

Selections from Interior Castle by Teresa of Avila

THE FIFTH MANSIONS CHAPTER I.

BEGINS TO TREAT OF THE UNION OF THE SOUL WITH GOD IN PRAYER. HOW TO BE SURE THAT WE ARE NOT DECEIVED IN THIS MATTER.

1. Graces of the fifth mansions. 2. Contemplation to be striven for. 3. Physical effects of the Prayer of union. 4. Amazement of the intellect. 5. The Prayer of union and of quiet contrasted. 6. Divine and earthly union. 7. Competent directors in these matters. 8. Proof of union. 9. Assurance left in the soul. 10. Divine union beyond our Power to obtain.

1. OH, my sisters, how shall I describe the riches, treasures, and joys contained in the fifth mansions! Would it not be better to say nothing about them? They are impossible to depict, nor can the mind conceive, nor any comparisons portray them, all earthly things being too vile to serve the purpose. Send me, O my Lord, light from heaven that I may give some to these Thy servants, some of whom by Thy good will often enjoy these delights, lest the devil in the guise of an angel of light should deceive those whose only desire is to please Thee.

2. I said 'some,' but in reality there are very few who never enter this mansion: some more and some less, but most of them may be said at least to gain admittance into these rooms. I think that certain graces I am about to describe are bestowed on only a few of the nuns, but if the rest only arrive at the portal they receive a great boon from God, for 'many are called, but few are chosen.' All we who wear the holy habit of the Carmelites are called to prayer and contemplation. This was the object of our Order to this lineage we belong. Our holy Fathers of Mount Carmel sought in perfect solitude and utter contempt of the world for this treasure, this precious pearl, of which we speak, and we are their descendants. How little do most of us care to prepare our souls, that our Lord may reveal this jewel to us! Outwardly we may appear to practise the requisite virtues, but we have far more to do than this before it is possible to attain to contemplation, to gain which we should neglect no means, either small or great. Rouse yourselves, my sisters, and since some foretaste of heaven may be had on earth, beg our Lord to give us grace not to miss it through our own fault. Ask Him to show us where to find it—ask Him to give us strength of soul to dig until we find this hidden treasure, which lies buried within our hearts, as I wish to show you if it please God to enable me. I said 'strength of soul,' that you might understand that strength of body is not indispensable when our Lord God chooses to withhold it. He makes it impossible for no one to gain these riches, but is content that each should do his best. Blessed be so just a God!

3. But, daughters, if you would purchase this treasure of which we are speaking, God would have you keep back nothing from Him, little or great. He will have it all; in proportion to what you know you have given will your reward be great or small. There is no more certain sign whether or not we have reached the prayer of union. Do not imagine that this state of prayer is, like the one preceding it, a sort of drowsiness (I call it 'drowsiness' because the soul seems to slumber, being neither quite asleep nor wholly awake). In the prayer of union the soul is asleep, fast asleep, as regards the world and itself: in fact, during the short time this state lasts it is deprived of all feeling whatever, being unable to think on any subject, even if it wished. No effort is needed here to suspend the thoughts: if the soul can love it knows not how, nor whom it loves, nor what it desires. In fact, it has died entirely to this world, to live more truly than ever in God. This is a delicious death, for the soul is deprived of the faculties it exercised while in the body: delicious because, (although not really the case), it seems to have left its mortal covering to abide more entirely in God. So completely does this take place, that I know not whether the body retains sufficient life to continue breathing; on consideration, I believe it does not; at any rate, if it still breathes, it does so unconsciously.

4. The mind entirely concentrates itself on trying to understand what is happening, which is beyond its power; it is so astounded that, if consciousness is not completely lost, at least no

movement is possible: the person may be compared to one who falls into a dead faint with dismay.

5. Oh, mighty secrets of God! Never should I weary of trying to explain them if I thought it possible to succeed! I would write a thousand foolish things that one might be to the point, if only it might make us praise God more. I said this prayer produced no drowsiness in the mind; on the other hand, in the prayer (of quiet) described in the last mansion, until the soul has gained much experience it doubts what really happened to it. 'Was it nothing but fancy, or was it a sleep? Did it come from God or from the devil, disguised as an angel of light?' The mind feels a thousand misgivings, and well for it that it should, because, at I said, nature may sometimes deceive us in this case. Although there is little chance of the poisonous reptiles entering here, yet agile little lizards will try to slip in, though they can do no harm, especially if they remain unnoticed. These, as I said, are trivial fancies of the imagination, which are often very troublesome. However active these small lizards may be, they cannot enter the fifth mansion, for neither the imagination, the understanding, nor the memory has power to hinder the graces bestowed on it. 6. I dare venture to assert that, if this is genuine union with God, the devil cannot interfere nor do any harm, for His Majesty is so joined and united with the essence of the soul, that the evil one dare not approach, nor can he even understand this mystery. This is certain, for it is said that the devil does not know our thoughts, much less can he penetrate a secret so profound that God does not reveal it even to us. Oh, blessed state, in which this cursed one cannot injure us! What riches we receive while God so works in us that neither we ourselves nor any one else can impede Him! What will He not bestow, Who is so eager to give, and Who can give us all He desires! You may perhaps have been puzzled at my saying 'if this is genuine union with God,' as if there might be other unions. There are indeed—not with God, but with vanities—when the devil transports the soul passionately addicted to them, but the union differs from that which is divine and the mind misses the delight and satisfaction, peace and happiness of divine union. These heavenly consolations are above all earthly joys, pleasure, and satisfaction. As great a difference exists between their origin and that of worldly pleasures as between their opposite effects, as you know by experience.

7. I said somewhere that the one seems only to touch the surface of the body, while the other penetrates to the very marrow: I believe this is correct, and I cannot express myself better. I fancy that you are not yet satisfied on this question, but are afraid of deception, for spiritual matters are very hard to explain. Enough, however, has been said for those who have received this grace, as the difference between divine union and any other is very striking. However, I will give you a clear proof which cannot mislead you, nor leave any doubt whether the favour comes from God or no. His Majesty brought it back to my memory this very day; it appears to me to be an unmistakable sign. In difficult questions, although I think I understand them and am speaking the truth, I always say 'it appears to me'; for, in case my opinion is wrong, I am most willing to submit to the judgment of theologians. Although they may not have had personal experience in such matters, yet in some way I do not understand, God Who sets them to give light to His Church enables them to recognize the truth when it is put before them. If they are not thoughtless and indevout, but servants of God, they are never dismayed at His mighty works, knowing perfectly well that it is in His power to perform far greater wonders. If some of the marvels told are new to them, yet they have read of others of the same kind, showing the former to be possible. I have had great experience as to this and have also met with timid, half-instructed people whose ignorance has cost me very dear. I am convinced that those who refuse to believe that God can do far more than this, and that He is pleased now, as in the past, to communicate Himself to His creatures, shut fast their hearts against receiving such favours themselves. Do not imitate them, sisters: be convinced that it is possible for God to perform still greater wonders. Do not concern yourselves as to whether those who receive these graces are good or wicked; as I said, He knows best and it is no business of yours: you should serve Him with a single heart and with humility, and should praise Him for His works and wonders.

8. Let us now speak of the sign which proves the prayer of union to have been genuine. As you have seen, God then deprives the soul of all its senses that He may the better imprint in it true

wisdom: it neither sees, hears, nor understands anything while this state lasts, which is never more than a very brief time;¹⁶⁵ it appears to the soul to be much shorter than it really is. God visits the soul in a manner which prevents its doubting, on returning to itself, that it dwelt in Him and that He was within it, and so firmly is it convinced of this truth that, although years may pass before this favour recurs, the soul can never forget it nor doubt the fact, setting aside the effects left by this prayer, to which I will refer later on. The conviction felt by the soul is the main point.

9. But, you may ask, how can a person who is incapable of sight and hearing see or know these things? I do not say that she saw it at the time, but that she perceives it clearly afterwards, not by any vision but by a certitude which remains in the heart which God alone could give. I know of some one who was unaware of God's being in all things by presence, power and essence, yet was firmly convinced of it by a divine favour of this sort.¹⁶⁸ She asked an ill-instructed priest of the kind I mentioned to tell her in what way God dwelt within us: he was as ignorant on the subject as she had been before our Lord revealed to her the truth, and answered that the Almighty was only present in us by grace.¹⁶⁹ Yet so strong was her conviction of the truth learnt during her prayer that she did not believe him and questioned other spiritual persons on the subject, who confirmed her in the true doctrine, much to her joy. Do not mistake and imagine that this certainty of God's having visited the soul concerns any corporal presence such as that of our Lord Jesus Christ Who dwells in the Blessed Sacrament, although we do not see Him: it relates solely to the Divinity. If we did not see it, how can we feel so sure of it? That I do not know: it is the work of the Almighty and I am certain that what I say is the fact. I maintain that a soul which does not feel this assurance has not been united to God entirely, but only by one of its powers, or has received one of the many other favours God is accustomed to bestow on men. In all such matters we must not seek to know how things happened: our understanding could not grasp them, therefore why trouble ourselves on the subject? It is enough to know that it is He, the all-powerful God, Who has performed the work. We can do nothing on our own part to gain this favour; it comes from God alone; therefore let us not strive to understand it.

10. Concerning my words: 'We can do nothing on our own part,' I was struck by the words of the Bride in the Canticles, which you will remember to have heard: 'The King brought me into the cellar of wine,' (or 'placed me' I think she says): she does not say she went of her own accord, although telling us how she wandered up and down seeking her Beloved. I think the prayer of union is the 'cellar' in which our Lord places us when and how He chooses, but we cannot enter it through any effort of our own. His Majesty alone can bring us there and come into the centre of our souls. In order to declare His wondrous works more clearly, He will leave us no share in them except complete conformity of our wills to His and abandonment of all things: He does not require the faculties or senses to open the door to Him; they are all asleep. He enters the innermost depths of our souls without a door, as He entered the room where the disciples sat, saying 'Pax vobis,' and as He emerged from the sepulchre without removing the stone that closed the entrance. You will see farther on, in the seventh mansion, far better than here, how God makes the soul enjoy His presence in its very centre. O daughters, what wonders shall we see, if we keep ever before our eyes our own baseness and frailty and recognize how unworthy we are to be the handmaids of so great a Lord, Whose marvels are beyond our comprehension! May He be for ever praised! Amen.

THE SIXTH MANSIONS

CHAPTER II.

TREATS OF SEVERAL WAYS WHEREBY OUR LORD QUICKENS THE SOUL; THERE APPEARS NO CAUSE FOR ALARM IN THEM ALTHOUGH THEY ARE SIGNAL FAVOURS OF A VERY EXALTED NATURE.

1. Our Lord excites the love of His spouse. 2. The wound of love. 3. The pain it causes. 4. The call of the Bridegroom. 5. Effect on the soul. 6. A spark of the fire of love. 7. The spark dies out.

8. This grace evidently divine. 9. One such wound repays many trials. 10. First reason of immunity from deception. 11. Second and third reasons. 12. The imagination not concerned in it. 13. St. Teresa never alarmed at this prayer. 14. 'The odour of Thine ointment.' 15. No reason to fear deception here.

1. IT seems as if we had deserted the little dove for a long time, but this is not the case, for these past trials cause her to take a far higher flight. I will now describe the way in which the Spouse treats her before uniting her entirely to Himself. He increases her longing for Him by devices so delicate that the soul itself cannot discern them; nor do I think I could explain them except to people who have personally experienced them. These desires are delicate and subtle impulses springing from the inmost depths of the soul; I know of nothing to which they can be compared.

2. These graces differ entirely from anything we ourselves can gain, and even from the spiritual consolation before described. In the present case, even when the mind is not recollected or even thinking of God, although no sound is heard, His Majesty arouses it suddenly as if by a swiftly flashing comet or by a clap of thunder. Yet the soul thus called by God hears Him well enough—so well, indeed, that sometimes, especially at first, it trembles and even cries out, although it feels no pain. It is conscious of having received a delicious wound but cannot discover how, nor who gave it, yet recognizes it as a most precious grace and hopes the hurt will never heal.

3. The soul makes amorous complaints to its Bridegroom, even uttering them aloud; nor can it control itself, knowing that though He is present He will not manifest Himself so that it may enjoy Him. This causes a pain, keen although sweet and delicious from which the soul could not escape even if it wished; but this it never desires. This favour is more delightful than the pleasing absorption of the faculties in the prayer of quiet which is unaccompanied by suffering.

4. I am at my wits' end, sisters, as to how to make you understand this operation of love: I know not how to do so. It seems contradictory to say that the Beloved clearly shows He dwells in the soul and calls by so unmistakable a sign and a summons so penetrating, that the spirit cannot choose but hear it, while He appears to reside in the seventh mansion. He speaks in this manner, which is not a set form of speech, and the inhabitants of the other mansions, the senses, the imagination and the faculties, dare not stir.

5. O Almighty God! how profound are Thy secrets and how different are spiritual matters from anything that can be seen or heard in this world! I can find nothing to which to liken these graces, insignificant as they are compared with many others Thou dost bestow on souls. This favour acts so strongly upon the spirit that it is consumed by desires yet knows not what to ask, for it realizes clearly that its God is with it. You may inquire, if it realizes this so clearly, what more does it desire and why is it pained? What greater good can it seek? I cannot tell: I know that this suffering seems to pierce the very heart, and when He Who wounded it draws out the dart He seems to draw the heart out too, so deep is the love it feels.

6. I have been thinking that God might be likened to a burning furnace from which a small spark flies into the soul that feels the heat of this great fire, which, however, is insufficient to consume it. The sensation is so delightful that the spirit lingers in the pain produced by its contact. This seems to me the best comparison I can find, for the pain is delicious and is not really pain at all, nor does it always continue in the same degree; sometimes it lasts for a long time; on other occasions it passes quickly. This is as God chooses, for no human means can obtain it; and though felt at times for a long while, yet it is intermittent.

7. In fact it is never permanent and therefore does not wholly inflame the spirit; but when the soul is ready to take fire, the little spark suddenly dies out, leaving the heart longing to suffer anew its loving pangs. No grounds exist for thinking this comes from any natural cause or from melancholy, or that it is an illusion of the devil or the imagination. Undoubtedly this movement of the heart comes from God Who is unchangeable; nor do its effects resemble those of other devotions in which the strong absorption of delight makes us doubt their reality.

8. There is no suspension here of the senses or other faculties: they wonder at what is happening, without impeding it. Nor do I think that they can either increase or dispel this

delightful pain. Any one who has received this favour from our Lord will understand my meaning on reading this: let her thank Him fervently: there is no need to fear deception but far more fear of not being sufficiently grateful for so signal a grace. Let her endeavour to serve Him and to amend her life in every respect; then she will see what will follow and how she will obtain still higher and higher gifts.

9. A person on whom this grace was bestowed passed several years without receiving any other favour, yet was perfectly satisfied, for even had she served God for very many years in the midst of severe trials, she would have felt abundantly repaid. May He be for ever blessed! Amen.

10. Perhaps you wonder why we may feel more secure against deception concerning this favour than in other cases. I think it is for these reasons. Firstly, because the devil cannot give such delicious pain: he may cause pleasure or delight which appears spiritual but is unable to add suffering, especially suffering of so keen a sort, united to peace and joy of soul. His power is limited to what is external; suffering produced by him is never accompanied with peace, but with anxieties and struggles.

11. Secondly, because this welcome storm comes from no region over which Satan has control. Thirdly, because of the great benefits left in the soul which, as a rule, is resolute to suffer for God and longs to bear many crosses. It is also far more determined than before to withdraw from worldly pleasures and intercourse and other things of the same sort.

12. It is very clear that this is no fiction: the imagination may counterfeit some favours but not this, which is too manifest to leave room for doubt. Should any one still remain uncertain, let her know that hers were not genuine impulses; that is, if she is dubious as to whether or no she experienced them, for they are as certainly perceived by the soul as is a loud voice by the ears. It is impossible for these experiences to proceed from melancholy whose whims arise and exist only in the imagination, whereas this emotion comes from the interior of the soul.

13. I may be mistaken, but I shall not change my opinion until I hear reasons to the contrary from those who understand these matters. I know some one who has always greatly dreaded such deceptions, yet could never bring herself to feel any alarm about this state of prayer.

14. Our Lord also uses other means of rousing the soul; for instance—when reciting vocal prayer without seeking to penetrate the sense, a person may be seized with a delightful fervour as if suddenly encompassed with a fragrance powerful enough to diffuse itself through all the senses. I do not assert that there really is any perfume but use this comparison because it somewhat resembles the manner by which the Spouse makes His presence understood, moving the soul to a delicious desire of enjoying Him and thus disposing it to heroic acts, and causing it to render Him fervent praise.

15. This favour springs from the same source as the former, but causes no suffering here, nor are the soul's longings to enjoy God painful: this is what is more usually experienced by the soul. For the reasons already given there appears no cause here for fear, but rather for receiving it with thanksgiving.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPEAKS OF THE MANNER IN WHICH GOD COMMUNICATES WITH THE SOUL BY INTELLECTUAL VISION AND GIVES ADVICE UPON THE SUBJECT. OF THE EFFECTS PRODUCED BY THIS VISION WHEN GENUINE. SECRECY ABOUT THESE FAVOURS IS ENJOINED.

1. Our Lord's presence accompanying the soul. 2. St. Teresa's experience of this. 3. Confidence and graces resulting from this vision. 4. Its effects. 5. It Produces humility. 6. And prepares the soul for other graces. 7. Consciousness of the presence of the saints. 8. Obligations resulting from this grace. 9. Signs that this favour is genuine. 10. A confessor should be consulted. 11. Our Lord will enlighten our advisers. 12. Cautions about this vision.

1. To prove to you more clearly, sisters, the truth of what I have been saying and to show that the more the soul advances, the closer does this good Jesus bear it company, it would be well for me to tell you how, when He so chooses, it cannot withdraw from His presence. This is clearly shown by the manners and ways in which His Majesty communicates Himself to us, manifesting His love by wonderful apparitions and visions which, if He is pleased to aid me, I will describe to you so that you may not be alarmed if any of these favours are granted you. We ought, even if we do not receive them ourselves, to praise Him fervently for thus communing with creatures, seeing how sovereign are His majesty and power.

2. For example, a person who is in no way expecting such a favour nor has ever imagined herself worthy of receiving it, is conscious that Jesus Christ stands by her side although she sees Him neither with the eyes of the body nor of the soul. This is called an intellectual vision; I cannot tell why. I knew a person to whom God granted both this grace and others I shall describe later on. At first it distressed her, for she could not understand it; she could see nothing, yet so convinced did she feel that Jesus Christ was thus in some way manifesting Himself that she could not doubt that it was some kind of vision, whether it came from God or no. Its powerful effects were a strong argument that it was from Him; still she was alarmed, never having heard of an intellectual vision, nor was she aware that such a thing could be. She however felt certain of our Lord's presence, and He spoke to her several times in the way that I described. Before she had received this favour, she had heard words spoken but had never known who uttered them.

3. She was frightened by this vision which, unlike an imaginary one, does not pass away quickly but lasts for several days and even sometimes for more than a year. She went, in a state of great anxiety, to her confessor³⁴⁷ who asked her how, if she saw nothing, she knew that our Lord was near her, and bade her describe His appearance. She said that she was unable to do so, nor could she see His face nor tell more than she had already done, but that she was sure it was the fact that it was He Who spoke to her and it was no trick of her imagination. Although people constantly cautioned her against this vision, as a rule she found it impossible to disbelieve in it, especially when she heard the words: 'It is I, be not afraid'³⁴⁸

4. The effect of this speech was so powerful that for the time being she could not doubt its truth. She felt much encouraged and rejoiced at being in such good company, seeing that this favour greatly helped her to a constant recollection of God and an extreme care not to displease in any way Him Who seemed ever by her side, watching her. Whenever she desired to speak to His Majesty in prayer, or even at other times, He seemed so close that He could not fail to hear her though He did not speak to her whenever she wished, but unexpectedly, when necessity arose. She was conscious of His being at her right hand, although not in the way we know an ordinary person to be beside us but in a more subtle manner which cannot be described. Yet this presence is quite as evident and certain, and indeed far more so, than the ordinary presence of other people about which we may be deceived; not so in this, for it brings with it graces and spiritual effects which could not come from melancholia. Nor could the devil thus fill the soul with peace, with a constant desire to please God, and such utter contempt of all that does not lead to Him. As time went on, my friend recognized that this was no work of the evil one, as our Lord showed her more and more clearly.

5. However, I know that she often felt great alarm and was at times overcome with confusion, being unable to account for so high a favour having been granted her. She and I were so very intimate that I knew all that passed in her soul, hence my account is thoroughly true and reliable. This favour brings with it an overwhelming sense of self-abasement and humility; the reverse would be the case, did it come from Satan. It is evidently divine; no human effort could produce such feelings nor could any one suppose that such profit came from herself, but must needs recognize it as a gift from the hand of God.

6. Although I believe some of the former favours are more sublime, yet this brings with it a special knowledge of God; a most tender love for Him results from being constantly in His company, while the desires of devoting one's whole being to His service are more fervent than any hitherto described. The conscience is greatly purified by the knowledge of His perpetual and near presence, for although we know that God sees all we do, yet nature inclines us to

grow careless and forgetful of it. This is impossible here since our Lord makes the soul conscious that He is close at hand, thus preparing it to receive the other graces mentioned by constantly making acts of love to Him Whom it sees or feels at its side. In short, the benefits caused by this grace prove how great and how valuable it is. The soul thanks our Lord for bestowing it on one unworthy of it, but who would refuse to exchange it for any earthly riches or delight.

7. When our Lord chooses to withdraw His presence, the soul in its loneliness makes every possible effort to induce Him to return. This avails but little, for this grace comes at His will and not by our endeavours. At times we may enjoy the company of some saint, which also brings us great profit. You will ask me, if we see no one, how can we know whether it is Christ, or His most glorious Mother, or a saint? Such a person cannot answer this question or know how she distinguishes them, but the fact remains undoubted. It seems easy to recognize our Lord when He speaks, but it is surprising how the soul can, without hearing a word from him, recognize which saint has been sent by God to be its companion and helper.

8. There are other spiritual matters which cannot be explained. Our inability to grasp them should teach us how incapable is our nature of understanding the sublime mysteries of God. Those on whom these favours are bestowed should marvel at and praise God's mercy for them. As these particular graces are not granted to everybody, any one who receives them should esteem them highly and strive to serve God more zealously, since He has given her such special aid. Therefore such a person does not rate herself more highly on this account, but rather thinks she serves Him less than any one else in the world; feeling herself to be under greater obligations to Him than others, any fault she commits pierces her to the heart, as indeed it ought under the circumstances.

9. When the effects described are felt, any of you whom our Lord leads by this way may be certain that it is neither deception nor fancy in her case. I believe it to be impossible for the devil to produce an illusion lasting so long, neither could he benefit the soul so remarkably nor cause such interior peace. It is not his custom, nor, if he would, could such an evil creature bring about so much good; the soul would soon be clouded by self-esteem and the idea that it was better than others. The mind's continual keeping in the presence of God and the concentration of its thoughts on Him would so enrage the fiend that, although he might try the experiment once, he would not often repeat it. God is too faithful to permit him so much power over one whose sole endeavour is to please His Majesty and to lay down her life for His honour and glory; He would soon unmask the demon's artifices.

10. I contend, as I always shall, that if the soul reaps the effects described from these divine graces, although God may withdraw these special favours, His Majesty will turn all things to its advantage; even should He permit the devil to deceive it at any time, the evil spirit will only reap his own confusion. Therefore, as I told you, daughters, none of you who are led by this way need feel alarm. Fear is good and we should be cautious and not overconfident, for if such favours made you careless, it would prove they were not from God as they did not leave the results I described. It would be well at first to tell your case, under the seal of confession, to a thoroughly qualified theologian (for that is the source whence we must obtain light) or to some highly spiritual person. If your confessor is not very spiritual, a good theologian would be preferable; best of all, one who unites both qualities. Do not be disturbed if he calls it mere fancy; if it is, it can neither harm nor benefit your soul much. Recommend yourself to the divine Majesty and beg Him not to allow you to be misled.

11. It would be worse should he tell you the devil is deceiving you, although no learned man would say so if he sees in you the effects described. Even should your adviser say this, I know that the same Lord Who is beside you will comfort and reassure you and will go to your counsellor and give him light that he may impart it to you. If the director, though given to prayer, has not been led by God in this way, he will at once take fright and condemn it. Therefore I advise you to choose a qualified theologian and, if possible, one who is also spiritual. The Prioress ought to allow you this, for although she may feel sure that you are safe from delusion because you lead a good life, yet she is bound to permit you to consult some one for your mutual security. When you have conferred with these persons, be at peace;

trouble yourself no more about the matter, for sometimes when there is no cause for fear, the demon gives rise to such immoderate scruples that the person cannot be satisfied with consulting her confessor only once on the subject, especially if he is inexperienced and timid or if he bids her consult him again.

12. Thus that which should have been kept strictly private becomes public; such a person is persecuted and tormented and finds that what she believed to be her own secret has become public property. Hence she suffers many troubles which may even devolve upon the Order in such times as these. Consequently I warn all Prioresses that great caution is required in such matters; also they must not think a nun more virtuous than the rest because such favours are shown her. Our Lord guides every one, in the way He knows to be best. This grace, if made good use of, prepares one receiving it to become a great servant of God, but sometimes our Lord bestows it on the weakest souls; therefore in itself it is neither to be esteemed nor condemned. We must look to the virtues; she who is most mortified, humble and single-minded in serving God is the most holy. However, we can never feel very certain about such matters until the true Judge rewards each one according to his merits. Then we shall be surprised to find how very different is His judgment from that of this world. May He be for ever praised. Amen.

THE SEVENTH MANSIONS, CHAPTER II.

TREATS OF THE SAME SUBJECT: EXPLAINS, BY SOME DELICATELY DRAWN COMPARISONS, THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRITUAL UNION AND SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE.

1. The spiritual nuptials introduced by an imaginary vision. 2. Spiritual betrothal and marriage differ. 3. Spiritual marriage lasting. 4. Not so spiritual betrothal. 5. Spiritual marriage permanent. 6. St. Paul and spiritual marriage. 7. The soul's joy in union. 8. Its conviction of God's indwelling. 9. Its peace. 10. Christ's prayer for the divine union of the soul. 11. Its fulfilment. 12. Unalterable peace of the soul in the seventh Mansion. 13. Unless it offends God. 14. Struggles outside the seventh Mansion. 15. Comparisons explaining this.

1. WE now come to speak of divine and spiritual nuptials, although this sublime favour cannot be received in all its perfection during our present life, for by forsaking God this great good would be lost. The first time God bestows this grace, He, by an imaginary vision of His most sacred Humanity, reveals Himself to the soul so that it may understand and realize the sovereign gift it is receiving. He may manifest Himself in a different way to other people; the person I mentioned, after having received Holy Communion beheld our Lord, full of splendour, beauty, and majesty, as He was after His resurrection. He told her that henceforth she was to care for His affairs as though they were her own and He would care for hers: He spoke other words which she understood better than she can repeat them. This may seem nothing new, for our Lord had thus revealed Himself to her at other times; yet this was so different that it left her bewildered and amazed, both on account of the vividness of what she saw and of the words heard at the time, also because it took place in the interior of the soul where, with the exception of the one last mentioned, no other vision had been seen.

2. You must understand that between the visions seen in this and in the former mansions there is a vast difference; there is the same distinction between spiritual espousals and spiritual marriage as between people who are only betrothed and others who are united for ever in holy matrimony. I have told you⁴⁰⁵ that though I make this comparison because there is none more suitable, yet this betrothal is no more related to our corporal condition than if the soul were a disembodied spirit. This is even more true of the spiritual marriage, for this secret union takes place in the innermost centre of the soul where God Himself must dwell: I believe that no door

is required to enter it. I say, 'no door is required,' for all I have hitherto described seems to come through the senses and faculties as must the representation of our Lord's Humanity, but what passes in the union of the spiritual nuptials is very different. Here God appears in the soul's centre, not by an imaginary but by an intellectual vision far more mystic than those seen before, just as He appeared to the Apostles without having entered through the door when He said: 'Pax vobis.'

3. So mysterious is the secret and so sublime the favour that God thus bestows instantaneously on the soul, that it feels a supreme delight, only to be described by saying that our Lord vouchsafes for the moment to reveal to it His own heavenly glory in a far more subtle way than by any vision or spiritual delight. As far as can be understood, the soul, I mean the spirit of this soul, is made one with God Who is Himself a spirit, and Who has been pleased to show certain persons how far His love for us extends in order that we may praise His greatness. He has thus deigned to unite Himself to His creature: He has bound Himself to her as firmly as two human beings are joined in wedlock and will never separate Himself from her.

4. Spiritual betrothal is different and like the grace of union is often dissolved; for though two things are made one by union, separation is still possible and each part then remains a thing by itself. This favour generally passes quickly, and afterwards the soul, as far as it is aware, remains without His company.

5. This is not so in the spiritual marriage with our Lord, where the soul always remains in its centre with its God. Union may be symbolized by two wax candles, the tips of which touch each other so closely that there is but one light; or again, the wick, the wax, and the light become one, but the one candle can again be separated from the other and the two candles remain distinct; or the wick may be withdrawn from the wax. But spiritual marriage is like rain falling from heaven into a river or stream, becoming one and the same liquid, so that the river and rain water cannot be divided; or it resembles a streamlet flowing into the ocean, which cannot afterwards be disunited from it. This marriage may also be likened to a room into which a bright light enters through two windows—though divided when it enters, the light becomes one and the same.

6. Perhaps when St. Paul said, 'He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' he meant this sovereign marriage, which presupposes His Majesty's having been joined to the soul by union. The same Apostle says: 'To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.' This, I think, might here be uttered by the soul, for now the little butterfly of which I spoke dies with supreme joy, for Christ is her life.

7. This becomes more manifest by its effects as time goes on, for the soul learns that it is God Who gives it 'life,' by certain secret intuitions too strong to be misunderstood, and keenly felt, although impossible to describe. These produce such over-mastering feelings that the person experiencing them cannot refrain from amorous exclamations, such as: 'O Life of my life, and Power which doth uphold me!' with other aspirations of the same kind. For from the bosom of the Divinity, where God seems ever to hold this soul fast clasped, issue streams of milk, which solace the servants of the castle. I think He wishes them to share, in some way, the riches the soul enjoys; therefore from the flowing river in which the little streamlet is swallowed up, some drops of water flow every now and then to sustain the bodily powers, the servants of the bride and Bridegroom.

8. A person who was unexpectedly plunged into water could not fail to be aware of it; here the case is the same, but even more evident. A quantity of water could not fall on us unless it came from some source—so the soul feels certain there must be some one within it who lances forth these darts and vivifies its own life, and that there is a Sun whence this brilliant light streams forth from the interior of the spirit to its faculties.

9. The soul itself, as I said, never moves from this centre, nor loses the peace He can give Who gave it to the Apostles when they were assembled together. I think this salutation of our Lord contains far deeper meaning than the words convey, as also His bidding the glorious Magdalen to 'go in peace.' Our Lord's words act within us, and in these cases they must have wrought their effect in the souls already disposed to banish from within themselves all that is corporal and to retain only what is spiritual, in order to be joined in this celestial union with the

uncreated Spirit. Without doubt, if we empty ourselves of all that belongs to the creature, depriving ourselves of it for the love of God, that same Lord will fill us with Himself.

10. Our Lord Jesus Christ, praying for His Apostles, (I cannot remember the reference), asked that they might be made one with the Father and with Himself; as Jesus Christ our Lord is in the Father and the Father in Him! I do not know how love could be greater than this! Let none draw back from entering here, for His Majesty also said: 'Not only for them do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me'; and He declared: 'I am in them.'

11. God help me! how true these words are, and how clearly are they understood by the soul which in this state of prayer finds them fulfilled in itself! So should we all but for our own fault, for the words of Jesus Christ, our King and our Lord, cannot fail. It is we who fail by not disposing ourselves fitly, nor removing all that can obstruct this light, so that we do not behold ourselves in this mirror wherein our image is engraved.

12. To return to what I was saying. God places the soul in His own mansion which is in the very centre of the soul itself. They say the empyreal heavens, in which our Lord dwells, do not revolve with the rest: so the accustomed movements of the faculties and imagination do not appear to take place in any way that can injure the soul or disturb its peace.

13. Do I seem to imply that after God has brought the soul thus far it is certain to be saved and cannot fall into sin again? I do not mean this: whenever I say that the soul seems in security, I must be understood to imply for as long as His Majesty thus holds it in His care and it does not offend Him. At any rate I know for certain that though such a person realizes the high state she is in and has remained in it for several years, she does not consider herself safe, but is more careful than ever to avoid committing the least offence against God. As I shall explain later on, she is most anxious to serve Him and feels a constant pain and confusion at seeing how little she can do for Him compared with all she ought.' This is no light cross but a severe mortification, for the harder the penances she can perform, the better is she pleased. Her greatest penance is to be deprived by God of health and strength to perform any. I told you elsewhere what keen pain this caused her, but now it grieves her far more. This must be because she is like a tree grafted on a stock growing near a stream which makes it greener and more fruitful. Why marvel at the longings of this soul whose spirit has truly become one with the celestial water I described?

14. To return to what I wrote about. It is not intended that the powers, senses and passions should continually enjoy this peace. The soul does so, indeed, but in the other mansions there are still times of struggle, suffering, and fatigue, though as a general rule, peace is not lost by them. This 'centre of the soul' or 'spirit' is so hard to describe or even to believe in, that I think, sisters, my inability to explain my meaning saves your being tempted to disbelieve me; it is difficult to understand how there can be crosses and sufferings and yet peace in the soul.

15. Let me give you one or two comparisons—God grant they may be of use; if not, I know that what I say is true. A king resides in his palace; many wars and disasters take place in his kingdom but he remains on his throne. In the same way, though tumults and wild beasts rage with great uproar in the other mansions, yet nothing of this enters the seventh mansions, nor drives the soul from it. Although the mind regrets these troubles, they do not disturb it nor rob it of its peace, for the passions are too subdued to dare to enter here where they would only suffer still further defeat. Though the whole body is in pain, yet the head, if it be sound, does not suffer with it. I smile at these comparisons—they do not please me—but I can find no others. Think what you will about it—I have told you the truth.