

The History and Life of Doctor John Tauler, of Strasburg

(c. 1290 – 1361)

Translated from the German by

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Note. – John Tauler, who appears as “the Master” in the following history, was born in Strasburg in the year 1290. He belonged to a wealthy family, and might have lived on his patrimony, but in early years devoted himself to a clerical life, and entered the Dominican Order, probably in the year 1308. The account which follows has reference only to his deeper experiences in the spiritual life, which began in the year 1340, when he was about fifty years of age.

FIRST CHAPTER

IN the year of Our Lord 1340, it came to pass, that a Master in Holy Scripture preached oft-times in a certain city, and the people loved to hear him, and his teachings were the talk of the country for many leagues round. Now this came to the ears of a layman who was rich in God’s grace, and he was warned three times in his sleep that he should go to the city where the Master dwelt, and hear him preach. Now that city was in another country, more than thirty leagues distant. Then the man thought within himself, “I will go thither and wait to see what God is purposed to do or bring to pass there.” So he came to that city and heard the Master preach five times. Then God gave this man to perceive that the Master was a very loving, gentle, good-hearted man by nature, and had a

good understanding of the Holy Scripture, but was dark as to the light of grace; and the man's heart did yearn over him, and he went to the Master and said, "Dear and honoured Sir, I have travelled a good thirty leagues on your account, to hear your teaching. Now I have heard you preach five times, and I pray you in God's name to let me make my confession to you." The Master answered, "With all my heart." Then the man confessed to the Master in all simplicity, and when he desired to receive the Lord's Body, the Master gave it him. When this had lasted twelve weeks, the man said to the Master, "Dear Sir, I beg you for God's sake to preach us a sermon, showing us how a man may attain to the highest and utmost point it is given to us to reach in this present time." The Master answered, "Ah! dear son, what dost thou ask for? how shall I tell thee of such high things? for I ween thou wouldst understand but little thereof." But the man said, "Ah! dear Master, even though I should understand little or nothing thereof, yet I cannot but thirst after it. Multitudes flock to hear you; if there were only one among them all who could understand you, your labour were well bestowed." Then said the Master, "Dear son, if I am to do as thou sayest, I must needs give some study and labour to the matter before I can put such a sermon together." But the man would not cease from his prayers and entreaties till the Master promised him that he should have his desire.

So, when the Master had finished his sermon, he announced to the people that in three days they should come together again, for he had been requested to teach how a man could attain to the Highest and Best and nearest to God that might be reached in this present time. And when the day was come, much people came to the church, and the man sat down in a place where he could hear well; and the Master came, and thus began his discourse, and said:

SECOND CHAPTER

In the following gracious Sermon, twenty-four articles are rehearsed whereby a man may perceive who are the proper, true, reasonable, enlightened, contemplative men; and what sort of man it is to whom Christ may well speak these words: Ecce vere Israelita in quo dolus non est—Lo! see a true beholder of God in whom is no guile (John i. 47).

DEAR children, I have much to say to you in this sermon concerning those things of which I have promised to speak; wherefore I cannot for this time expound the gospel of the day to you as is my wont, neither shall I speak much Latin in this sermon; for what I have to say, I will prove with Holy Scripture [and he said]:

"Dear children, I would have you to know that there be many men, who indeed attain to a clear understanding and reasonable judgment, but who do this by means of images and forms through the help of other men, and without the Scriptures. Further, there be found many who, when they mark that something is known to them through the Scriptures, are not therewith content. Such a man is still far from his highest and greatest good.

Dear children, if a man had broken through these things, and was become dead to them, and had got above forty

stages of contemplation, and above the conceptions of our reason, whether they come to us through images or forms of speech—if there were a man who had come to this, he would be dearer and more precious in God’s sight than a hundred thousand men who never get out of their own self, and live after the way of their own choosing; for to such God cannot find entrance, nor work in their souls.

This all comes of their own will, and their self-glorifying folly, which takes delight in the dexterity of their own reason, in framing and handling conceptions. But those men who while on earth have broken through those things, and have given themselves to God in such sort that they have died unto themselves, and have both made themselves free from all outward forms, and the use of sensible images in their exercises of contemplation, and humbly toiled and pressed onwards above the images of mere reason, as Dionysius says, “the light of faith requires that a man should be raised above the apprehensions of reason;”—know, dear children, that in such souls God doth find rest, and a place wherein to dwell and to work when He chooseth. Now when God findeth thus no hindrance in such a man, He works His own works in him, and draweth him truly to Himself in Himself. Now know that such a man is rare, for his life and ways are hidden from others, and unknown to them, except to such as have a like life, of whom, alas! I fear there be but few. To this state, and this noble perfectness, none can come except through boundless humility, an unclouded understanding, and a clear reason; for it has happened ere now that some great doctors and priests have fallen; and a multitude of rational spirits belonging to the angelic hosts, who perceived nothing else in their nature and essence but mere reason, have erred hence, and fallen everlastingly away from eternal truth. And this is what happens still to all those who look to their own reason, and want to be and do as God by the light of their self-willed understanding. For which reason it is profitable and needful to know who are the proper, truly reasonable, enlightened, contemplative men. Now as far as I can find from Scripture, there are four and twenty tokens which such a man must possess.

The First is given us by the highest Master of all doctors, arts and wisdom, namely, our Lord Jesus Christ, when he says: “Hereby shall ye know whether ye be my disciples, if ye have love one to another even as I have loved you.” As much as to say, ‘Though ye should possess arts and wisdom, and high understanding, it is all in vain if ye have not withal fidelity and love.’ We believe that Balaam was so replete with understanding, that he perceived what things God purposed to do or reveal hundreds of years after his day; but it availed him nothing, forasmuch as he did not cleave with love and loyalty to the things which he understood.

The Second mark appertaining to a truly reasonable, enlightened man is that he must become empty of self; and this must not make him proud, but he shall consider how he may ever more attain to this freedom, and sit loose by all creatures.

The Third Article: He shall resign Himself utterly to God, that God may work His own works in him, and he shall not glory in the works as being his own, but always think himself too mean to have done them.

The Fourth Article: He shall go out from himself in all the things in which he is wont to seek and find himself, whether belonging to time or to eternity, and by so doing he shall win a true increase.

The Fifth Article: He shall not seek his own ends in any creature, whether temporal or eternal, and hereby he shall attain to perfect satisfaction and content.

The Sixth Article: He shall always wait on that which God will have him to do, and shall try, with the help of God, to fulfil that to the uttermost, and shall take no glory to himself therefore.

The Seventh Article: He shall daily, without ceasing, give up his will to the will of God, and endeavour to will nothing but what God willeth.

The Eighth Article: He shall bend all his powers into submission to God, and exercise them so constantly and so strenuously in God, and with such power and love, that God may work nothing in him without his active concurrence, and he may do nothing without God.

The Ninth Article: He shall have the sense of the presence of God in all His works, at all times, and in all places, whatever it please God to appoint, whether it be sweet or bitter.

The Tenth Article: All his pleasure and pain he shall receive, not as from the creature, but from God; howbeit God oftentimes works through the creature, yet he shall receive all things as from God alone.

The Eleventh Article: He shall not be led captive by any lusting or desire after the creatures without due necessity.

The Twelfth Article: No contradiction or mishap shall have power to move or constrain him so that it separate him from the truth; therefore hold fast always and entirely by the same.

The Thirteenth Article: He shall not be deceived by the glory of the creature, nor yet by any false light, but in a spirit of kindness and love he shall confess all things to be what they are, and from all things draw out what is best, and use it to his own improvement, and in no wise to his own detriment; for such a course is a certain sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Fourteenth Article: He shall at all times be equipped and armed with all virtue, and ready to fight against all vice and sin, and with his good weapons he shall obtain the victory and the prize in all conflicts.

The Fifteenth Article: He shall confess the truth in simplicity, and he shall mark what it is in itself, what God requireth of us, and what is possible to man, and then order his life accordingly, and act

up to what he confesses!

The Sixteenth Article: He shall be a man of few words and much inward life.

The Seventeenth Article: He shall be blameless and righteous, but in no wise be puffed up by reason of the same.

The Eighteenth Article: His conversation shall be in all uprightness and sincerity; thus he shall let his light shine before men, and he shall preach more with his life than with his lips.

The Nineteenth Article: He shall seek the glory of God before all things, and have no other aim in view.

The Twentieth Article: He shall be willing to take reproof; and when he striveth with any he shall give way if the matter concern himself alone, and not God.

The Twenty-first Article: He shall not desire or seek his own advantage, but think himself unworthy of the least thing that falls to his lot.

The Twenty-second Article: He shall look upon himself as the least wise and worthy man upon earth, yet find in himself great faith; and above all he shall take no account of his own wisdom and the works of his own reason, but humble himself beneath all men. For the Author of all truth will not work a supernatural work in the soul, unless He find a thorough humility in a man, and go before his doings with his perfect grace, as he did with St. Paul. But I fear, alas! that little heed is taken to this in these our days.

The Twenty-third Article: He shall set the life and precepts of our Lord Jesus Christ before him for a pattern to his life, words, and works, and without ceasing look at himself therein as in a mirror, that, in so far as he is able, he may put off everything unbecoming the honoured image of our Lord.

The Twenty-fourth and last Article is: He shall comport himself as a man of small account,—as nothing more than a beginner in a good life; and though he should therefore be despised by many, it shall be more welcome to him than all the favour of the world.

Now, dear children, these are the signs that the ground of a man's soul is truly reasonable, so that the image of all truth shineth and teacheth therein: and he who does not bear in himself these signs, may not and must not set any store by his own reason, either in his own eyes or those of others. That we all may become such a true image, in thorough sincerity and perfect humility, may He help us who is the Eternal Truth, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!

THIRD CHAPTER

How this pious man privately reveals to the doctor in part his own hidden holiness, and convicts the Master that he is still walking in the night of ignorance, and has an unclean vessel, and therefore is yet a Pharisee.

WHEN this sermon was ended, the man went home to his lodging, and wrote it down word for word as the Master had spoken it. And when he had finished he went to the Master, and said, "I have written out your sermon, and if it be not troublesome I should like to read it to you." The Master replied, "I shall be glad to hear it." Thereupon the man read the sermon over, and then said to the Master, "Dear sir, pray tell me if there be a word wanting, that if so I may set it down." The Master said, "Dear son, thou hast written every word and phrase just as it came out of my mouth. I tell thee, if any one would give me much money for it, I could not write down every word so exactly as thou hast done it here, unless I set to afresh to draw it from the Scripture. I confess that I am greatly astonished at thee to think that thou hast been concealed from me so long, and I should never have perceived how full of wit thou art, and so often as thou hast confessed to me, thou shouldst so have hidden thy talent that I have never perceived it in thee." Then the man made as though he would depart, and said, "Dear Master, if God will I am purposed to go home again." But the Master said, "Dear son, what shouldst thou do at home? Thou hast neither wife nor child to provide for; thou must eat there as well as here: for if God will, I am minded to preach again of a perfect life." Then said the man, "Dear Master, you must know that I have not come hither for the sake of your preaching, but because I thought, with God's help, to give you some good counsel." Quoth the Master, "How shouldst thou give counsel, who art but a layman, and understandest not the Scriptures; and it is, moreover, not thy place to preach if thou wouldst. Stay here a little longer; perchance God will give me to preach such a sermon as thou wouldst care to hear." Then the man said, "Dear Master, I would fain say somewhat to you, but I fear that you would be displeased to hear it." But the Master answered, "Dear son, say what thou wilt; I can answer for it that I shall take it in good part." Hereupon, the man said, "You are a great clerk, and have taught us a good lesson in this sermon, but you yourself do not live according to it; yet you try to persuade me to stay here that you may preach me yet another sermon. Sir, I give you to know that neither your sermons, nor any outward words that man can speak, have power to work any good in me, for man's words have in many ways hindered me much more than they have helped me. And this is the reason: it often happened that when I came away from the sermon, I brought certain false notions away with me, which I hardly got rid of in a long while with great toil; but if the highest Teacher of all truth shall come to a man, he must be empty and quit of all the things of time. Know ye that when this same Master cometh to me, He teaches me more in an hour than you or all the doctors from Adam to the Judgment Day will ever do." Then said the Master, "Dear son, stay here, I pray thee, and celebrate the Lord's Death with me." Whereon the man answered, "Seeing that you adjure me so solemnly, it may be that, in obedience to God, I ought to stay with you; but I will not do it unless you promise to receive all that I have said to you, and all I may yet say to you, as under the

unless you promise to receive all that I have said to you, and all that may yet say to you, as under the seal of confession, so that none may know of it.” Quoth the Master: “Dear son, that I willingly promise, if only that thou wilt stay here.” Then said the man, “Sir, ye must know, that though you have taught us many good things in this sermon, the image came into my mind while you were preaching, that it was as if one should take good wine and mix it with lees, so that it grew muddy.” Quoth the Master: “Dear son, what dost thou mean by this?” The man said, “I mean that your vessel is unclean, and much lees are cleaving to it, and the cause is, that you have suffered yourself to be killed by the letter, and are killing yourself still every day and hour, albeit you yourself know full well that the Scripture saith, ‘The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.’ Know, that same letter which now killeth you will make you alive again, if so be you are willing; but in the life you are now living, know that you have no light, but you are in the night, in which you are indeed able to understand the letter, but have not yet tasted the sweetness of the Holy Ghost; and, withal, you are yet a Pharisee.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, I would have thee to know that, old as I am, I have never been spoken to in such fashion all my life.” The man said, “Where is your preaching now? Do you see now what you are when you are brought to the proof? And although you think that I have spoken too hardly to you, you are in truth guilty of all I have said, and I will prove to you from your own self that it is true.” Then said the Master, “I ask for no more, for I have ever been an enemy to all Pharisees.” Quoth the man, “I will first tell you how it is that the letter is killing you. Dear sir, as you know yourself, when you were arrived at the age to understand good and evil, you began to learn the letter, and in so doing you sought your own welfare, and to this day you are in the same mind; that is to say, you are trusting to your learning and parts, and you do not love and intend God alone, but you are in the letter, and intend and seek yourself, and not the glory of God, as the Scripture teacheth us to do. You have a leaning towards the creatures, and specially towards one creature, and love that creature with your whole heart above measure, and that is, moreover, the cause why the letter killeth you. And whereas I said that your vessel is unclean; that is also true, inasmuch as you have not in all things a single eye to God. If you look into yourself, you will, for one thing, find it out by the vanity and love of carnal ease whereby your vessel is spoiled and filled with lees; wherefore, when the pure unmixed wine of godly doctrine has gone through this unclean vessel, it comes to pass that your teaching is without favour, and brings no grace to pure, loving hearts. And whereas I further said that you were still in darkness, and had not the true light; this is also true, and it may be seen hereby that so few receive the grace of the Holy Spirit through your teaching. And whereas I said that you were a Pharisee, that is also true; but you are not one of the hypocritical Pharisees. Was it not a mark of the Pharisees that they loved and sought themselves in all things, and not the glory of God? Now examine yourself, dear sir, and see if you are not a proper Pharisee in the eyes of God. Know, dear Master, that there are many people in the world who are all called Pharisees in God’s sight, be they great or small, according to what their hearts or lives are bent upon.”

As the man spoke these words the Master fell on his neck and kissed him, and said: “A likewise has come into my mind. It has happened to me as it did to the heathen woman at the well. For know, dear son, that thou hast laid bare all my faults before my eyes; thou hast told me what I had hidden

up within me, and specially that I have an affection for one creature; but I tell thee of a truth that I know it not myself, nor do I believe that any human being in the world can know of it. I wonder greatly who can have told thee this of me? But doubt not that thou hast it from God. Now, therefore, I pray thee, dear son, that thou celebrate our Lord's Death, and be thou my ghostly father, and let me be thy poor sinful son." Then said the man, "Dear sir, if you speak so contrary to ordinances, I will not stay with you, but ride home again; that I assure you." Hereupon said the Master, "Ah, no! I pray thee, for God's sake, do not so; stay awhile with me; I promise thee readily not to speak thus any more. I am minded, with God's help, to begin a better course, and I will gladly follow thy counsel, whatsoever thou deemest best, if I may but amend my life." Then said the man, "I tell you of a truth, that the letter and learning lead many great doctors astray, and bring some into purgatory and some into hell, according as their life here hath been,—I tell you of a truth, it is no light matter that God should give a man such great understanding and skill, and mastery in the Scripture, and he should not put it in practice in his life."

FOURTH CHAPTER

How God had wrought a great miracle through this pious man, and how this had come to pass because God found in him a good and thorough humility.

THEN said the Master, "I pray thee, for God's sake to tell me how it is that thou hast attained to such a life, and how thou didst begin thy spiritual life, and what have been thy exercises and thy history." The man said, "That is, indeed, a simple request: for I tell you truly, if I should recount, or write, all the wondrous dealings of God with me, a poor sinner, for the last twelve years, I verily believe that you have not a book large enough to contain it if it were all written; however, I will tell you somewhat thereof for this time.

"The first thing that helped me was, that God found in me a sincere and utterly self-surrendering humility. Now I do not think there is any need to tell you the bodily exercises by which I brought my flesh into subjection: for men's natures and dispositions are very unlike; but whenever a man has given himself up to God with utter humility, God will not fail to give him such exercises, by temptations and other trials, as He perceives to be profitable to the man, and such as he is well able to bear and endure if he be only willing. But this you ought to know: he who asks counsel of many people will be apt to go often astray; for each one will point him to his own experience. But oftentimes a man may exercise himself in a certain practice which is good and profitable to himself; while, if another did the same, it might very likely be useless, or even hurtful to him. The Devil often stirs up a man to practise great austerities, with the intent that the man may grow sick and infirm thereby, or weak in his brain, or do himself some other injury.

"I will tell you how it befell me in the beginning. I was reading the German books about the

lives of the Saints, when I thought to myself, 'These were men who lived on this earth as well as I, and perhaps, too, had not sinned as I have.' And when these thoughts came into my head, I began to exercise myself in the life of the Saints with some severities, but grew so sick thereby that I was brought to death's door. And it came to pass one morning at break of day, that I had exercised myself so that my eyelids closed from very weakness, and I fell asleep. And in my sleep it was as though a voice spoke to me and said, 'Thou foolish man, if thou art bent upon killing thyself before thy time, thou wilt have to bear a heavy punishment; but if thou didst suffer God to exercise thee, He could exercise thee better than thou by thyself, or with the Devil's counsel.' When I heard speak of the Devil I awoke in a great fright, rose up, and walked out into a wood nigh to the town. Then I thought within myself, I had begun these exercises without counsel: I will go and tell the old hermit all that has happened to me. And I did so, and told him the words that I had heard in my sleep, and besought him in God's name to give me the best counsel he could. So the hermit said, 'Thou must know that if I am to advise, thou must first tell me all about thy exercises.' So I did, and he said, 'By whose counsel hast thou done these things?' and I answered, 'Of my own will. Then the hermit said, 'Then know that it has been the Devil's counsel, and thou must not obey him any more as long as thou livest, but thou must utterly give thyself up to God; He can exercise thee much better than thou thyself, or the Devil.' Behold, dear Master, thereupon I ceased from these exercises, and yielded myself and my doings altogether up to God. For the rest, dear sir, you must know that by nature I was a very ingenious, clever, good-hearted man; but I had not the Scriptures in my hand, like you, but could only learn to know myself by my natural intelligence; and with this sometimes I got so far that I was surprised at myself. And once upon a time, I thought in my reason, 'Thou hast such good parts, may be, if thou shouldst give thy mind to it with all earnestness, thou couldst attain to comprehend somewhat of divine things.' But as this thought came into my head I marked straightway that it was the Devil's counsel, and saw that it was all false. So I said, 'O thou Evil Spirit, what an impure false counsel hast thou put in my heart, thou bad, false counsellor! If we had such a God I would not give a berry for him.' After that, another night, when I was saying my matins,* an ardent longing came over me, so that I said, 'O eternal

* Three o'clock in the morning.

and merciful God, that it were thy will to give me to discover something that should be above all our sensual reason!' As soon as I had said it I was sorely affrighted at this great longing, and said with great fervour, 'Ah, my God and my Lord, forgive me of Thy boundless mercy for having done this, and that it should have entered into the heart of a poor worm like me to desire such a great gift of such rich grace, and I confess indeed that I have not always lived as I ought of right to do. I confess, moreover, dear Lord, that I have been unthankful to Thee in all things, so that methinks I am not worthy that the earth should bear me, still less that such an ardent, gracious desire should spring up in me; wherefore my body must be punished for my sin.' With that I threw off my garments and scourged myself till the blood ran down my shoulders. And as these words remained in my heart and on my lips till the day broke, and the blood was flowing down, in that same hour God showed His mercv on me. so that mv mind was filled with a clear understanding. And in that same

hour I was deprived of all my natural reason; but the time seemed all too short to me. And when I was left to myself again I saw a supernatural mighty wonder and sign, insomuch that I could have cried with St. Peter, 'Lord, it is good for me to be here!' Now know, dear sir, that in that self-same short hour I received more truth and more illumination in my understanding than all the teachers could ever teach me from now till the Judgment Day by word of mouth, and with all their natural learning and science. Now, dear Master, I have said enough for this time, as to how it stands with you."

FIFTH CHAPTER

How God converted a heathen in a foreign land through this pious layman, and how that the Holy Ghost still to this day displays His grace with the same power that He showed on the day of Pentecost, when He finds fitting hearts to receive Him. Further, how this pious man gives still better instruction to the Doctor in these matters, and shows him that he is a true Pharisee, and brings him to submit to be converted and amend his ways.

THEN said the Master, "If God give thee grace to say still more, I should heartily rejoice in it, for I tell thee in all sincerity that I have listened to thee gladly, dear son: now I beg thee for God's sake do not leave me, but stay here, and if thou lack money I will not let thee want for anything, if I have to pledge a book for it." Then said the man, "God reward you, dear sir: know that I need not your kindness, for God hath made me a steward of His goods, so that I have of earthly wealth five thousand florins, which are God's, and if I knew where there was need of them, or where God would have them bestowed, I would give them away." Then said the Master, "Then, dear son, thou art indeed the steward of a rich man and a great Lord! I am in great wonderment about that thou saidst, that I and all teachers could not teach thee as much by the Day of Judgment as thou hast been taught in an hour. Now tell me, for I wish to hear, has the Scripture proceeded from the Holy Ghost?" Then said the man, "Sir, methinks it seems impossible that after I have said so much to you, you should talk in such a childish fashion! Look here, dear Master! I will ask you a question, and if with all your reason you can explain it to me, either by the Scriptures, or without the Scriptures, I will give you ten thousand florins." Then said the Master, "What is that?" The man said, "Can you instruct me how I should write a letter to a heathen far away in a heathen land, in such fashion and language that the heathen should be able to read and understand it; and make the letter such that the heathen should come to the Christian faith?" Then said the Master, "Dear son, these are the works of the Holy Ghost; tell me where has this happened? If thou know anything of the matter, tell me in what way this came to pass, and whether it happened to thyself?" Then said the man, "Albeit I am unworthy of it, yet did the Holy Spirit work through me, a poor sinner; and how it came to pass would take long to tell, and make such a long story that one might write a large book about it: The heathen was a very good-hearted man, and often cried to Heaven, and called upon

HIM who had made him and all the world, and said: 'O Creator of all creatures, I have been born in this land: now the Jews have another faith, the Christians another. O Lord, who art over all, and hast made all creatures, if there be now any faith better than that in which I have been born, or if there be any other better still, show it to me in what wise Thou wilt, so that I may believe it, and I will gladly obey Thee and believe: but if it should be that Thou dost not show it me, and I should die in my faith, since I knew no better, if there were a better faith, but Thou hadst not shown it nor revealed it to me, Thou wouldst have done me a grievous injustice.' Now, behold, dear sir, a letter was sent to that heathen, written by me, a poor sinner, in such sort that he came to the Christian faith; and he wrote me a letter back again, telling what had befallen him, the which stood written in a good German tongue, that I could read it quite well. Dear sir, there were much to be said on this matter, but for this time it is enough; you are well able to mark the meaning thereof." Then said the Master, "God is wonderful in all His works and gifts! Dear son, thou hast told me very strange things."

The man said, "Dear sir, I fear that I have said some things to you which have vexed you greatly in your mind; it is because I am a layman, and you are a great doctor of Holy Scripture, and yet I have said so much to you after the manner of a teacher. But that I have meant it well and kindly, and sought your soul's salvation in it, and simply the glory of God, and nothing else, of that God is my witness." Then said the Master, "Dear son, if it will not make thee angry, I will tell thee what vexes me." Then said the man, "Yea, dear sir, speak without fear; I promise not to take it amiss." The Master said, "It amazes me greatly, and is very hard to receive, that thou being a layman, and I a priest, I am to take instruction from thee; and it also troubles me much that thou calledst me a Pharisee." Then said the man, "Is there nothing else that you cannot take in?" The Master answered, "No, I know of nothing else." Then said the man, "Shall I also explain to you these two things?" He answered, "Yes, dear son, I pray thee in all kindness to do so, for God's sake." Then said the man, "Now tell me, dear Master, how it was, or whose work it was, that the blessed Saint Katharine, who was but a young virgin barely fourteen years old, overcame some fifty of the great masters, and moreover so prevailed over them that they willingly went to martyrdom? Who wrought this?" Then said the Master, "The Holy Ghost did this." Quoth the man, "Do you not believe that the Holy Ghost has still the same power?" The Master, "Yes, I believe it fully." The man, "Wherefore then do you not believe that the Holy Ghost is speaking to you at this moment through me, a poor sinner and unworthy man, and is minded to speak to you? He spoke the truth through Caiaphas, who was also a sinner; and know, that since you take what I have said to you so much amiss, I will refrain from saying anything to you for the future." Then said the Master, "Dear son, do not do that: I hope, if God will, to be the better for thy words." The man said, "Ah, dear sir, it vexes you also that I should have called you a Pharisee, and yet I gave you such full proof of it that you could not deny it. This should have been enough to content you, but since it is not, I must say still more, and prove to you once again, that I am right, and that you are what I said. Dear Master, you know very well that our Lord Jesus Christ said himself, 'Beware of the Pharisees, for they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.' Now, dear sir, look at yourself; in this sermon of yours you have bound

and laid upon us twenty-four articles, and you keep few enough of them yourself. Again: Our Lord said, ‘Beware of the Pharisees: whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do, but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.’” Quoth the Master, “Our Blessed Lord spoke these words to the men of his own day.” The man said, “He speaks them still, now and evermore, to all men. Dear Master, look at yourself; whether you touch these burdens and bear them in your life is known to God and also to yourself; but I confess that as far as I can judge of your present condition, I would rather follow your words than your life. Only look at yourself, and see if you are not a Pharisee in the eyes of God; though not one of those false hypocritical Pharisees whose portion is in hell-fire.” The Master said, “I know not what I shall say; this I see plainly, that I am a sinner, and am resolved to better my life, if I die for it. Dear son, I cannot wait longer; I pray thee, simply for God’s sake, to counsel me how I shall set about this work, and show me and teach me how I may attain to the highest perfection that a man may reach on earth.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, do not be wroth with me; but I tell you of a truth that such counsel is scarcely to be given you; for if you are to be converted, all your wonted habits must be broken through with great pain; because you must altogether change your old way of life: and besides I take you to be near fifty years old.” Then said the Master, “It may be so; but O dear son, to him who came into the vineyard at the eleventh hour was given his penny the same as to him who came in at the first. I tell thee, dear son, I have well considered the matter, and my heart is so firmly set that if I knew this moment that I must die for it, I would yet, with the help of God, cease from my carnal life, and my earthly reasonings, and live according to thy counsel. I beseech thee for God’s sake not to keep me longer waiting, but to tell me this moment how I must begin.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, because you have received grace from God, and are willing to humble yourself and submit, and to bow down before a poor, mean, unworthy creature; for all this let us give the glory to God, to whom it is due, for this grace proceeds from him, and flows back to Him. Since then, dear sir, I am to instruct you, and counsel you in God’s name, I will look to Him for help, and do so in love to Him, and set you a task such as they give children to begin with at school,—namely, the four-and-twenty letters of the alphabet, beginning with A:

SIXTH CHAPTER

This is the golden A B C which this pious man set the Doctor to learn, for the amending of his life, and which, doubtless, it were very profitable and needful for us all to repeat many times and oft, and amend our lives thereafter.

AFTER a manly and not a childish sort, ye shall, with thorough earnestness, begin a good life.
BAD ways ye shall eschew, and practice all goodness with diligence and full purpose of mind.
CAREFULLY endeavour to keep the middle path in all things, with seemliness and moderation.
DEMEAN yourself humbly in word and work, from the inward holiness of your heart.
ENTIRELY give up your own will; evermore cleave earnestly to God, and forsake Him not.

FORWARD and ready shall ye be to all good works, without murmuring, whatever be commanded you.

GIVE heed to exercise yourself in all godly works of mercy toward the body or the spirit.

HAVE no backward glances after the world, or the creatures, or their doings.

INWARDLY in your heart ponder over your past life with honesty, sincere repentance in the bitterness of your heart, and tears in your eyes.

KNIGHTLY and resolutely withstand the assaults of the Devil, the Flesh, and the World.

LEARN to conquer long-cherished sloth with vigour, together with all effeminacy of the body, and subservience to the Devil.

MAKE your abode in God, with fervent love, in certain hope, with strong faith, and be towards your neighbour as towards yourself.

NO other man's good things shall ye desire, be they what they may, corporeal or spiritual.

ORDER all things so that you make the best and not the worst of them.

PENANCE, that is, suffering for your sin, you shall take willingly, whether it come from God or the creatures.

QUITTANCE, remission, and absolution, you shall give to all who have ever done you wrong in thought, word, or deed.

RECEIVE all things that befall you with meekness, and draw improvement from them.

SOUL and body, estate and reputation, keep undenied with all care and diligence.*

TRUTHFUL and upright shall ye be towards all, without guile or cunning.

* The letters R and S have been transposed; the rest follow the order of the original, in which, as in the translation, the important word of the sentence is by no means always the one with which it commences. The letters V and W are wanting in the original.—TR.

WANTONNESS and excess, of whatsoever kind it may be, ye shall learn to lay aside, and turn from it with all your heart.

XT., our Blessed Lord's life and death, shall ye follow, and wholly conform yourself thereunto with all your might.

YE shall evermore, without ceasing, beseech our blessed Lady that she help you to learn this our lesson well.

ZEALOUSLY keep a rein over your will and your senses, that they may be at peace with all that God doth, and also with all His creatures.

All this lesson must be learnt of a free heart and will, without cavilling.

SEVENTH CHAPTER

How the Doctor learns this task very quickly (though with trouble), and how this layman further instructeth him in the shortest way to the highest contemplation; also how he was obliged to begin a dying life, and exercise himself therein till at last he prevailed over himself. And in this

following lesson lies the true ground of almost all the sermons that stand in this book, from which lesson also this Doctor obtained his understanding of Holy Scripture, and the perfecting of his life, as shall be hereafter set forth.

NOW, dear sir, take kindly as from God, without cavilling, this child's task, which He sets you by the mouth of me, a poor and unworthy human being."

Then said the Master, "However thou mayst call this a child's task, methinks it needs a man's strength to attack it. Now tell me, dear son, how long a time wilt thou give me to learn this lesson?" The man answered, "We will take five weeks, in honour of the five wounds of Christ, that you may learn it well. You shall be your own schoolmaster; and when you are not perfect in any one of these letters, and think yourself hardly able to learn it, then cast aside your garment and chastise your body, that it may be brought into subjection to your soul and reason." Then said the Master, "I will gladly be obedient."

Now when this discipline had lasted three weeks, the man said to the Master, "Dear sir, how goes it with you?" The Master said, "Dear son, thou must know that I have received more stripes in these three weeks about your lesson than I ever did in all my days before." Then said the man, "Sir, you well know that no man giveth his pupil a new task before he have learnt the first lines." Then said the Master, "If I said that I knew them, I should say what is not true." Then said the man, "Dear sir, go on as you are doing till you know your lesson right well."

But at the end of another three weeks the Master sent for the man, and said to him, "Dear son, rejoice with me, for I think, with God's help, I could say the first line; and if thou art willing, I will repeat over the whole lesson to thee." "No, dear sir," said the man, "I will gladly rejoice with you, and take your word for it that you know it." Then said the Master, "I tell thee of a truth it has gone hard with me. And now, dear son, I pray thee give me further instruction." Then said the man, "I can for myself teach you nothing further; but if so be that God willeth to teach you through me, I will gladly do my part, and be an instrument in the Lord's hand by which He may work out His purposes.

"Hearken, dear Master: I will counsel you in godly love and brotherly faithfulness. If it should happen to you as to the young man in the Gospel, to whom our Lord said, 'Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and come and follow me,' I will not be answerable." Then said the Master, "Dear son, have no fears on that score, for I have already left all that I have, and, with God's help, am resolved to go forward, and be obedient unto God and to thee." Then said the man, "Since your heart is steadfastly fixed to commit yourself wholly unto God, I counsel you in all faithfulness that ye be obedient to your order and your superiors; as it may be that you may be brought into great perplexity if you be minded to go the straight and narrow way, and that you will be hard pressed and assailed, and most of all by your brethren. And if this should come to pass, your earthly feelings

will seek everywhere for help, and make you call to mind the words in which you pledged yourself to God, and also other things, with the intent that, if possible, they might break away from the cross; and that must not be, but you must yield a willing obedience to suffer all that is appointed you, from whatsoever it may proceed. For know that you must needs walk in that same path of which our Lord spoke to that young man;—you must take up your cross and follow our Lord Jesus Christ and His example, in utter sincerity, humility, and patience, and must let go all your proud, ingenious reason, which you have through your learning in the Scripture. You shall also for a time neither study nor preach, and you shall demean yourself with great simplicity towards your penitents; for when they have ended their confession, you shall give them no further counsel than to say to them, ‘I will learn how to counsel myself, and when I can do that I will also counsel you.’ And if you are asked when you will preach, say, as you can with truth, that you have not time at present, and so you will get rid of the people.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, I will willingly do so; but how then shall I occupy myself?” The man replied, “You shall enter into your cell, and read your Hours, and also chant in the choir if you feel inclined, and shall say mass every day. And what time is left, you shall set before you the sufferings of our Lord, and contemplate your own life in the mirror of His, and meditate on your wasted time in which you have been living for yourself, and how small has been your love compared to His love. In all lowliness ye shall study these things, whereby in some measure ye may be brought to true humility, and also wean yourself from your old habits, and cease from them. And then, when our Lord sees that the time is come, He will make of you a new man, so that you shall be born again of God.

“Nevertheless, you must know that before this can come to pass, you must sell all that you have, and humbly yield it up to God, that you may truly make Him your end, and give up to Him all that you possess in your carnal pride, whether through the Scriptures or without; or whatever it be, whereby you might reap honour in this world, or in the which you may aforetime have taken pleasure or delight, you must let it all go, and, with Mary Magdalene, fall down at Christ’s feet, and earnestly strive to enter on a new course. And so doing, without doubt, the Eternal Heavenly Prince will look down on you with the eye of His good pleasure, and He will not leave His work undone in you, but will urge you still further, that you may be tried and purified as gold in the fire; and it may even come to pass, that He shall give you to drink of the bitter cup that He gave to His only-begotten Son. For it is my belief that one bitter drop which God will pour out for you will be that your good works and all your refraining from evil, yea your whole life will be despised and turned to nought in the eyes of the people; and all your spiritual children will forsake you and think you are gone out of your mind, and all your good friends and your brothers in the convent will be offended at your life, and say that you have taken to strange ways.

“But when these things come upon you, be not in any wise dismayed, but rejoice, for then your salvation draweth nigh; howbeit, no doubt, your human weakness will shrink back in terror, and give way. Therefore, dear Master, you must not be fainthearted, but trust firmly in God, for He forsakes none of His servants, as you know well from the examples of the blessed saints. Now, dear sir, if so be that you are minded to take these things in hand, know that there is nothing better

or more profitable for you at this present than an entire, hearty, humble self-surrender in all things, whether sweet or bitter, painful or pleasant, so that you may be able to say with truth, ‘Ah, my Lord and my God, if it were thy will that I should remain till the Day of Judgment in this suffering and tribulation, yet would I not fall away from thee, but would desire ever to be constant in thy service.’ Dear sir, I see well, by God’s grace, how you are thinking in your heart, that I have said very hard things to you, and this is why I begged you beforehand to let me go, and told you that if you went back like that young man, I would not have it laid to my charge.” Then said the Master, “Thou sayest truly; I confess it does seem to me a hard thing to follow your counsel.” The man answered, “Yet you begged me to show you the shortest way to the highest perfectness. Now I know no shorter nor surer way than to follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. But, dear sir, I counsel you in all faithfulness, to take a certain space of time to consider these matters, and then in God’s name do as God gives you grace to do.” Then said the Master, “That will I do, and wait and see whether, with the help of God, I may prevail.”

EIGHTH CHAPTER

How it fared with the Doctor after this, and how he fell into great tribulation and contempt, till he fell ill thereby; and how the layman counselled him, and allowed him to help nature with some good food and spices, and afterwards departed from him.

ON the eleventh day after this, the Master sent for the man, and said to him, “Ah, dear son, what agony and struggle and fighting have I not had within me day and night, before I was able to overcome the Devil and my own flesh. But now by God’s grace I have gathered myself together with all my powers inward and outward, and set my hand to this work with good courage, and am purposed to remain steadfast therein, come weal come woe.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, do you remember still all I said to you when you asked me how you should begin?” The Master answered, “Yes, the moment thou didst depart I wrote down all thou hadst said to me, word for word.” Then said the man, “Dear sir, that through God you have found this bold heart, rejoices me from the bottom of my soul, and I am as well pleased as if it had happened to myself, so God be my witness. And now in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, set forward.” Then the man took his leave, and the Master did as he had been bidden.

Now it came to pass that before a year was out the Master grew to be despised of all his familiar friends in the convent, and his spiritual children all forsook him as entirely as if they had never seen him. And this he found very hard to bear, and it caused him such grief that his head was like to turn. Then he sent for the man and told him how it fared with him; how he was ill in his whole body, and especially in his head. Then said the man, “Sir, you must not be dismayed, but you must humbly cleave to God, and put your firm trust in Him. Know that this account of yours pleases me well. and it stands well with your life. and will grow better every day.

“Dear sir, you know well that he who will walk in the right way, and tread this path, must be made a partaker of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore be not afraid, but commit yourself wholly to God. For know that the same thing happened to me also. Meanwhile you must take some remedies while you are in this state, and treat your body well with good food which may strengthen it. A box of spices was made for me, and I will have such an one prepared for you to strengthen your head. But you must know that I always gave myself up body and soul to God, that He might do with them what he pleased.”

Then said the Master, “But thou didst tell me before that I must shun good eating and drinking.” The man answered, “Yes, sir, that was in the first beginning, when the flesh was yet wanton, but now that it is tamed and obedient to the spirit, we may come to its help with remedies, else we should tempt God. So long as you are in this sickness, you will be serving God to cherish your body by allowable means, but not to live disorderly; that must not be. Dear sir, make God your help, and go forward with cheerful mind, and commit yourself to God with true and thorough resignation, and put your trust in His boundless mercy, and wait for His grace to show you what He will have you to do, and then with His help strive to fulfil that to the uttermost, whether it be bitter or sweet. Further, I beseech you for God’s sake not to take it amiss of me, but I must go home on account of a very important matter, which I assure you in all earnestness I have much at heart; but if so be that you could not or would not do without me, send into the town for me, and I will gladly come; but if you can bear up without the aid of any creature, that would be best of all for you.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, say not so, for I cannot and would not do without thee for any length of time; it would be hard indeed if thou didst forsake me, for then I should have no consolation left in the world.” The man said, “Dear sir, I will show you a better Comforter, that is the Holy Ghost, who has called and invited and brought you to this point, by means of me His poor creature, but it is His work which has been wrought in you, and not mine; I have been merely His instrument, and served Him therein, and have done so right willingly, for the glory of God and the salvation of your soul.” Then said the Master, “Dear son, may God be thine eternal reward! Since it is so weighty a matter, I will commit myself to God, and bear this suffering as best I may.” The man said, “Dear sir, since you are now under the yoke, and have entered on a spiritual life and obedience to God, and have voluntarily devoted yourself thereto, you should know how to live discreetly and wisely, and to govern yourself aright; and do not let it repent you because you are forsaken of the creatures, but if it should happen that you lack money, or have need of some, put a part of your books in pawn, and do not suffer yourself to want for anything, but by no means sell the books, for a time will come when good books will be very useful, and you will have need of them.” Then the man took his leave and departed from that place, but the Master’s eyes filled with tears, and he began to weep.

NINTH CHAPTER

How Doctor Tauler was visited, touched, and illuminated after a wonderful manner by God, and how the layman came to him again, and admonished him tenderly to begin to preach afresh, and to exercise himself in the Holy Scriptures. Also concerning a strange event that befell him afterwards, whereby he was still more tried and humbled, yet not without fruit.

NOW when the Master had suffered thus for two years, from sore assaults and temptations of the Devil, and great contempt from all his friends, and also great poverty, so that he was obliged to pledge a part of his books, and withal fell into great weakness of the body, and he had demeaned himself with great humility throughout;—behold, it came to pass on the Feast of St. Paul’s Conversion, that in the night he was overtaken by the most grievous assault that may be imagined, whereby all his natural powers were so overcome with weakness that when the time for matins came he could not go in to chapel, but remained in his cell, and commended himself to God in great humility, without help or consolation from any creature. And as he lay in this state of weakness, he thought of the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, and His great love that He had for us, and considered his own life, how poor his life had been compared to the love of God. Whereupon he was overwhelmed with contrition for all his sins and all his wasted time, and exclaimed with tongue and heart: “O merciful God! have mercy upon me a poor sinner, for thy boundless mercy’s sake, for I am not worthy that the earth should bear me.” And as he was lying in this weakness and great sadness, but fully awake, he heard with his bodily ears a voice saying: “Stand fast in thy peace, and trust God, and know that when He was on earth in human nature, He made the sick whom He healed in body sound also in soul.” Straightway when these words were uttered, he lost his senses and reason, and knew not how or where he was. But when he came to himself again, he felt within himself that he was possessed of a new strength and might in all powers outward and inward, and had also a clear understanding in those things which aforetime were dark to him, and he wondered greatly whence this came, and thought to himself, “I cannot come to the bottom of this matter. I will send for my friend and tell him all that has happened.” So he sent for the man; and when he was come, the Master told him all that had befallen him. Then the man said, “It rejoices me from the bottom of my heart to hear all that you have told me. Dear sir, you must know that you have now for the first time received the true and mighty gift of God’s grace; and I tell you of a truth that now, for the first time, your soul has been touched by the Most High; and know that, as the letter hath in some measure slain you, so it shall likewise make you alive again, for your doctrine will come now from the Holy Ghost, which before came from the flesh; for you have now received the light of the Holy Spirit by the grace of God, and you already know the Holy Scriptures. Therefore you have now a great advantage, and you will henceforward have a much clearer insight into the Scripture than you had before. For, as you know, the Scripture sounds in many places as if it contradicted itself, but since that you have now, by the grace of God, received the Holy Scriptures into your own heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, you will perceive that all Scripture has the same intent, and does not contradict itself, and you will also be able rightly to follow the pattern left us by the Lord Jesus Christ. You ought also to begin to preach again, and to teach your fellow-Christians, and show them the right path to eternal life. The time is come now when good

books will be profitable to you; for know that one of your sermons will be more profitable now, and the people will receive more fruit therefrom, than from a hundred aforetime, for the words that you say now, coming from a pure soul, will have a pure and simple favour. Wherefore, just as much as you have been despised by the people, so shall you now be esteemed and beloved by them. But it will be most especially needful that you keep yourself humble, for you know well that he who carries a great treasure exposed to view must ever be on his guard against thieves. I tell you truly the Devil is in great terror when he perceives that God has bestowed on any man such a noble and precious treasure, and the devils will set all their arts and wisdom, and their lusts too, to work, to rob and bereave you of this costly treasure; wherefore look wisely to your goings, for nothing will so greatly help you to preserve it as utter humility. Now, dear sir, it is no longer needful for me to speak to you as a teacher, as I have done hitherto, for you have now the right and true Master, whose instrument I have been: to Him give ear, and obey His commands; this is my most faithful counsel. And now, in all godly love, I desire to receive instruction from you, for I have, with God's help, accomplished the good work for which I was sent and came hither. I would fain, if God will, sojourn here a good while and hear you preach. If God give you to do so, methinks it were well that you should now begin to preach again." Then said the Master, "Dear son, what had I better do; I have pledged a great many good books, as many as come to thirty florins?" The man answered, "Look! I will give you that sum, for God's sake, and if you have any of it left over, give it back to God, for all that we have is His, whether temporal or spiritual." So the Master redeemed his books, and ordered notice to be given that he would preach three days after. The people wondered much thereat, because it was so long since he had preached, and a great crowd gathered together to hear him. And when the Master came and saw that there was such a multitude, he went up into a pulpit in a high place that they might hear him all the better. Then he held his hood before his eyes, and said, "O merciful, Eternal God, if it be Thy will, give me so to speak that it may be to the praise and glory of Thy name and the good of this people." As he said these words, his eyes overflowed with tears of tenderness, so that he could not speak a word for weeping, and this lasted so long that the people grew angry. At last a man spoke out of the crowd, "Sir, how long are we to stand here? It is getting late; if you do not mean to preach, let us go home." But the Master remained in earnest prayer, and said again to God, "Oh, my Lord and my God, if it be Thy divine will, take this weeping from my eyes, and give me to deliver this sermon to Thy praise and glory. But, if Thou dost not do it, I take it as a sign that Thou judgest I have not yet been enough put to shame. Now fulfil, dear Lord, Thy divine will on me Thy poor creature, to Thy praise and my necessities." This all availed nothing; he wept yet more and more. Then he saw that God would have it so, and said, with weeping eyes, "Dear children, I am sorry from my heart that I have kept you here so long, for I cannot speak a word to-day for weeping; pray God for me, that He may help me, and then I will make amends to you, if God give me grace, another time, as soon as ever I am able." So the people departed, and this tale was spread abroad and resounded through the whole city, so that he became a public laughing-stock, despised by all; and the people said, "Now we all see that he has become a downright fool." And his own brethren strictly forbade him to preach any more, because he did the convent great injury thereby, and disgraced the order with the senseless practices that he had taken up, and which had disordered his brain.

Then the Master sent for the man, and told him all that had happened. The man said, “Dear Master, be of good cheer, and be not dismayed at these things. The Bridegroom is wont to behave so to all His best and dearest friends, and it is a certain sign that God is your good friend, for, without a doubt, He has seen some speck of pride concealed within you that you have not perceived, nor been conscious of yourself, and therefore it is that you have been put to shame. You may have received some great gifts of God, which you yourself do not know or perceive, that have been given you by means of the patience with which you have endured this assault; therefore be of good cheer, and be joyful and humble. Neither should you think this a strange thing, for I have seen many such instances in other people. You shall not despise this pressure of the cross which God has sent you, but count it a great blessing and favour from God. I counsel you that you remain alone for the next five days, and endure without speaking to any, to the praise and glory of the five wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when the five days are ended, beg your Prior to give you permission to deliver a sermon in Latin. If he refuse, beg him to let you try in the school and read a lecture to the brethren.” And he did so; and read to his brethren such an excellent lecture as they had never heard in their lives before, so grand and deep and godly was his doctrine. Then they gave him permission to preach a sermon; and after one of their brethren had preached in the church where the Master was wont to preach, he gave notice to the people, and said, “I am ordered to announce that to-morrow the Master intends to preach in this place; but if it should befall him as it did lately, I will not be answerable for it. So much I can say with truth, that in our school he has read us a lecture containing such great and profound instruction, with high and divine wisdom, as we have not heard for a long time. But what he will do this time I know not; God only knoweth.” The next day after, the Master came to the convent (it was a convent of ladies), and began to preach, and said:

TENTH CHAPTER

An excellent sermon which this Doctor delivered in a convent after his illumination, concerning Christ the true Bridegroom of the soul, in the which he showed how she is to follow Him in true, shamefaced, humble, and patient resignation, and how Christ tries her beforehand in divers ways, and at last accepts her lovingly. Taken from these words—“Ecce sponsus venit, exite obviam ei” (Matt. xxv. 6).

DEAR children, it may be now two years or more since I last preached. I spoke to you then of four-and-twenty Articles, and it was then my custom to speak much Latin, and to make many quotations; but I intend to do so no more, but if I wish to talk Latin, I will do so when the learned are present, who can understand it. For this time repeat only an Ave Maria to begin with, and pray for God’s grace.

Dear children, I have taken a text on which I mean to preach this sermon, and not to go beyond

it: in the vulgar tongue it runs thus,—“*Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.*”

The Bridegroom is our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Bride is the Holy Church and Christendom. Now we are all called brides of Christ, wherefore we ought to be willing to go forth and meet our Bridegroom; but, alas! we are not so. The true paths and straight highways by which to go out to meet the Bridegroom are, alas! nowadays quite deserted and falling into decay, till we have come hardly to perceive where they are; nay, this highway is to many quite strange and unknown, so that they do not go out to meet the Bridegroom, as they are in duty bound to do, of which I will speak another time, with God’s help; but now, since we hear that we are all called brides, I will tell you somewhat concerning what the Bride must do in order to go and meet the Bridegroom.

It is seemly that a faithful Bride should avoid everything that is displeasing to the Bridegroom, such as vain-glory, pride, envy, and all the other sins of this world, and all the delights of the body and the flesh, whether it be the ease and indulgence of the body, or other things which are beyond the necessaries of life. Further, it beseems a faithful Bride to be shamefaced. When this comes to pass, and the Bride, for her Bridegroom’s sake, has despised and given up all these things, then she begins to be somewhat well-pleasing to the Bridegroom.

But, if she desires to be yet more well-pleasing in His sight, she must humbly bow down before Him, and say with heart and lips, “Ah! my dear Lord and Bridegroom, Thou knowest all hearts. I have said to Thee, with my whole heart, that I desire to do all that I can and may, and to do it willingly, as far as Thou givest me to perceive through my conscience what is agreeable and well-pleasing to Thee.” When the Bride makes this vow to the Bridegroom, He turneth himself and begins to look upon her. Then she beseeches Him to bestow upon her some gift as a token of love. What is the gift? It is that she is inwardly and outwardly beset with divers assaults, with which He is wont to endow his special friends.

But if the Bride be as yet unaccustomed to suffer, she will say, “Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, this is very hard upon me; I greatly fear that I shall scarcely be able to endure it. Therefore, dear Lord and Bridegroom, I pray Thee to make my burden somewhat more tolerable, or else to take a part of it away.” Then the Bridegroom answers, “Tell me then, dear Bride, should the Bride fare better than the Bridegroom has fared? If thou desirest to meet the Bridegroom, thou must imitate Him in some sort, and it is, moreover, reasonable that a faithful Bride should suffer somewhat with Him for her Bridegroom’s sake.” Now when the Bride heareth what is the will of her Bridegroom, and how grave a matter it is, she is sore affrighted, and says, “Dear Lord and Bridegroom, be not wroth with me, for I will gladly hearken unto Thee: appoint unto me what Thou wilt; I am willing to suffer all things with Thy help and in thy love.” When the Bridegroom heareth this, He loveth the Bride yet better than He did before, and giveth her to drink of a still better cup. This cup is that she is to cease from all her own thoughts, and all her works and refrainings will give her no content, for she can take pleasure in nothing that is her own. However good the actions may be in themselves, she is always thinking how she shall anger her Bridegroom therewith, and feareth much that she

will, perhaps, have to suffer a great punishment for them hereafter. Moreover, she is derided by all, and these things are accounted her folly.

Now, children, by reason of all these things, her natural powers become wearied out and grow feeble, insomuch that she is constantly in fear lest she should not hold out to the end, but must die at last; and hereupon she is greatly terrified, for she is yet somewhat timorous and faint-hearted. Then she cries earnestly unto the Bridegroom, and says, “Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, how great are Thy terrors; know that I cannot endure them long: I must die.” But the Bridegroom answers, “If thou wilt in truth go out to meet thy Bridegroom, it is fitting that thou should first tread some portion of the path that He has travelled. Now whereas the Bridegroom has suffered shame, hunger, cold, thirst, heat, and bitter pains, for three and thirty years, and at last a bitter death, for the Bride’s sake, out of pure love, is it not just and right that the Bride should venture even her life for the Bridegroom’s sake, out of love, and with all her heart? Verily, if thou hadst the right sort of love and true faithfulness unto thy Bridegroom, all thy fear would vanish.”

Then when she hears these words of the Bridegroom her whole heart is moved with fear, and she says, “Ah! dear Lord, I acknowledge in all sincerity that I have done wrong, and I am out of all measure terrified at it; I grieve from the bottom of my heart that I have not with a faithful heart yielded myself up unto Thee, even unto death. Dear Lord and Bridegroom, I here vow and promise to Thee surely that all which Thou willest I also will. Come sickness, come health, come pleasure or pain, sweet or bitter, cold or heat, wet or dry, whatever Thou willest, that do I also will; and desire altogether to come out from my own will, and to yield a whole and willing obedience unto Thee, and never to desire aught else either in will or thought: only let Thy will be accomplished in me, Thy poor unworthy creature, in time and in eternity. For, dear Lord, when I look at what I am, I am not worthy that the earth should bear me.”

Now when the Bridegroom seeth this entire and faithful will in the Bride, and her deep and thorough humility, what does He then do? His heart yearns over the Bride, and giveth her a very costly, noble, sweet cup to drink. What is this cup? It is that she suffers yet far more from all manner of temptation and tribulation than she has ever suffered before. And when the Bride perceiveth this, and seeth the Bridegroom’s earnestness and good pleasure concerning her, she suffereth all these things willingly and gladly for the Bridegroom’s sake, and boweth herself down humbly before Him, and saith, “Ah! dear Lord and Bridegroom, it is just and right that Thou shouldest not will as I will, but I desire and ought to will as Thou wilt; I receive this gift right willingly and gladly for Thy love from Thy divine hand, whether it be pleasant or painful to the flesh, I acquiesce wholly in it for love of Thee.”

Now when the Bridegroom, in His eternal wisdom, perceives this disposition within His humble Bride, and her thorough earnestness, she begins to grow precious to Him, and from hearty love He giveth her to suffer in all her nature, until the Bride is wholly purified from all faults and stain of sin. and become perfectly fair and unspotted. Then He says. “Now rise up. my beloved. my pleasant.

my beautiful Bride, for Thou art pure and without spot, and altogether lovely in my eyes.” Then He looks upon her with infinite, mighty, divine love. To this joyful high-tide cometh the Father of the Eternal Bridegroom, and saith to the Bride, “Rise up, my lovely, chosen beloved, it is time to go to Church,” and He taketh the Bridegroom and the Bride, and leadeth them to the Church, and marries them to each other, and binds them together with divine love; yea, God doth bind them together in bonds so fast that they can never be parted again, either in time or eternity. And when, in these divine espousals, they have been made one, the Bridegroom saith, “O, beloved and Eternal Father, what shall be our wedding-gift?” And the Father saith, “The Holy Ghost, for that it is His office to be in the Father’s stead.” And He sheds forth upon the Bride the torrent of divine love, and this love flows out unto the Bridegroom, insomuch that the Bride loseth herself, and is intoxicated with love, so that she forgets herself and all creatures, in time or eternity, together with herself. Now he only who is bidden to such a spiritual, glorious marriage-feast, and has obeyed the call, does for the first time perceive and taste the real, true, blessed, gracious sweetness of the Holy Spirit. Now is this Bride a true worshipper, for she worshippeth the Father in the Holy Spirit. In this marriage-feast is joy upon joy, and therein is more peace and joy in one hour than all the creatures can yield in time or in eternity. The joy that the Bride hath with the Bridegroom is so vast that no senses or reason can apprehend or attain unto it.”

As the Doctor spoke these words a man cried out with a loud voice, “It is true!” and fell down as if he were dead. Then a woman called out from the crowd and said, “Master, leave off, or this man will die on your hands.”

Then the Master said, “Ah, dear children, and if the Bridegroom take the Bride and lead her home with Him, we will gladly yield her to Him; nevertheless, I will make an end and leave off. Dear children, let us all cry unto the Lord our God in Heaven. For verily we have all need so to do, seeing that, alas! we have grown so dull of hearing and foolish of heart that none of us has compassion on his fellow, although we confess that we are all called brothers and sisters. There be also few who are willing to fight their way against their own flesh, and follow the Bridegroom, in order to reach a nobler joy and a glorious wedding-feast.

I give you to know that in these days those be few and far between who do truly go out to meet the Bridegroom, such as there were many in the olden time. Therefore it behoveth each one to look at himself and consider his ways with great earnestness. For the time is at hand—nay, it is already come—when it may be said of most who are now living here, that “they have eyes and see not, and ears that hear not.” Dear children, let us all strive to enter into this wedding-feast, most rich in joy, and honour, and blessedness.

But when the Bride departs from this marriage-feast and is left to herself, and beholds that she has come back again to this miserable earthly state, she says within herself, “O! poor miserable creature that I am, am I here again?” And she is sad in herself; nevertheless, she is so utterly resigned in boundless humility to her Bridegroom that she in no wise may think of or desire His presence

in boundless humility to her Bridegroom, that she will not may think of or desire His presence, because she deems herself wholly unworthy thereof. But the Bridegroom does not therefore forsake her, but looketh upon His Bride from time to time, because He well knoweth that none will or can comfort her, but He alone.

And now that you have heard this, let it not surprise you that I have not told you how lovingly the Bridegroom talketh with the Bride. It might well happen that none would believe me (except such a one as had tried and tasted it himself), should I tell you what strange words the Bride saith to her Bridegroom. We find, too, in the Scriptures, that the loving soul oftentimes holds such converse with her Beloved as words cannot perfectly express. Nay, does it not happen every day with earthly lovers, that a bride and bridegroom talk together in such wise that if others heard it they would declare them mad or drunk?

Now, dear children, I fear that I have kept you too long; but the time has not seemed long to me: also, I have said it all for your good, and could not well this time make my sermon shorter if I were rightly to explain my meaning; therefore receive it kindly.

That we may all become real, true, perfect brides of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we may in sincere, true, utter humility and resignation, go out to meet our glorious Bridegroom, and abide with Him for ever, may God help us, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Of a great prodigy that was wrought in certain persons through this sermon, as afterwards appeared, whereby we are given to understand what great wonders God works by good instruments, that is that He will do more by one sermon of an enlightened man than by a hundred others.

WHEN this sermon was ended, the Master went down and read Mass, and gave the Lord's Body to certain good people; but after the sermon the man perceived that some forty people remained sitting in the churchyard. When Mass was over he told the Master of it, and they went out to where he had seen the people sitting that they might see how it was with them. But in the meantime, while the Master had been celebrating Mass, they had risen up and gone away, except twelve, who were still there. Then said the Master to the man, “Dear son, what dost thou think we had best do with these people?” Then the man went from one to another and touched them, but they lay as if they were dead, and scarcely moved. The Master knew not what to think of this strange thing, for he had never seen the like before, and so he said to the man, “Tell me, what dost thou think? Are the people alive or dead?” Then he smiled and said, “If they were dead, it would be your fault and the Bridegroom's; how then should you bring them round again?” The Master said, “But if the Bridegroom be with me in this business, ought I to awaken them?” The man answered, “Sir, these

people are still in this present state, and I wish that you would ask the convent ladies to let them be carried into their cloister, that they may not take some sickness and harm to their bodies, by lying in the open air on the cold earth.” And they did so; and the people were brought into a warm place. Then the convent ladies said, “Dear sir, we have a nun here to whom the same thing has happened, and she is lying on her bed as if she were dead.” Then said the Master, “My dear daughters, be patient, for God’s sake, and look to these sick people, and when any one of them comes to himself give him something warm to take; if he will have it; give it him in Christ’s name.” And the ladies said they would willingly do so. So the Master and the man went their way, and entered into the Master’s cell. Then the man said, “Now, dear Master, what think you of this? Has the like ever happened to you in your life before? Now I wot you see what wonders God works with good tools. Dear sir, I perceive that this sermon will stir many, and one will tell it to another. If it please you, methinks it were well that you let these sick children rest for awhile, for this sermon will give them plenty to digest for some time, and if you think it good, and God give you so to do, that you preach a sermon also to those who are in the world, seeing it is now Lent.” And the Master did so gladly, and preached also to those who were in the world, to the great amendment of certain of them.*

* Here follow two chapters in the original, containing sketches of other sermons preached by Tauler; but as they are less valuable than most of his sermons, and have nothing whatever to do with the progress of the story, I have judged it best to omit them.—TR.

TWELFTH CHAPTER

How this holy Doctor came to his end, and afterward appeared to his dear friend the layman, and showed him the cause of his painful departure from this world, to wit that it had been his purgatory, after which he attained great joy and eternal blessedness, which were given him by God as the reward of his good and faithful teaching.

NOW you must know that the Master made progress in the divine life, and received such wisdom, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he preached both to clergy and laity, and came to be held in such esteem and honour throughout the land, and also in that city, that whenever the people had any weighty matter to transact, he was called in to settle it with his wisdom, whether it concerned spiritual or temporal affairs, and whatever he counselled them was right in their eyes, and they hearkened unto him gladly. And after that the Master had led this faithful life full eight years, God would not leave His servant longer in this earthly misery, and saw fit to take him to Himself without purgatory. Wherefore He sent His judgments upon him, and visited him with sickness, so that the Master kept his bed for more than twenty weeks, and his sufferings were very sore, and his pains grievous. Then he perceived, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he was about to depart from this world (God was minded to reward him for his work); wherefore he sent for the man, his dear friend, and begged him to come to him, for he expected not to be much longer in this world. And the man

hearkened and came to the Master, who received him after a most friendly sort; and the man was glad that he found him yet alive, and said, “Dear Master, how fares it with you?” The Master said, “I believe that the time is very near when God purposes to take me from this world, for which cause, dear son, it is a great consolation to me that thou art present at my end. I pray thee take these books which are lying there: thou wilt find written therein all thy discourse with me aforetime, and also my answers, and thou wilt find somewhat concerning my life, and the dealings of God with me His poor unworthy servant. Dear son, if thou think fit, and if God give thee grace, make a little book of it.” Then said the man, “Dear Master, I have written down five of these sermons, and if it please you, I will write them out also, and will make a little book about you.” Quoth the Master, “Dear son, I lay upon thee my most solemn admonition, that thou write nothing about me, and that thou do not mention my name; for thou must know that of a truth the life, and words, and works which God has wrought through me a poor, unworthy, sinful man are not mine, but belong to God Almighty, now and for evermore; therefore, dear son, if thou wilt write it down for the profit of our fellow-Christians, write it so that neither my name nor thine be named, but thou mayst say the Master and the man. Moreover, thou shalt not suffer the book to be read or seen by any one in this town, lest he should mark that it was I, but take it home with thee to thy own country, and let it not come out during my life.”

And for a space of eleven days the Master held much discourse with the man. After that, the time came that the Master should die. Then he said, “Dear son, I pray thee, in God’s name, to give thy consent to it, if God should permit my spirit to come back to thee, and tell thee how it fared with me.” The man answered, “Dear Master, if God will have it so, I am also willing.” But it came to pass that at the last the Master had a most horrible and frightful death-struggle, insomuch that all the brethren in the convent, and also other people, were greatly terrified and distressed thereat, and were sore amazed at the dreadful anguish that they saw in his death.

Now when he was dead, all who were in the convent and the city were filled with sorrow. But when they perceived who was the man that had been so long his bosom-friend in secret, they came and desired to show him honour, and besought him to be their guest. But when he was aware of their intent, he fled that same hour out of the city, and travelled home again. And as he was on the way, the third day after the Master’s death, at nightfall he was passing through a little village with his servant, and seeing a nobleman go past along the road, he said to him, “My friend, is there any inn in this village?” The nobleman answered, “No.” Then said the man, “Then show us the kindness, dear friend, in God’s name, to let us lodge in thy house for to-night, and take for it what thou wilt.” Then he said, “If you will put up with such things as we have, I will willingly lodge you, and give you the best in my power.” So he took him home with him. When it was night he laid the man upon a feather-bed, and showed the servant into the barn to lie upon the straw. Now in the night the man awoke and heard a voice close by; yet he saw no one. Then a shudder ran through him, and he made the sign of the Cross. Then the voice said, “Fear not, dear son, it is I, the Master.” Then said the man, “Dear Master, is it you? Then I beseech you, with my whole heart, to tell me, if God will, how it standeth with you, and how it came to pass that you had such a dreadful end; for your brethren

in the convent were much astonished at you, and it is to be feared that your frightful end will be a great stumbling-block to your own brethren in the convent.” Then said the Master’s voice, “Dear son, that will I tell thee. Thou must know that our Lord God saw fit to appoint me such a hard death in order that the holy angels might straightway receive my soul to themselves; and for the same cause thou shalt also have such a like hard death. It was needful that I should suffer this as a purgatory; but know likewise, my dear son, that the evil spirits tormented me greatly, and assailed me with such cunning and instancy, that I was in constant fear lest my courage should fail me. But, however hard my death was, it was as nothing compared to the joy which the Almighty, Eternal, and Merciful God hath given me in return. Know, dear son, that the same hour in which my soul left my body, the blessed angels received it, and conducted me to Paradise, and said to me, ‘Here shalt thou tarry five days, and shalt know no anxiety or fear lest the evil spirits should harm thee any more, neither shalt thou labour any more, only thou shalt be deprived for these five days of the blissful company of the blessed in eternity. And then we will come again with joy, and bring thee to the unspeakable joys, and reward thee for thy good and faithful teaching and useful counsels;’ all which I have received by thy excellent instruction, for the which I can never thank God and thee enough.”

Then said the man: “Dear Master, I beseech you from the bottom of my heart that when you come into the presence of God, you pray Him for me.” But whatever the man said after this, or whatever questions he put, no one answered him again. Then he would fain have slept, and turned from one side to the other; but it availed him nothing: he got no more rest that night, and could hardly wait till it was light. And at daybreak he rose up, and wrote that same hour word to the Prior and brethren of all things that the spirit had said to him, and returned to his own house, and came also to a good and blessed end.

That we may all follow the pattern of our Lord Jesus Christ, insomuch that after this miserable life and this transitory world we may come to eternal and never-ending joys,—to God and His chosen and beloved friends, may He help us, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen!

Here endeth the History of the Life of the enlightened Doctor John Tauler.