. The numbers and curiosity of the people who came to see her ecstasy on Thursday and Friday, were diminished by the cessation of it, and the monastery was freed from the importunity of the nobility who wished to enter it in order to see her, and the only trouble which remained, which was a great one to her humility and love of retirement, was that she had to listen to a great many people who came to tell her all their sorrows and afflictions, in the hope of being relieved by her prayers. She would not have done this, unless she had been constrained by obedience, and this audience was one of the heavy crosses which she was obliged to suffer for the rest of her life.

Another heavy cross was imposed upon her humility when her superiors obliged her to accept the office of sub-prioress, which they did because they could no longer resist the pressing instances of those who came to speak to her, and in her quality of sub-prioress it was her duty to go with the prioress to the grate or to the door, so that every one had the consolation of seeing and speaking to her. This was done in the year 1547,

when she was only in her twenty-sixth year, contrary to the custom of that monastery, where only the nuns most advanced in years are elected to this office. She, who with all her power fled from the honours of this world, beheld her promotion with real anguish, and begged her Divine Spouse with the greatest earnestness to free her from the burthen, but she was not heard ; and on the other hand, she showed herself more worthy of it every day, by her rare prudence and exact observance of the rules and constitutions, and the zeal that she showed in causing them to be observed by all the others. These virtues were remarked by the nuns, and they made her superioress for the remainder of her life, which lasted forty-four years, electing her first sub-prioress and then prioress, which last post she filled seven different times, in spite of her strong repugnance and the feeling of her unworthiness, and her fear of some omission that might displease her Divine Spouse, and of giving a bad example to her subjects. But God, to whom her goodness was well known, and who preserved it by His grace, that she might become a true mistress and model to all, comforted her and encouraged her to accept this charge, and not to object when it was imposed upon her by obedience, so she received it in silence without changing any of her humble ways. When she had to give an order, she did it with so much love and benignity, that her subjects became enamoured of obedience, and such was the sweetness and gentleness with which she corrected them, that her reproofs were agreeable to

all, and yet she could not bear to let a whole day pass without consoling those whom she had reproved with loving words. Sometimes she went so far as to beg their pardon, and explained to them how she had given them a penance in order to lighten the pains of purgatory which they had deserved by their faults, and her gentle advice always made them perform their penances with good will, and correct their imperfections while their wish to be governed by her was increased. And even when she was superioress, she employed herself by preference in the lowest and most humble offices of the monastery, and esteemed it an injury if she was prevented from doing so by any of the nuns, for it was her greatest pleasure to serve every one. She never formed a resolution without consulting the nuns, and willingly deferred to the opinion of the most experienced; she was always frightened when she had to speak in public, believing herself incapable of putting two words together; it distressed her greatly to hear herself praised, and she reprimanded whoever did so. She strictly forbade the nuns to talk about her spiritual gifts and ecstasies, and because she had heard that some of the nuns had committed to writing a great many facts of her life, about her ecstasies and the sermons that she made during them, she secretly sought for these notes one day in all the cells, and the most secret recesses of the monastery, and when she found them she put them all into a bag which she took to Sister Taddea, the lay-sister who baked the bread, and commanded her to burn it in her pre-

sence, saying, "Burn these writings at once, for woe to us, if they are discovered." The bread was taken out of the oven, and when the lay-sister had put the bag into it, Sister Catherine stirred it with the poker, lest the smallest fragment should remain unburnt. The nuns' sorrow when they were informed by the lay-sister of this circumstance is hardly credible, for they were thus deprived of the best and most curious information about her ecstasies, and all her saintly actions.

But it was not the intention of the Divine Providence that all these notices of her life should be lost, and although in her humility she burnt a great number, enough remained in still more hidden corners to furnish materials for some memoirs which were written before the processes of her life were instituted, and accounts of the sermons and discourses she made in her ecstasies, though a great many facts were entirely concealed by her own efforts, which tended to keep all her ecstasies, raptures, and heavenly privileges, unknown to the world, lest a door should ever be opened to vain thoughts in her heart ; and she said, with reference to this, in one of her ecstasies, "Thou knowest that through Thy grace, not even the first movements of vanity have arisen in my heart, nor shall they ever arise, because Thou hast laid Thy hand upon it."

CHAPTER XV.

OF THE HEROIC MANNER IN WHICH THE SAINT EXERCISED THE FOUR CARDINAL VIRTUES.

It would be impossible, even in the most summary manner, to relate St. Catherine's virtues one by one, without forgetting how small a space is allowed to a mere compendium, therefore we shall only touch upon them.

If we consider the constancy and fortitude with which she retired from the world to shut herself up in a poor cloister, and how much was necessary to oppose the will of her parents, we shall see that the virtue of Prudence, which regulates all the others, by illustrating the intellect, and directing the will in the choice of those means which are best adapted to the attainment of eternal happiness, reigned in Catherine's mind when she was a child, and her exactness in observing not only the Divine precepts, but also the vows and constitutions which she professed, showed that it continued to rule her actions during her whole life.

She not only displayed the utmost prudence in the direction of her own conduct, but she guided others by her advice, her prayers, and exhortations, with so much wisdom, that an immense number of persons of every rank and con-

dition, both ecclesiastical and secular, came to the monastery to recommend themselves to her prayers, and consult her, both as to the means of saving their souls, and of conducting the most important affairs, which always prospered when they adhered faithfully to her advice, but whenever they deviated from it they fell into great affliction.

On account of her singular prudence which far exceeded her years, the nuns thought that they would make her sub-prioress, and then prioress, while she was still very young. Catherine opposed this promotion with all her strength, and begged the general not to confirm her election, as is required by the rules of the order, or to exempt her from being obliged to obey the prior and provincial, who required her to accept these dignities, but always in vain, for although the general sometimes granted her the desired permission, the nuns exerted themselves so energetically about it, that he retracted the exemptions, and she was again compelled to become prioress of the monastery. In this office she governed it more by her example than by her orders, treating all with equal love; she waited upon the sick, helped those who were in want, comforted the pusillanimous, admonished the tepid to be more diligent in the service of the monastery, and was so compassionate towards all, that they saw that she thought herself more happy in serving them all than in commanding; and, in fine, carried out with all sweetness and prudence that precept of the rule of St.

Augustine, which is prescribed to the Order of Preachers, that the superior, "*appetat potius amari quam timeri.*"

When she was prioress she wished that all her subjects should be alike in their life, and in their food and clothing; she endeavoured to keep up a great simplicity in their actions, and was a great enemy to affectation or research in speaking. She never seemed wearied by the applications that were made to her by her subjects, but listened to them with the greatest patience; and, as monastic prudence recommends, allowed them every indulgence that was consistent with the modesty of a religious life.

When she was obliged to speak in public, she did so with great reluctance, and at the same time with modesty and gentleness, never overlooking the transgressions which she saw or knew of; she did the same in her ecstasies, sometimes addressing her subjects in the person of God, sometimes in that of the most Holy Virgin, and of St. Dominic, according to the festivals which were kept at the time, so that the nuns listened to her and corrected their faults with pleasure.

But her prudence displayed itself in the most striking manner in the year 1577, during her priorate, when their Dominican superiors ordered that the door between the monastery and the public church should be closed; this was the door behind which she was often accustomed to pray, that she might be less seen, and nearer to the Blessed Sacrament. Immediately she received these orders she transmitted them to the work-

men employed by the monastery, that it might be built up, but this, as soon as the circumstance was known, produced a great disturbance in the monastery, for the nuns feared that by means of this the fathers intended to introduce the rule of strict enclosure, to which they were not bound, the Third Order of St. Dominic having been exempted from it by Papal authority, expressed in two Constitutions of Julius II. This opposition reached the ears of the workmen, who reported it to the prioress and the nuns, that they might order whatever they judged most fit, and the saint, whose obedient heart was much pained by it, fearing that greater evils might arise from these discussions, suspended the execution of the order till she had spoken to them all singly, and had appeased the discord which had arisen, by advising them not to resist the commands of their superiors. Her loving exhortations produced the desired effect, and they consented to the door being closed, protesting, however, that they wished first to be assembled in chapter, and that the notes should be registered by the notary. She was obliged to accede to their request, as the prioress has not power to decide anything important without the sanction of the chapter; and not only convoked all the sisters who had received the veil, but even the novices and the lay-sisters, as they said it was a point which related to the profession of every one; their number amounted to one hundred and forty-eight, excluding herself and the sub-prioress.

As appears from the report drawn up on the

17th of April, 1577, the chapter consented to the closing of the door, "since they could not do otherwise;" and some, moreover, protested that if it was the intention of the Fathers to establish a strict enclosure, they wished to return to their homes, while some stated that they absolutely opposed this plan; and some others refused to remain any longer subject to the order of the religious, and wanted to place themselves under the jurisdiction of the Bishop, since the religious were desirous of bringing in novelties that were contrary to the profession that they had made, and to their privileges; and this they said without reflection, because they thought that it was merely the wish of the Fathers to introduce a strict enclosure, and perhaps also because they were not aware that the Fathers had sent this order in execution of the Apostolic Constitutions of St. Pius V.

Then the saint, together with her sub-prioress, said, that having received a command from the father prior of the convent to close the door, she would not disobey her superiors, but as it was a case which concerned all the nuns, she had convoked them to a chapter, and notified the matter to them, wishing that the will of each should be written down, and that she and the sub-prioress were about to ratify the command, in compliance with the vote of the chapter, that they might not be wanting in their duty towards God, and their obligations to their mothers, sisters, and daughters. This most prudent expedient of allowing the nuns to vent their feelings

in protests, restored tranquillity to the monastery, and the order was put in force without any further difficulties.

She was not less exact in observing the virtue of justice in all that concerned her; she was most punctual in fulfilling the Divine precepts, and the three vows and the constitutions, which she had promised to keep; and she sought, by assiduous prayers, holy meditations, and incessant penances, to render due thanks to God for all the singular benefits which He had conferred on her, and to preserve herself from all sin with the help of His grace, which she always humbly prayed for, that it might protect her from all the wiles of the devil, especially in her ecstasies. She said so to Father Francesco Romeo, and was often heard to pray in these words during her ecstasies: "I entreat Thee, O Lord, to prevent me from being deluded by the devil; take away his power, reveal his fraud, because I am greatly afraid of his deceits." She said this, although her obedience in making the trial of her ecstasies prescribed by her superiors, and the assurance she once received from her Divine Spouse, made her certain that she was not misled by the devices of hell. She further said, in another ecstasy, "I beseech Thee, my Spouse, to keep me under Thy especial care and protection, lest I should be deceived, for I am in great fear of the devil's stratagems, though I know that these favours come from Thy hand. Thou hast promised that Thou wilt not let me be deceived, and I am certain that Thou wilt keep Thy promise, but I am

afraid that I shall commit some fault, which will force Thee to abandon me. Oh if the nuns could see the terror that I have of falling, they would have no fear of my feeling a vain complacency in these ecstasies, for when I consider what I am, and knowing myself to be the vilest creature upon earth, I should be indeed deprived of reason if I felt vain-glory for that which not only is not mine, but of which I am unworthy." This shows how justly she attributed all the good that was in her to God, and all the evil to herself, as a most vile creature.

She was equally zealous in causing others to attribute everything that was good to God, and to observe all His precepts, and the rules of their order; and she helped them by means of counsels, alms, and exhortations to satisfy their obligations.

Her fortitude displayed itself with the greatest vigour when she was a child, in her renunciation of the goods of this world, and her choice of a cloister, where a life of poverty and austerity was led, and taught her to suffer all the troubles which came upon her, when her father refused to let her become a nun, or when she had to submit to the most minute examinations about the truth of her ecstasies, with a firm and tranquil mind.

She bore the many illnesses, which came heavily and frequently upon her, with heroic patience, and instead of giving the least sign of impatience, thanked God who sent her the great sufferings which she bore to atone for her neighbours' sins,

and those which were caused by the delicacy of her constitution. The physicians were filled with astonishment, and praised God in His creature, when they witnessed her patience, which was also remarkable in the joy of heart with which she suffered the cruel pains of her stigmata and crowning with thorns.

She heard of the death of her parents, brothers, and sisters with no less submission to the will of God; nor was she ever troubled when the nuns, who had not understood her goodness, ridiculed her as a hypocrite, or when her superiors reproved her sharply to try her; nor did her patience and fortitude desert her up to her last breath.

We might also mention the rigorous temperance through which she was contented to live upon poor and scanty food during the whole of her life.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS, PROPHECIES, AND APPARITIONS OF ST. CATHERINE.

In order to render Catherine's sanctity more wonderful, God deigned to reveal many of the secrets of futurity to her, which is a grace He is accustomed to confer upon holy souls. She predicted the death of Father Ginnesio da Lucca, which we have described, and told Margarita

Strozzi, who was married to the Commissario of Prato, Ristoro Serristoro, and Maria Maddalena Ridolfi, the wife of Roberto Ubaldini, that their husbands would die, and that the former would retire to St. Vincent's monastery for the remainder of her life, and that the latter would become a nun there, both which prophecies were verified. She assured Filippo Salviati, many years before it happened, that only three of his daughters would become nuns in this monastery; and informed Maria Riscoli, Maria Cini, and Maria Barducci, when they were children living in their father's house, that in process of time they would take the veil in this monastery; and also predicted that Vincenza Monaldi would marry, and would give all her children to God, which was verified by the event, for of her three daughters and two sons, two daughters became nuns in the monastery which is called di Folignio at Florence, and the other in St. Vincent's monastery, while the two sons became religious of the Order of St. Dominic.

She consoled Alessandra Nerli, the wife of Averardo Salviati, who had no sons, by telling her that she would shortly give birth to some, as the event proved; and she said the same with the same result to Caterina Salviati, the wife of Giovanni Niccolini who grieved for the death of her only son.

She persuaded Margarita Baroncelli to become a nun in St. Vincent's monastery, warning her that unless she did so she would have many troubles, which in effect she suffered after having

married. She also said that Marcantonio Ubal dini, who was determined to go and marry a Roman against his mother's wishes, would take a wife in Florence according to her desire, as it turned out; for when he was on the point of setting out for Rome he was reduced to the last extremity by illness, and after his recovery determined to marry in Florence as she wished to do.

When the Grand Duchess Jane of Austria, wife of the Grand Duke Francis, brought their child the Princess Mary to the monastery of St. Vincent, the saint said to her, "My little child, you will one day be queen, you will endure many tribulations, which you will overcome; but I exhort you to be devout to the most holy Mary." She was afterwards married to Henry IV. of France, and had to suffer a great deal.

She assured Sister Caterina Puccetti, a nun in St. Vincent's convent, that her mother, who was on the brink of the grave, would not die; and told Ginevra Ceffini that her husband would soon be out of danger; and they both recovered.

In the beginning of the year 1552 she foretold the death of her uncle Father Timoteo Ricci, who was then prior of the convent of St. Dominic at Perugia, and further convoked the nuns at the exact hour of the evening on which he died, and told them to pray for his soul, because he had been their confessor for many years. The nuns were surprised at this announcement, and asked how she knew that he was dead, but she only answered that she knew it for certain; and after a few days the news of his death arrived,

and finding that he had expired at the very hour in which she convoked the nuns, they saw that she must have known it by Divine inspiration.

She told Father Tommaso Cambi, Confessor of St. Vincent's, that she would be present at his death ; and we will conclude this short compendium of the many prophecies she made, with the following one, which she made on the night in which she died. She said that her brother, Vincenzo Ricci, would labour under many difficulties and trials, and begged Sister Maria Benigna Acciajoli to console him, and to tell him that she would assist him, while he should not lose courage, but should trust in God, for he would overcome all his difficulties, which was verified in process of time.

God, however, wished to render it more evident that He had given Catherine the gift of prophecy in reward for her great love towards Him, and thus she prophesied some future things which could come from Him alone, and the first time she did this was her promising Sister Margherita Ricasoli that she should feel what an act of true love of God was ; and subsequently, when she was prioress, Sister Margherita refused to accept a charge which she put into her hands unless she redeemed her promise, whereupon she said, "Never mind it, you will feel it ;" and in fact after a few days she was so inflamed with the love of God that her heart seemed consumed by love. The second time was when her sister, Maria Benigna Ricci, who was a nun in the same monastery, was at the point of death, and some

relations of Sister Maria Grazia Capponi and Sister Felice Ricasoli came to assist at their clothing, Saint Catherine, who was sub-prioress, not wishing to disturb this function by her absence, nor yet to be away from her sister in her last moments, commanded her not to die until the ceremony was over, and she could be present. After the clothing she went back to her sister, and said, "Now you may die," and then began to pray and went into an ecstasy, and her sister expired, which made it evident to the sisters who assisted, how great God's love for Sister Catherine must be since He made her worthy to command death itself which is entirely in His own hands.

The Lord not only enriched His servant with the gift of prophecy, but also gave her light to penetrate the hearts of others, which gift is most singular, inasmuch as He said He would reserve it for Himself. Catherine showed that she possessed this gift when, during her ecstasy, she saw what sign Father Nicolo Michelazzi the provincial required when he sent Sister Eufrasia Mascalconi to watch her, as we have related above; nor was this the only instance of her reading other people's hearts when she was in ecstasy, for when people asked her to obtain some favour for them while she was in ecstasy, she blessed them the same number of times as were the favours that they requested.

The nuns were well aware of her penetration of hearts when she became prioress, for she used to admonish many of them, in choir or out of

choir, not to let their thoughts wander to such and such things, but to fix them on Jesus their Spouse, so that several nuns shunned her, lest she should reprove them for their thoughts, but this was a great inducement to guard their thoughts instead of letting them wander on things that they ought not, for fear of being corrected by her.

This was the case with strangers as well as with the nuns themselves. A father of the company of Jesus once came to the grate to ask for her, and being told that she was ill in bed, said he would return another day, and they were not to mention his coming to her, which the porters obeyed; but the saint, in spite of that, called her sister Beatrice Ricci, and told her to take ten little figures of angels, which are made in that monastery, and give them from her to the Jesuit Father, who was at the grate. She did so at once, but when she got to the grate, she found that the father had gone a few minutes before. She sent the porter to call him back, and gave him the ten angels from Sister Catherine, which astonished him very much, for he had never told any one that he had come to ask her for that very number of angels.

By this supernatural light she was enabled to prevent much mischief by warning many persons not to commit that sin that they were determined to do.

In fine, she was so devoted to the assistance of souls, that every time her help was asked, even from a distance, she seeing their wants, by a

double miracle appeared to them to bring them relief. She appeared, as we have said, to Filippo Salviati, who doubted of the truth of her espousals with Jesus, and leaving him certain of it; she appeared to him again on another occasion, when she was deeply afflicted, and showed him for his greater consolation the Infant Jesus, assuring him that He would be his reward, both which facts he attested in letters which he wrote, particularly on the approach of his death, to Sister Jacopa Cini, which letters are still preserved in the monastery.

We feel also bound to relate another circumstance mentioned in those letters which Filippo himself attributed to the saint, and occurred in the following manner. He was travelling with his family to Bologna; but, while crossing the summit of the Apennines, was overtaken by such a tremendous snow-storm that he mistook the way, and lost sight of his family. In this perilous situation, surrounded by the snow, afraid of moving lest he should fall down a precipice, and afflicted by the loss of his family, he invoked the assistance of the Almighty, and heard a voice which said, "Build a church for the monastery of St. Vincent." He bound himself at once to do so, and the tempest abating, he perceived his family in the distance, and not only rejoined them, but was able to save the lives of all, and he executed his promise on his return to Prato, during Sister Catherine's life-time.

The circumstance relating to Bernardo Ricasoli was still more astonishing. When he was about

to be sent on an embassy to the Grand Duke of Bavaria, he begged his mother to recommend him to Sister Catherine's prayers, which she did, and Sister Catherine promised to comply with this request. On the day of his departure, as soon as he was without the gates of Florence, he saw a lady in the dress of a Dominican nun in the air above his horse's head, who accompanied him until his arrival at the residence of the Grand Duke, and throughout his journey home. After giving an account of his embassy, he went to Prato, to return the due thanks to Sister Catherine, whose prayers had brought about a happy termination of his affairs, and to relate what he saw on the road. On his arrival at the monastery, he saw Sister Catherine at a distance, and exclaimed, although he had never seen or spoken to her before; "This is the nun who accompanied me during my journey." He sent for her in order to thank her, but she turned off the conversation from herself with much modesty, and skill.

Father Agostino da Siena, an Augustinian, was also indebted to her for help in great danger. As he was fording a river on horseback, his horse fell down, and he would have been drowned, had not Catherine, whose aid he implored, appeared to him, and saved him. She appeared too to the Grand Duchess, Jane of Austria, wife of Francis I. of Tuscany, to comfort and assist her in her last illness, as she informed her assistants. Finally omitting the relation of many other apparitions,

tions, we shall refer the reader to her visit to St. Philip Neri in Rome, described in chapter eleven.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE MIRACLES WROUGHT BY ST. CATHERINE DURING HER LIFETIME, AND THE GREAT FAME OF HER SANCTITY.

SHE obtained from God, besides the gifts we have enumerated, the power of working miracles; her blessing alone, as we have described, cured a woman afflicted with the dropsy, restored the rotten wheat to its original soundness, healed a poor lay-sister's infectious disease of the head, and another whose complaint was so infectious, that no one dared to administer any remedies to her, and being prioress, when Sister Alessandra Velluti showed her an inveterate swelling on her arm, to exempt herself from an office which she wished to entrust her with, she replied, making the sign of the cross over her, "Go, and do as you are told, for God will assist you," and Sister Alessandra found herself perfectly cured. She freed Sister Maria Arcangiola Leoni, from an attack of erysipelas, in the same manner, adding, that she would never be troubled by it again, and she cured Castanza de Bonis of the same malady. She likewise delivered Nicolò de Bruni from an evil spirit by the sign of the cross.

In the year 1543, Maria Gualterotti, the wife of

Filippo Salviati, was reduced to the last extremity and given over by the doctors, but her husband sent to entreat Sister Catherine to pray for her, and she appeared to her and cured her.

Again, Antonio Bruni who was on his deathbed, had received the last sacraments, and was in his last agony, but Caterina Salvatici, his wife, went to St. Vincent's to recommend him to Catherine's prayers. She gave him a small written paper with directions to place it on his head, which being done he immediately recovered his health; upon which his wife went back to the monastery to thank Sister Catherine, taking with her one of her daughters who was hardly able to stand upright or to walk, to ask for her prayers, and the servant of God drew her towards herself within the monastery, touched her sides, and then said to the mother, "You tell me that this little girl is lame, but see how well and uprightly she walks," and, indeed, from that time forward she was quite well, and walked with ease to her mother's great astonishment. This miracle was approved by the Auditors of the Rota, and mentioned first of the five miracles which they adduced in their request to Urban VIII., to proceed to her beatification.

It is not to be wondered at that in consequence of her remarkable privileges and miracles, the fame of her holiness was spread, even during her lifetime, through the whole of Europe, so that besides the crowds who went to Prato to see and speak with her, the first princes of Europe sent to ask for her prayer, all calling her the holy nun.

Maria Salviati, mother of Cosmo I., who was

invested by St. Pius V. with the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany, went to Prato to see whether the reports she had heard of Catherine were true, and found her in an ecstasy. After watching her with great admiration for a long time, she told the nuns she had never seen anything so admirable in her life, for her face was so beaming with holiness that it seemed rather that of an angel than of an earthly mortal, and she advised the nuns to keep her clothes as relics. After St. Catherine had returned to her senses, she begged her to write some prayers in her book with her own hand, and desired on her death-bed that they should be preserved as relics, saying that they would certainly work miracles, because they had been written by Sister Catherine de' Ricci. Although this lady related everything she had seen at Prato to her son and to her whole court, there still remained a shade of doubt in their minds, so the next March, 1544, the Duchess Leonora of Toledo, wife of Cosmo, went there unexpectedly with other ladies and noblemen, as we have already related. (Chap. 8.)

The Grand-Duchess Jane of Austria, wife of Francis I., also went to see her with her daughter Mary, who was afterwards Queen of France, as Sister Catherine predicted to her. (Chap. 16.)

Cammilla Martelli, the last wife of Cosmo I., Bianca Capello, second wife of Francis I., Christina of Lorraine, wife of Ferdinand I., all three Grand-Duchesses of Tuscany, Vincent Duke of Mantua, and Leonora his consort, the Duchess of Ferrara, the Princess Leonora Orsini who was

married to the Duke Sforza, went to visit her; and the Duke of Bavaria sent his own son to speak to her. The King of Spain sent his ambassador to consult her upon various doubts, as was attested by the confessor of the monastery, Father Tommaso Cambi, who was present at their conference, and listened to her solution of his difficulties with great admiration.

Many also of the cardinals went to Prato for the sole purpose of seeing her, as it was commonly believed at the time, for since her death no similar dignitaries have visited the monastery. Besides the cardinals Alessandrino and Pucci, who were sent there by St. Pius, Cardinal Cervini, who was subsequently Pope, under the name of Marcellus II., Cardinal Medici, who became Pope Leo XI., and Cardinal Aldobrandini, who was afterwards Pope under the name of Clement VIII., the Cardinals Gaddi, Niccolini, Caffarelli, and Giustiniani, and many other prelates went to see her, and returned much edified by her goodness and holiness.

Such was her reputation, that the greater part of the nuns who were in the monastery at the time of her death, had chosen it on account of her holiness, and many rich persons gave large alms to help to build it, and to endow it, in order that the nuns might live in a perfect community, without having to beg for their support, as they were obliged to do when Saint Catherine entered it.

The noble Filippo Salviati spent more than 30,000 dollars on the buildings of the monastery,

because of his veneration for Saint Catherine, and out of gratitude for the benefits which he had received from her, and the Grand-Duke Cosmo used to consider this immense alms as one of the miracles wrought by Saint Catherine, for Salviati was extremely prudent and moderate in his expenses. His sons, Antonio and Averardo, imitated his generosity. Antonio Gondi left 6,000 dollars to the monastery out of admiration for the saint, for he had no daughters in the monastery, but was in the habit of going there frequently to see her. Tommaso Ginori left his great estate of Settimelo to the monastery for the same reason, upon condition that, during Catherine's life-time, the rents should be distributed in alms at her discretion. Margherita Strozzi de' Serristori gave the saint 1,000 dollars for the necessities of the monastery every time that she was elected prioress, besides the alms which she frequently gave her for poor girls. Saint Catherine was in the habit of praying continually that God would help her benefactors in their wants especially their spiritual ones.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE SAINT'S LAST ILLNESS AND HAPPY PASSAGE TO ANOTHER LIFE.

THE hour in which God had determined to reward our saint's merits with eternal glory was

preceded and accompanied by sure signs of her holy perseverance to the end. She fell ill on the 23rd of January, in the year 1590, according to the Roman reckoning, and 1589 according to the Florentine reckoning. At this time a comet was seen over the city of Prato by many of the nuns and other persons out of the monastery, which resembled a great star, much larger than the others, from which a ray fell perpendicularly upon the saint's cell. It was visible for five or six days, and was considered by the learned to be a presage of the death of the servant of God, especially as it disappeared after she expired.

She was assailed by a violent fever, accompanied by severe pains at nine o'clock in the evening, which continued until the 27th of the same month, when a retention of urine began, which complaints were principally caused by her austerities, and fifty years abstinence. The disease continued to rage, in spite of the physicians' diligence in applying remedies, for they venerated her very much, and the grief of every one was great, as they foresaw that they were about to lose her, while their admiration for her unwearied patience continually increased. She never lost the placidity of her countenance, and was always returning thanks to God, for giving her such a good opportunity of suffering, and praying that her pains might continue and increase. On the last day of the month the doctors ordered her to take some turpentine, which had frequently occasioned her great sufferings, and even put her in danger of choking; wherefore she made her confession

the evening before she was to take it, and asked for the holy Sacraments, and with tears in her eyes begged pardon of all the nuns, and endeavoured to persuade them that she had not been so good as they thought, but on the contrary, a great sinner, and a trouble to all; and she went on to exhort them to keep up the regular observance of their rule, and community life, assuring them that so long as they were exact in their obedience to the constitutions she would always pray to God for them, if, through the infinite merits of Jesus, she was allowed to enjoy Him for all eternity.

There were two small altars in the cell, over one of which was a crucifix, and over the other an image of the Blessed Virgin with Jesus in her arms, to which she walked, supported by her dear sisters, and remained a long time in prayer before each of them, ending by resigning herself to the will of God, and offering herself willingly to do whatever that blessed will had marked out for her. She implored the most Holy Trinity, who had condescended to create her after the Divine image and likeness, to show mercy to her soul, to forgive her sins, and to grant her eternal life; then she turned to the Blessed Virgin, and prayed her, the advocate and the mother of sinners, not to abandon her, but ever to help her; she begged the holy angels to protect her from the snares of the evil spirits in the last hours of her life; and she entreated the saints, especially Saint Dominic, Saint Thomas Aquinas, St. Vincent, Saint Mary Magdalen, St. Ursula,

and St. Thecla, to obtain for her final perseverance and an increase of all virtues.

After all this preparation she asked the infirmarian to divide the turpentine into five pills, and turning to the crucifix, she said, "My Jesus, I am about to take these pills in honour of Thy five most sacred wounds; and as these are given me as medicine for the body, so, O Lord, mayest Thou by Thy most holy wounds heal my soul." After these words she took the turpentine through pure obedience, although she foresaw what great suffering it would cause her.

About the time of vespers of the same day she became worse, and the nuns decided to carry the crucifix, which had sometimes spoken to her, in procession to her, from the oratory where it had been placed. As soon as she saw it she asked them to place it in her arms, and gave vent to her love by tears, and kisses, and loving words, praying at the same time for her eternal salvation. When these prayers were ended, a great noise was heard outside the cell, as if the monastery were falling down, which was considered by the nuns to have been caused by the devil's rage against our saint.

On the following morning, which was the 1st of February, the vigil of the Purification of the most holy Virgin, the doctors advised her to receive the Viaticum, for which she prepared herself by confession, and prayed for an hour, sitting upon the bed, during which time they thought she was in ecstasy, for she was motionless, and coughed at the end as she did when

she awoke from an ecstasy. She said, when she returned to her senses, "It is necessary to be resigned to the will of God," which words pierced the nuns' hearts, as they understood by them that God was about to take her from them. When she heard the sacred Viaticum approaching her cell, she rose from her bed and went forward, saying, "Behold my Jesus, let us go to meet Him;" and as soon as It entered she knelt down, supported by the nuns, who saw her face so resplendent, that it looked like an angel's, while she, all on fire with Divine love, said, "My Jesus, I thank Thee for all the favours that Thou hast done me, and art still doing me, by condescending to come to me, and by Thy most sacred wounds I commend my soul into Thy hands." She then asked the nuns' pardon a second time, particularly for having perhaps refused to satisfy their wishes, and assured them that this had not been caused by want of affection, for she loved them all equally, but only by ignorance, and she said the *Confiteor* with many tears.

She made the ordinary protest of belief, that in the sacrament there present was contained the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that she believed all that our holy mother the Roman Church believes, and received the holy Viaticum with the greatest devotion, praying that Jesus would purify her with His Precious Blood, so as to receive Him worthily: and thus she spent a long time in prayer.

She received the Sacrament of Extreme Unction in her bed, in the evening of the same day, and

when she was given the crucifix to kiss, broke out in most fervent acts of love towards Jesus, recommending her nuns to Him; and although she laboured under great pain, she sent for the postulants who had been received into the monastery to become nuns, and encouraged them to persevere; she next sent for the lay-sisters, then the novices, after these the young nuns, and lastly, the mothers, exhorting them all, according to their condition, to strict observance of their rule, with so much wisdom, that she astonished not only the nuns who were present to the number of one hundred and fifty, but also Father Tommaso Cambi, the confessor, who was there.

After these profitable warnings, she employed the remaining hours of her life in meditating upon the Passion of Jesus, as her actions and ejaculations manifested, and at the same time many of the nuns heard sweet songs, apparently sung by angelic voices, the burden of which was, as far they could understand, *Veni sponsa Christi*, Come, O Spouse of Christ, which continued a quarter of an hour, at the end of which the saint stretched out her arms and placed her feet one above the other as if she were on the cross, and having closed her own eyes, as she used to do those of the nuns who died, she gave up her soul in perfect peace to her Creator, at the beginning of the 2nd day of February, which is dedicated to the Purification of Mary most holy. She lived in this world sixty-seven years, nine months, and seven days, and served Jesus her Spouse as a nun of the Third Order of Saint

Dominic fifty-four years, and governed Saint Vincent's monastery for forty-four years.

The grief of the nuns at losing such a beloved sister and venerated mother is not to be described, but their grief was partly calmed by looking at her corpse, which was shining with light, and diffused a most fragrant odour, while her face was like an angel's, and excited feelings of devotion in those who saw it. There was no change of colour, but it seemed rather the face of a virgin who was living and in the flower of her age, than one who was dead. Her eyebrows shone with a peculiar beauty, which the nuns attributed to the punctures of the crown of thorns, which were then seen by some of them, and by some secular persons.

It was impossible to distinguish what fragrance it was that proceeded from her sanctified body, but it was like that of several flowers, particularly of violets, and was perceived by the nuns before it was laid on the bier, and ornamented with flowers, according to custom; and is even now perceived by many in her cell, and round her sepulchre, and has always been considered supernatural.

When the first lamentations were over, and her body had been dressed by some of her daughters who were most familiar with her, it was carried into the interior half of the Church, where the nuns assembled, and thence transferred the next morning to the public part of the church, which was crowded with people, who came from Florence as well as from Prato, as

soon as they heard of her death, to venerate her before her burial: and the concourse was so great of people who strove to kiss her hands, to take the flowers which were placed upon the bier, and to cut off little pieces of her habit for devotion, that they were obliged to postpone the funeral for two days. At the end of them the body was brought back within the enclosure of the monastery, and placed in a leaden coffin, within another of wood, which was put in the nuns' church and walled up, and her picture placed over it, with an inscription stating that she was buried there; and her tomb may be seen from one of the gratings of the *parlatorio*, to which great numbers of strangers as well as inhabitants of Prato, drawn by the enduring renown of her sanctity, resort, as they cannot come nearer to her sepulchre, to ask various favours, and bring many tablets as a sign of the graces and miracles they receive, but these tablets are kept in a separate room, as Urban VIII. forbade any tablets being hung on the sepulchres of those who are not yet canonized.

The saint appeared after her death to many persons who were devout to her, and in particular to one of her nieces, a secular person, who was in the monastery when her body was brought back by the nuns from the public church. She saw her clothed in her habit and mantle, kneeling before the nuns' altar, with such a beautiful light on her right shoulder, that it resembled a ray of the sun; and thinking that her aunt had risen again, she wanted to rise from her knees and go

to embrace her, but she was not able; and by the time the nuns had reached the choir the vision disappeared.

At the very hour of the night in which she died, Baccio Verzoni of Prato began to make lamentations, and his wife, who was awakened by them, enquired the cause of his distress, to which he replied, that it was the death of his benefactress, Sister Catherine of Ricci, for he had just seen her ascend all glorious to heaven in a half moon. His wife tried to console him, saying that he had only had a dream, but he answered that it was a true vision, for he had not been sleeping, and at that moment they heard the bell of the monastery rung as it was at the death of a nun, which convinced them both of the fact.

She appeared, moreover, twice to Sister Theodora, a lay-sister ninety years of age, and to some of the nuns of the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, and of that of Santa Marta in Florence, and to Saint Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, who saw her ascend into heaven, as she told her confessor, Father Vincenzo Puccini; and in the year 1602 she appeared to the nuns who accompanied Monsignor Caccia, when that prelate made the visitation of their enclosure; and in the year after her death she was seen full of splendour by Sister Filippa Dardinelli, who was praying at her sepulchre, and gave her her blessing; but we omit the account of many other apparitions, for fear of wearying our readers.

All her great and eminent virtues, her ecsta-

sies, and raptures, were examined with the greatest care by Monsignor Giovanni Battista Coccini, Monsignor Filippo Piravano, and Monsignor Clemente Merlino, to whom this charge was confided by the Sagra Rota, about the year 1625, who, having also examined her miracles, joined in the supplicatory statement that she might *safely* be beatified, presented by the Rota to Clement VIII. of glorious memory; but when this Supreme Pontiff's new decrees appeared, it was necessary that the cause should be re-examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and as they were occupied by several processes which were commenced long before that relating to our saint, it was postponed until they, as well as it, had been investigated, when Benedict XIII. of holy memory proclaimed, by the following decree, that her virtues had been truly heroic.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF THE
VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,

CATHERINE OF RICCI,

NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS OF THE MONASTERY
OF SAINT VINCENT, IN PRATO.

In the presence of His Holiness Benedict PP. XIII. on the 4th day of this month, in the year 1727, a general council of the Sacred Congregation of Rites was held, in which the cause of the beatification and canonization of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, nun of

the Order of Preachers, of the monastery of Saint Vincent at Prato, was proposed for consultation by the reporter, the most Reverend Cardinal Origo—*whether the theological, as well as cardinal virtues, of the same venerable servant of God, are sufficient in this case and for the purpose of the Congregation*—and when first the consultors, then the most reverend cardinals, had given their votes on that question, His Holiness also, having heard them, thought fit to postpone the solution of it, that he might implore the aid of Heaven and Divine Light, as was customary in a deliberation of so important a nature; when he had done this most fervently during the ensuing days, he at length, on the undermentioned day, sacred to the angelic doctor Saint Thomas Aquinas, towards whom, during her lifetime, she felt a particular devotion, and by whom she had very frequently been loaded with special graces and favours, commanded, that the following affirmative answer to the proposed doubt should be published, viz., *that the virtues of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, as well theological, that is to say, Faith, Hope, and Charity, as cardinal, which are Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, and Temperance, and their respective attributes in a heroic degree had been proved, and thus, &c.* This day, 7th of March, 1727.

N. CARDINAL COSCIA.

Loco + Sigilli.

N. M. TEDESCHI, Archbishop
of Apamenus, Secretary of the
Sacred Congregation of Rites.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRACES AND MIRACLES WORKED BY GOD THROUGH
THE INTERCESSION OF SAINT CATHERINE AFTER HER
DEATH.

ALTHOUGH the life of our saint was composed of miracles, and I had almost said was one continued miracle, it is as well to describe some of the miracles which the Divine Omnipotence worked after her death in regard of her merits, that her sanctity might be more fully illustrated, and that men might appeal with more confidence to her protection.

Very many were the sick who were instantaneously cured by St. Catherine's intercession. A child named Vittoria Buonaparte, who was nearly suffocated by a bad catarrh, merely recommended herself to Saint Catherine and recovered at once. Sister Maria Giacinta Strozzi, a professed nun in Saint Vincent of Prato, was freed from an abscess in her throat, which prevented her from swallowing even a drop of liquid, when the nuns brought her the saint's mantle. When Mother Veronica Marzoppini, a nun in St. Vincent's monastery, commended herself to St. Catherine's intercession, an abscess which had festered in her thigh, burst suddenly, and left her quite well. She appeared to Pietro Buonamici, a Florentine, who invoked her while suffering from an inflammation, accompanied by a malignant fever, and told him that if he wished to recover from his mortal sick-

ness, he should promise to recite the Passion of our Lord, with the Office of the Holy Cross, and to celebrate or to have celebrated a mass of the Cross; and as soon as he had made this promise he found himself cured.

They carried the relics of Catherine to Sister Domenica Puccetti, a nun of Saint Vincent's, who had the spotted fever, and they healed her at once. When Elisabetta Dardinelli was a child she was standing at the top of a high cliff, the ground gave way under her, but as she fell she called upon Saint Catherine, and although she struck against several large stones and bushes, she found herself on her feet at the foot of the cliff without having received any injury.

The Divine power worked many other miracles through Saint Catherine's merits in Prato, and also in Florence, Lucca, and Osimo, which were recognized in the trials made by the bishops of the place, but we will confine ourselves to those which were approved by the Sacred Ruota in Rome, and by the Sacred Congregation of Rites confirmed by a Pontifical decree.

Caterina Biagini was possessed by an evil spirit, of which she gave clear signs, such as frightful contortions, and speaking different languages, especially Latin, although she did not know how to read or write; and further, in spite of frequent exorcisms, she daily grew worse, until her parents touched her with some relics of our saint, and she was thenceforward perfectly free.

In the year 1621 Sigismondo Petronio was attacked by a violent spotted fever, accompanied

with delirium, and in spite of the cares of his father, a doctor by profession, was reduced to the brink of the grave. His father, finding that human means were of no avail, had recourse to supernatural ones, and begged the nuns of Saint Vincent's to give him a relic of St. Catherine to place upon his son, which he obtained with a promise that they would recommend him to the venerable servant of God; he applied the relic to his son as soon as he returned home, and the delirium subsided, and the patient recovered his health and strength so rapidly, that this cure was considered an evident miracle by all the physicians.

In Saint Vincent's itself all the wine in the cellar was spoilt, which distressed the prioress and the nuns, inasmuch as they had not the means of buying any more, so they resolved to carry some of the relics of the venerable mother processionally to the cellar, and implore her assistance in the necessity of the monastery, and in the very moment that the procession ended the wine returned to its original quality, and even became better than it was at first in the opinion of all the nuns.

The fourth miracle, which was approved by the Auditors of the Rota, was the sudden cure of Bernardino Ceparelli, a surgeon in Prato, which was effected by touching him with our saint's head-dress, after he had been given over by the doctors, who, when they returned and expected to find him dead, found him alive and

well, and were never weary of praising the wonders of God in His saints.

The same thing happened to Sister Veronica de Ricci, a nun in the same monastery and niece of the saint, who was reduced to the extremity of her life by a violent fever, and despaired of by the doctors, and when she was in this condition the nuns brought her the cloak of her aunt, praying most fervently to her for her health, which she recovered as soon as the mantle was put on, and this so completely, that she immediately dressed herself and went to the saint's tomb to return her thanks, in spite of the reluctance of the infirmarians to allow her to do so.

Although we cannot recount all the miracles which her Divine Spouse worked, and continues up to the present time to work in her favour, we must add those which were examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and approved by His Holiness Clement XII.

The first was the cure of Sister Caterina Alessandra Bonsi, a professed nun in the monastery of Saint Vincent, who was assailed by a violent fever, which, from the diversity of its symptoms, was at first thought erratic, yet, as the evil went on increasing for several years, and as a pulsation showed itself in the region of the heart, the case was examined with greater attention by the doctor who had attended her, and by others of the first physicians of Tuscany, who had arrived on other business in the year 1725. They found that the heart was the seat of the disease, for the pulsation clearly proceeded from thence, and

extended to the great artery; and that the spurious ribs of the left side, which were above the pulsation, as well interior as exterior, were so elevated that the patient was obliged to wear a corset without bones over that part. They also noticed that her pulse was weak and intermittent, with shortness of breath, a taste of blood, which even tinged the saliva, with coldness and incipient swelling of the extremities; and consequently they concluded that the long-continued fevers which tormented the patient arose from aneurism or dilatation of the great artery, a complaint entirely beyond the reach of the medical art. Moreover, the complaint increased from day to day, and the only remedy that the doctors could suggest, was a strict regimen, and occasional bleeding when the paroxysms were most painful and dangerous, by which some relief might be afforded.

In spite of this treatment, exactly followed by the patient, she became so weak that she could not get up, but was obliged to remain sitting on the bed supported by many pillows, only awaiting, with the assistance of the confessors, a speedy death, as the doctors had foretold, and as was threatened by the almost continual faintings which took away her speech and her breath. In this state of things she recommended herself with great devotion to the intercession of the servant of God, and on the 4th of May, 1726, had the stick which she used brought to her. She applied it with great confidence to the diseased part, and unexpectedly

heard a voice within her, say, "Rise, for you are cured," whereupon she asked for her clothes in order to get up and dress herself, but the nuns, who assisted her, thought that she was delirious, and that these were the last efforts of her life, so they recommended her to remain quiet, and to make a prayer for a happy death. She answered that she wished to dress herself because she was cured, and thereupon rose without any assistance from the bed, telling them that her mama Saint Catherine had cured her. When they saw her standing upright, who was not able even to move herself in bed, they gave her her clothes, and she dressed herself, and walked about the room with a smiling and joyful face. Her confessor, who, seeing that she became more tranquil when the saint's staff was applied to the heart, had left her a few minutes before, in order to visit the other sick, returned to be present at her death; and when he saw her, to his great amazement, walking to meet him, and exclaim with great joy, "A miracle! a miracle!" he united his voice to hers to praise the omnipotence of God in His servants, as also did the doctor, who expected to find her dead.

To the great joy of every one, seeing this unmistakeable miracle, her re-acquired health lasted for four months, during which she performed all the duties of the monastery like the other nuns; but hearing her companions say that she was very pale, which was owing to the number of times she had been bled, she gradually lost her firm faith in the health she had miraculously

obtained, and asked for some more medicine, although the nuns advised her to trust in the saint, and to ask for her intercession to obtain perfect strength without having recourse to human remedies, but without effect, for she insisted on applying to the doctors, having persuaded herself that the saint had indeed restored her to health, but had left the recovery of all her strength to her care; in fact, according to her own confession, her ingratitude towards her was such that, as she justly deserved, she fell back into her former complaint, and became even worse than she had been. In addition to her former sufferings she had a most acute pain in her head and left arm, where a new dilatation of the artery manifested itself, and the swelling grew from day to day, in spite of the plasters of lead which were applied to it, to repress the inflammation. She was thus reduced a second time to the last extremity, and the doctors judged death to be inevitable, without the interposition of another miracle. In this condition the patient entreated the saint's pardon with many tears, promising that if she would condescend to restore her to health, she would not fail to correct her fault; and while doing so heard a voice similar to the first, say, "Rise, for you are healed," to which she paid no attention until this was repeated, when she leapt from the bed, saying, "I am cured, our mama Saint Catherine has done me this favour a second time." The two nuns, who had remained to attend to her when the others had gone into choir to say ves-

pers, were in amazement, and used a little force to induce her to return to her bed, but she invariably answered that she was cured, and wanted to dress in order to go and return thanks before the sepulchre of the Venerable Catherine. She showed some strength in opening a chest where her tunic was kept, without doing the slightest injury to her diseased arm, and then went alone to the saint's sepulchre; whereupon her two attendants and her sister, who had just come to the spot, began to exclaim, a miracle! a miracle! and went into choir to inform the nuns, who went in a body to the saint's tomb, when vespers were finished, and with great wonder saw her kneeling there whom they had left on her death-bed. After this miraculous cure she performed all her monastic duties, without the slightest recurrence of her dreadful malady.

Sister Elisabetta Caterina Catani, a lay-sister in the monastery of Santa Chiara of the Seraphic Order, likewise in Prato, had been confined to her bed by sciatica from the year 1720, till she was so tormented by it, that she suffered the greatest pain when they moved her in sheets or towels, as they were obliged to do. The doctors, finding that nothing gave her any relief, left off troubling her with prescriptions. At the beginning of the year 1726 she was attacked by fever, accompanied by universal relaxation and continual vomitings, and went on in this miserable state until the month of May, when the great miracle we have just described came to her knowledge, and inspired her with great

confidence in the merits of our saint, so she begged the nuns of her monastery to send for the saint's staff from Saint Vincent's, which, when she had received, she applied immediately to herself, commending herself to Saint Catherine, and fell into a tranquil sleep, which lasted all the night. She awoke only two or three times, and when she tried to turn herself she found that she was able to do it perfectly, and consequently that she had been cured, but she was then oppressed by sleep, and did not awake until late in the morning, when she said to a nun who was attending on her, that she was quite well, and would go to the refectory with the others. She dressed herself without any assistance, and knelt down to thank God and our saint for her newly restored health, and then walked about, to the great surprise of the nuns, who joined with her in returning thanks to God for the miracle He had worked through Saint Catherine's intercession upon this lay-sister. She henceforward did all the work with the other lay-sisters, such as cooking, baking, and the like, without feeling the slightest pain from her old complaint.

These two miracles were brought before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and after having undergone fresh trials, were confirmed by its authority, and published as true miracles by the following decree of the Sovereign Pontiff Clement XII.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION OF
THE VENERABLE SERVANT OF GOD,
CATHERINE OF RICCI.NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS IN THE
MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT AT PRATO.

In the presence of our most holy Lord, Pope Clement XII., on Tuesday, the 22nd of April, of the current year, 1732, a general Congregation of the Sacred Rites was held on the Florentine cause of the venerable servant of God, Catherine of Ricci, a nun of the order of St. Dominic, in the monastery of St. Vincent at Prato; and the most reverend Cardinal Origo, the Reporter, proposed the following doubt:—*Whether the miracles, and which of them, were sufficient for the case under consideration.* His Holiness, therefore, having heard the desires of the consultors, the most reverend cardinals judged fit to postpone his decision, according to custom, that he might implore a fuller share of heavenly light to assist them in such an important deliberation. Having executed this, on the above-mentioned day, sacred to St. Catherine of Sienna, a virgin of the same order, with whose name the aforesaid servant of God was adorned, and towards whom, during her lifetime, she bore a singular devotion, owing to the special favours which she received at her hands, he summoned the most reverend Father D. Cavalchino, Archbishop of Filippi, and me,

the undersigned secretary of the same sacred congregation before him, and commanded the following answer to be published, namely:—That besides the nine already published, the tenth miracle is proved; viz., the instantaneous cure from aneurism of Sister Caterina Alessandra de' Bonsi, a professed nun of the monastery of St. Vincent of Prato, of the order of St. Dominic, and also the eleventh; viz., the instantaneous cure of Elisabetta Cherubina Catani, a lay-sister of the monastery of St. Clare at Prato, of Ischia, as miracles of the third class, &c. Thus, &c. Given this 30th day of April, 1732.

A. F. CARDINAL ZONDADARI, Pro-Prefect.
Loco + Sigilli.

N. M. FEDESCHI, Archbishop of Apamenus,
Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE EVENTS WHICH TOOK PLACE AFTER CATHERINE'S BEATIFICATION.

IN the year 1733, which immediately followed our saint's beatification, the prioress and the nuns of the venerable monastery of St. Vincent of Prato, presented a humble supplication to the Congregation of Rites to be allowed to transfer her sacred body from their private church to the public one, which was granted by the instructions

of Monsignor, the Promoter of the Faith, and the decree of permission was sanctioned by Clement XII., of holy memory, on the 19th of September, of the same year. The Lord was pleased after the recent beatification, to grant new favours and miracles to the prayers of this His saint, and the postulator of her cause made a request through the late Cardinal Origo, the exponent of it, to have a commission for the resumption of the cause signed, which was graciously conceded by the Sacred Congregation on the 11th of December, 1733, and remissory letters were sent to the bishops and ordinaries of the city of Augusta, situated in the Valley of St. Catherine, in the diocese of Costanza, and of the city of Florence, in the year 1734, authorizing them to commence apostolic processes upon her miracles.

The processes were accordingly made, and sent to Rome, where they were opened with the accustomed forms, and ratified by the Sacred Congregation, and by our holy Lord, Benedict XIV., on the 25th of January, 1741; and after the ante-preparatory Congregation held before the most Eminent Cardinal Lercari, exponent of the cause, on the 8th of January, and the preparatory one, held on the 19th of November, 1743, the doubt was proposed in presence of His Holiness:—*An, et de quibus miraculis constet post indultam eidem Beatæ Venerationem in casu &c. Whether the miracles, and which of them, after the beatification, are sufficient for the case in question, &c.*

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE MIRACLES WHICH WERE APPROVED OF FOR
THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED CATHERINE OF
RICCI.

THE two miracles we are going to relate were the most evident, and the most clearly proved of all those which God worked through St. Catherine's intercession after her beatification.

The first happened in Florence, in the year 1733, to Maria Clemenza Staccioli, a girl of that city. Beside the various diseases which obliged her for several years to resort to medical advice, in 1725 she was surprised by a swelling which appeared first in her jaw, and then in her right breast, with very bad symptoms, and great pain, becoming about the size of an egg, and obliged her to disclose it. The doctor at first feared that it might be of a cancerous nature, but having noticed the sharp pain and the straining which the patient suffered whenever she moved, the erosion and universal inflammation of the breast, the strange and unequal hardness in different places, and the livid colour of others; and moreover that in spite of the suppuration of abundant matter and blood, which he procured, the pain and the other bad symptoms were not at all diminished, and that a remarkable quantity of worms appeared on the surface and round the edges of the apertures; the physicians no longer doubted, but pronounced it a genuine ulcerated

cancer. In spite of all remedies, it increased furiously, and spread through the glands and muscles, and even through the bones of her breast, and broke into seven deep holes, which reduced themselves in time into two very wide, deep, and callous ones, which communicated with each other; and in this miserable condition the suffering girl lived for eight years, until the month of June, 1733, she was attacked by a violent fever with delirium, heat, and violent agitation, which reduced her to the last extremity in a few days, and it was thought necessary to fortify her with the last sacraments of the Church. Towards the middle of the night, she heard her confessor mention the approaching festivals which were to be made in honour of the blessed Catherine of Ricci, and also the relic of a straw hat of hers, which was in the possession of the noble family of Ricci, and she conceived hopes of being cured by the intercession of the Blessed Catherine, and begged her confessor, who was also her parish priest, to bring the relic to her. On the following day he complied with her desire, and brought her the relic before bringing her the Viaticum, and placed it on the breast of the dying girl, exhorting her to put a firm trust in the merits and intercession of the Blessed Catherine, which the patient at the same time implored with great fervour. Wonderful to relate, she was freed that instant from the dreadful headache, fever, and pain in her right arm, and ulcerated breast; and she opened her eyes, and sat up in the bed, saying that she was perfectly

cured, and able to get up, which the priest would not allow, but desired her to wait till the doctor's arrival, for greater security. He came after dinner, and found her as has been described, to his extreme astonishment. About two hours after the application of the relic, the patient wanted to examine her breast, and found that the mouth nearest her right arm, which gave her the most pain, was closed and healed, while the other from which she suffered less remained open, which she showed to the doctor the next morning, on which she rose thoroughly cured, and was able to use her arm, and do all the business of the house. The next autumn she satisfied her desire of going to Prato, to return thanks to the Blessed Catherine, and to ask the nuns of St. Vincent's for a little of the oil of the lamp which burned before the saint's sepulchre, in hopes that it would complete her cure, and heal the remaining wound. She obtained the oil, and returned to Florence, and the same evening anointed the last ulcer: she felt in the night that the lint had come out, and when she re-anointed herself in the morning, she found that she was perfectly healed, and what is more singular, the wound was cicatrized, which fact was ascertained and recognized in several examinations of it made by professors in the course of the next two years; nor did she ever again suffer the smallest degree of pain or annoyance in that part.

The second miracle which they recognized was worked upon Sister Maria Maddalena Fabri, a

professed Dominican nun of the venerable monastery of Saint Catherine in the city of Augusta. This nun suffered from violent convulsions for five years, at the end of which she was delivered from them by natural remedies, or rather by fervent prayers to God and His saints, but her health was still extremely weak, and she lost it entirely soon after in a new and violent illness. In the autumn of 1729 she became a prey to pain in the joints, which was so severe, that she could not move from one place to another without the greatest difficulty and suffering. The physicians and surgeons who were called in, laboured for two years to relieve her from such an obstinate malady, but without success; on the contrary, the pain increased so much that she could scarcely drag herself about the monastery even with assistance of crutches; and whenever she tried to kneel her nerves cracked with a great noise, and the doctors gave up the case as hopeless. Her sufferings increased daily, and the nerves of the feet and thighs became contracted, so that for two months the poor religious was utterly unable to walk, and was obliged to remain immoveable upon a bed or a chair.

Thus she existed until the 9th of November, 1732, on which a solemn mass and Te Deum were sung in thanksgiving for the decree of the beatification of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci, and the sick nun got herself carried in an armchair to the oratory adjoining the church, but while assisting at high mass she was surprised by such violent pain in

both her sides, that she thought she could bear it no longer. When mass was over the *Te Deum* was sung, and the sick nun, filled with a lively faith, implored the Blessed Catherine's intercession most earnestly, for the recovery of her health. She had not quite finished this invocation, before she felt herself perfectly well, and rising in haste from her seat knelt down on the *priedieu*, then prostrated herself on the ground in prayer, and getting up without assistance, walked round the oratory, and lastly ran to the choir to make known to her sisters the miracle which God had worked in her through the saint's merits. They were filled with admiration and surprise on seeing her walk freely to and fro without any help, and praised God who is wonderful in His saints; and they returned together into choir to sing the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving before the image of the Blessed Catherine.

The two aforesaid miracles were cited in the General Congregation held before His Holiness on the 24th of March, 1744, and approved by him in a decree bearing date the 26th of May, 1744.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED CATHERINE OF RICCI.

PROFESSED NUN IN THE VENERABLE MONASTERY OF
SAINT VINCENT OF THE CITY OF PRATO, OF
THE ORDER OF PREACHERS.

When the commission for the resumption of the cause of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci was

signed, and the validity of the processes undertaken by apostolic authority recognized, this doubt was proposed in the antepreparatory congregatory on the 8th day of January, and the preparatory one, held on the 19th of November, 1743—*Whether the miracles, and which of them, worked since the permission to venerate the Blessed Catherine was given, are sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question.*—The same doubt was again proposed in the General Congregation held before His Holiness on the 24th day of March of the current year. Among the miracles which were there cited and discussed, the two which were received with the greatest applause were the cure of Maria Clemenza Staccioli, a Florentine, and of Sister Mary Magdalen Fabri, a nun of the Order of Preachers of St. Catherine's monastery in the city of Augusta. The former was delivered by the intercession of St. Catherine, to whom she commended herself with great fervour and devotion, from a cancer abounding with worms; having first seven, latterly two mouths or cavities, which tormented her right breast for eight years, and at last brought her to the point of death, so that it was considered fit to fortify her with the Sacred Viaticum. The latter had been ill for three years, and afflicted by a severe arthritic disease, which had its seat in her knees and thighs; she had left off the use of medicine, which was of no avail, and was shortly rendered unable to move. She was carried in the arms of the other nuns to the smaller choir of the church on the day when the hymn *Te Deum*

Laudamus was sung in thanksgiving for the beatification of the Blessed Catherine of Ricci; her disease and sufferings increased, but when she commended herself, with all the devotion of which she was capable, to the Blessed Catherine, she was not only suddenly freed from pain, but finding herself able to kneel, she genuflected immediately, and at once began to walk about the monastery, having recovered all the strength that she had before she was first attacked by the illness.

Therefore, our most holy Lord, having received the suffrages of the consultors and heard the desires of the cardinals, did not decree anything in the General Congregation held on the aforesaid 24th day of March, but postponed his decision till he had time to implore God's light and help. When he had performed this, some time after, on the same day that he had offered the holy sacrifice in the interior chapel of the church of Santa Maria de Vallicella, on the altar under which the body of St. Philip Neri reposes, he summoned the Rev. Father, the Promoter of the Faith, and me the undersigned secretary of the Sacred Rites, and stated that, having undertaken the continuation and promotion of the cause, and having examined it a second time in private after the General Congregation, he had some difficulty in approving the second of the above-mentioned miracles; and he went on to inform us that he doubted whether the miracle in question could be truly said to have taken place after the permission of the

eneration, as it happened on the 9th day of November, 1732, which was fourteen or fifteen days before the solemn beatification, performed in the Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles, on the 23rd day of November of the same year ; but, nevertheless, he had at length come round to the opinion that it had truly taken place after the permission to venerate, for though the Brief was not yet published, nor the solemnity of the beatification enacted in the Vatican Basilica, the Sacred Congregation of Rites had decreed that the beatification could be safely proceeded with and the Brief of beatification had been signed on the 1st day of October by the hand of Clement XII. his predecessor ; and moreover, because it had been so decided in the cause of Saint John of the Cross, as related by His Holiness in his work on the *Canonization of Saints*, Book II. chap. xxi., num. 11.

Having disposed of this difficulty, the same most holy Lord further stated that he had hesitated to approve the same miracle, although he allowed that the instantaneous cure, together with the recovery of health, had been amply proved, because he did not think that it was proved in the same way that she had persevered in health, that she had no other disease, and that she had not merely changed from one disease to another ; and he said, that in order to clear up this difficulty he had taken particular pains to discover the truth, as was done in a similar case by Clement XI. of holy memory, as we read in the above quoted work of His Holiness on the

Canonization of Saints, Book III. cap. v. num. 14 ; namely, by sending to the bishop of Augusta, and giving him instructions to take proper means for the discovery of the truth, and added, that he had learnt what he wished from the replies which had been transmitted to him, namely, that the nun still lived, that she still enjoyed perfect health, and since her miraculous cure had never suffered from any disease, except, after the lapse of four years, a slight pain in the reins, which only annoyed her a short time ; the witnesses to this being the physician of the monastery and all the nuns. These facts had been gathered by His Holiness from the answers faithfully given to the heads of his instructions, which were returned to him by an ecclesiastic well known to His Holiness, deputed for this purpose by the bishop of Augusta.

He concluded by asserting that the difficulties having been removed, he wished to delay no longer, and had selected this day, dedicated to St. Philip Neri, in consideration of the spiritual and intimate friendship which existed between this saint and the Blessed Catherine of Ricci during his lifetime, as the following words of the Bull of his canonization witness : Cum in Urbe maneret tunc in humanis agentem Catharinam Ricciam sub regula S. Augustini Monialem Prati in Hetruria commorantem longo temporis spatio est allocutus. Thus on this day he declared that “ *The miracles before us, both of the first and second, as well as of the second and third class, are sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question,*

i. e., of Canonization. And so His Holiness decreed, and commanded that the decree should be published. This day the 26th of May, 1744.

C. CARDINAL DE MARINIS, Prefect.

Loco ✕ Sigilli.

T. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM,
Secretary.

Finally, this doubt having been proposed in the General Congregation of Rites before the same Sovereign Pontiff, on the 22nd of September, 1744:— *Whether, after these two miracles have been approved, it is safe to proceed to the Canonization of the Blessed Catherine*; and having received an affirmative answer from the Sacred Congregation; our holy Lord, after mature consideration, commanded on the 6th of October, of the same year, that the following decree for the solemn canonization of the Blessed Catherine should be issued and published.

FLORENTINA.

OF THE CANONIZATION OF THE BLESSED

CATHERINE OF RICCI,

PROFESSED NUN OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS, IN
THE VENERABLE MONASTERY OF ST. VINCENT'S,
IN THE CITY OF PRATO.

In the General Congregation of Rites, held before our most holy Lord, Benedict XIV., on the 24th day of March, of the current year, the cause of the canonization of the Blessed Catherine

rine of Ricci was brought forward by the most reverend Cardinal Lercari "*super dubio*:" *Whether the miracles, and which of them, will be sufficient in the case and for the purpose in question.* His Holiness approved two out of the three miracles, which were there cited and examined, having happened after the formal beatification of the Blessed Catherine, as is shown by the decree published on the 26th day of May, of the current year. Subsequently, on the 22nd day of the past month of September, a General Congregation of Rites was again assembled in the presence of our most holy Lord; the last doubt which remained to be investigated was proposed by Cardinal Lercari: *Whether, after these two miracles having been approved, it is safe to proceed to the Canonization of the Blessed Catherine*; and all the members of the Congregation, who had the power of voting, answered in the affirmative. His Holiness deferred giving the solution of the doubt until his own prayers, and those of others, had sought for light from the Father of lights, to assist him in such a grave deliberation; which, having done with great fervour in the ensuing days, on the undermentioned day, sacred to St. Bruno, Founder of the Carthusians, after he had celebrated mass in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, he summoned before him the Rev. Father Ludovico de Valenti, Promoter of the Faith, and me, the undersigned Secretary of the Congregation of Rites, and in order to add a new honour to the Order of Preachers, he commanded in person that a decree

of the canonization of the aforesaid Blessed Catherine of Ricci should be issued and promulgated, whensoever it should take place. This day, 6th of October, 1744.

S. CARDINAL VALENTI.

Loco † Sigilli.

T. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM,
Secretary.

A CANTICLE

OF PASSAGES FROM THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, IN HONOUR
OF THE PASSION OF CHRIST OUR LORD, REVEALED
TO THE BLESSED CATHERINE OF RICCI BY THE VIRGIN
MOTHER OF GOD.*

Amici mei et proximi mei adversum me appropinquaverunt et steterunt.

Traditus sum et non egrēdiebar, oculi mei languerunt præ inopia.

Et factus est sudor meus, sicut guttæ sanguinis decurrentis in terram.

Circumdederunt me canes multi, consilium malignantium obsedit me.

Corpus meum dedi percutientibus; et genas meas vellentibus.

Faciem meam non averti ab increpantibus, et conspicientibus in me.

Quoniam ego in flagella paratus sum, et dolor meus in conspectu meo semper.

* Vid. Chap. ii.

Milites plectentes coronam de spinis imposuerunt eam super caput meum.

Foderunt manus meas et pedes meos, dinumeraverunt omnia ossa mea.

Et dederunt me in escam meam fel ; et in siti mea potaverunt me aceto.

Omnes videntes me deriserunt me, locuti sunt labiis, et moverunt caput.

Ipsi vero consideraverunt et inspexerunt me, diviserunt sibi vestimenta mea, et super vestem meam miserunt sortem.

In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum, Redemisti me Domine Deus veritatis.

Memento famulorum tuorum Domine dum veneris in regnum tuum.

Jesus autem emissâ voce magna tradit spiritum.

Misericordias Domine in eternum cantabo.

Vere languores nostros ipse tulit et dolores nostros ipse portavit.

Ipse vulneratus est propter iniquitates nostras, attritus est propter scelera nostra.

Omnes nos quasi oves erravimus, unusquisque in viam suam declinavit.

Et posuit in eo Dominus iniquitates omnium nostrorum.

Exurge quare obdormis Domine, exurge, et ne repellas in finem.

Ecce Deus salvator meus, fiducialiter agam, et non timebo.

Te ergo quæsumus Domine Jesu famulis tuis subveni, quos pretioso sanguine redemisti.

V. Miserere nostri Jesu benigne.

B. Qui passus es clementer pro nobis.

OREMUS.

Respice quæsumus Domine super hanc familiam
tuam, pro qua Dominus noster Jesus Christus
non dubitavit manibus tradi nocentium et crucis
subire tormentum. Per eundem, &c.
