

it would not be an act of piety, or worthy of praise, for any one to speak lightly of such miracles as have been honoured by the approbation of the Holy See.

But there is still another question, to which it is necessary to reply, Whether we are bound to imitate all the extraordinary actions and penances of the saints recorded in this book? Undoubtedly not: they are recorded more to excite our admiration, and to fill us with humiliation, when we reflect upon our own distance from their holiness and perfection, than to induce us to adopt a line of conduct exactly similar. The Church constantly teaches, that it would not only be imprudent, but even presumptuous, to undertake such extraordinary actions, without at least the advice of an experienced confessor, or a particular inspiration from God. We ought to avoid singularity as much as possible, and in all things to make humility and obedience our guides. But when we read of the wonderful penances of these great servants of God; when we behold how much they did to insure their title to the kingdom of heaven, how they wept and lamented over even the smallest failings, and with what rigour they chastised their innocent bodies, shall we not reflect on how very little we do to gain eternal happiness? We know, indeed, that of themselves, independent of the merits of Jesus Christ, our good works can be of no avail to our salvation, and that unless we have been justified and placed in the state of grace through his most precious passion and death, we cannot make one step towards heaven; still 'He who has redeemed us without our aid, shall not save us without our co-operation;' and, therefore, our grand aim should be to heap up as great a treasure of merits as possible, imitating the example of our blessed Lord, his sweet Mother, and all the holy saints of the heavenly court. The joys of paradise are not to be obtained but by those, who do continual violence to themselves, mortifying all their natural inclinations and desires, firmly purposing to die a thousand times, than ever to offend our Lord by a mortal sin. Those, who before their conversion have frequently offended God with grievous sins, should think on the severe penances which the saints performed for even venial sins. Ah! how that angelical youth, S. Aloysius Gonzaga wept for a few idle words which he had uttered in his infancy, before he was capable of committing a formal sin! What cruel disciplines did he not inflict upon his innocent flesh! How such considerations should humble and confound us! How little do we perform for the love of Jesus Christ, who shed the last drop of his blood for the love of us! How many saints in the Catholic Church have preserved their baptismal innocence, and have carried their white robe, according to the awful charge of our mother, the church, clean and unspotted before the judgment seat of Christ! and yet was it ever heard that any one attained this blessedness without unceasing mortification and sharp penances? If, then, these holy acts of violence be so needful for those, who by the

grace of God have always preserved their innocence, in order to maintain them in the state of grace, and to enable them to make advances in virtue; what shall we not say of those, who have fallen into repeated mortal sins after baptism, and have not been converted until perhaps late in life? Do not such considerations as these suggest any motives for holy fear and greater exertions? Our blessed Lord declares that the gate of heaven is narrow, and that few go in thereat. Why so? Because few meditate upon his life, and the lives of the saints; because men seek rather to gratify the slothful inclinations of corrupt nature, than to follow the maxims of our holy religion. I cannot conclude these few remarks, without again begging the kind indulgence of the reader, humbly entreating that he would remember in his prayers, if it be but for once, the unworthy Translator. And may our Divine Lord vouchsafe a blessing to this book; infusing into the hearts of those who shall read it, a more earnest desire to love and serve him in imitation of his holy saints.

AMBROSE LISLE PHILLIPPS.

PERFECTION.

It is necessary to begin with a vigorous and constant resolution to devote oneself entirely to God, protesting to him in a tender and affectionate manner which should spring from the bottom of your heart, that for the future you desire to belong to him without reserve; and afterwards to make frequent renewals of this same resolution.—S. FRANCIS OF SALES.

Exactly such was one of the methods much inculcated by S. Philip Neri for the acquiring of perfection, and he himself practised it frequently—the often renewing our good determinations. S. Francis of Sales from time to time practised this renewal of spirit, and always conceived from it new desires of serving God better. The venerable John Berchmans, from the first moment that he entered into the religious state, planted in his heart a real determination to become a saint; and afterwards not only kept up his pious practices and resolutions, which he had undertaken to this end, but also every day applied himself with fresh vigour to his spiritual advancement. It happened that a holy religious was once giving the spiritual exercises in Torre di Specchi at Rome, and a certain nun, named sister Mary Bonaventura, who lived a worldly life, would not be present at them: at length, after many entreaties, the father induced her, and ever at the first meditation on the end of man she was so affected, that he had scarcely finished, when she called him, and said, 'Reverend father, I desire to become a saint, and that too as soon as possible;' and having withdrawn into her cell, she wrote these same words on a piece of paper which she fastened to the foot of her crucifix, and from this moment she devoted herself with such fervour to the exercise of perfection, that when she died, eleven months after, it was judged proper to write her life.