

Above all things our Lord desires of us, that we be altogether perfect, to the end that we be of one same spirit with himself. Let us look and see how far distant we are from attaining this point.—S. THERESA.

The blessed father, Peter Faber, the companion of S. Ignatius of Loyola, a man greatly esteemed by S. Francis of Sales, used to think on this, that Almighty God greatly desires our spiritual advancement, to which end he made it his study to go on always advancing, and never to let a day go by without making some progress in virtue, by which means he attained a great height of perfection and a great reputation for sanctity. S. Pacomius and S. Anthony used to admire the virtues of others, to the end that they might be excited to gain them themselves. The venerable sister Mary Villani, on the festival of S. Francis, for whom she had a great devotion, had the following vision: The saint appeared to her, and conducted her to a lofty place, the most beautiful she had ever seen; in order to enter within, it was necessary to climb over four very high walls, which, as the saint declared to her, signified four degrees of perfection. He made her climb over the first wall, in which she found great difficulty, and he told her that this was the first degree of perfection, called purity of conscience, which bordereth upon angelical purity, when the soul becomes as a little child of three or four years old, and enjoys a pure and holy serenity, and does not ever think ill of the actions of others, nor cares to hear any thing of what does not belong to her proper condition, every thing else appearing to her foreign to her purpose. He then made her climb over the second wall, saying to her that he hath reached the state of purity of conscience, is rendered capable of prayer and of true love, which is the inseparable fruit of prayer; and here he discovered to her the qualities of the true lover, which are, to be pure, simple, detached, and firmly rooted in the truths of the one only God, who cannot communicate himself but to those souls which have the aforesaid purity. Then he made her climb the third wall, which is that of the cross and of mortification, saying to her that from purity and love the soul passes on courageously to take up the cross on her own shoulders, and to be crucified; and that in order to arrive at this state, it is necessary to acquire four principal virtues: to wit, a true mortification of all vices and of every earthly affection; a perfect poverty of spirit, through which one tramples under foot all temporal goods; a living death, with which dying to oneself and to all the affections of sense, one lives in a total annihilation; transformed into the image of our crucified Lord, so that one can say, "vivo ego, jam non-ego, vivit vero in me Christus." I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me. The soul having once come to this state, she appears to

herself to have an absolute sway over the world, and she supports sufferings and crosses in such a manner, that she appears to herself no longer capable of feeling them, so sweet and light are they unto her. The fourth wall, concluded the saint, is the state of true and perfect union.

I hear many speaking of perfection, but I see it practised by few; each one has his own ideas about it; some make it consist in simplicity of dress, others in austerities; some in alms deeds, others in frequenting the sacraments; some in prayer, others in passive contemplation, or in extraordinary graces; but all equally deceiving themselves, taking the effects for the cause, and the means for the end. I, for my part, know of no other perfection than that which consists in loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves. He who imagines to himself another kind of perfection deceives himself, since the whole collection of the other virtues without this love is but as a heap of stones; and if we do not enjoy quickly and perfectly this treasure of holy love, the fault arises from ourselves; because we are too backward and slow towards God, and never end with devoting ourselves entirely to him as the saints did.—S. FRANCIS OF SALZS.

Who does not see from this, that the perfection of this same S. Francis of Sales, could not but be most true and sublime, seeing that his love towards God and his neighbour was so great and so pure? The same also may be said of S. Vincent of Paul, and of many others. How truly admirable was S. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, in these two respects; to such a height had she arrived in the love of God, that, not being able to resist the excessive ardours of this divine fire, she was sometimes constrained to cool her breast with linen cloths, soaked in cold water; and so great was her love towards her neighbour, that she desired and procured his good much more than her own.

All perfection is founded upon two only principles, by attending to which, if we fulfil the daily duties of our state of life, we shall assuredly arrive at the very height and fullness of it. The first is a most complete contempt for all created things, and, above all, of ourselves; from which contempt we may derive in practice a complete detachment and forsaking of all created things, both as to the affections with a resolute determination of the will, and in reality when and where there is a necessity for that, and at the same time, above all, a complete contentment and joy whenever our Lord deprives us of the sense of his presence or of any thing else whatsoever. The second principle is a most lofty esteem of God, which easily is acquired by considering with the light of faith, how he is all-powerful, our chief good, our end, and that he hath loved us in all things both in the order of nature and of grace, and in particular that he calleth each one of us, and conducteth us with a singular vocation unto the highest degrees of perfection. From this esteem will farther spring up a promptness and a great submission of the heart, and of the whole man to the divine will, to adore it, and to accomplish all that which it wills of us to his greater glory, without any regard to our own interest, much as such a duty is even holy; and at the same time a complete conformity to the divine will, so that it be the scope of all our designs, affections, and actions; by these means the soul arriveth at union, now no longer mystical through the means of raptures and elevations of the mind and vehement affections, but solid and real and universal by means of a will sovereignly conformed to that of God, through perfect love, which urgeth us to act bravely altogether in and for God. And of this we are all capable, and to this we may all securely arrive, though infallibly not without crosses. —FRANCIS GAVIUS