

# THE DARK BEYOND

BY  
REV. JOHN HAW  
OF TREVES, GERMANY

TRANSLATED BY  
REV. JAMES WALCHER

— REPRODUCTION —

ST. LOUIS, MO., 1912  
PUBLISHED BY B. HERDER  
17 SOUTH BROADWAY

FREIBURG (BADEN)  
GERMANY

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## *NIHIL OBSTAT*

*Sti. Ludovici, die 10 Junii, 1912.*

*JOSEPHUS WENTKER,*

*Censor Librorum.*

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*Archiepiscopus*

*Sti . Ludovici.*

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## PREFACE

Rev. John Haw, the author of "Etwas aus dem dunklen Jenseits fuer Jedermann," has kindly permitted me to English this popular treatise on the terror-inspiring doctrine of eternal punishment.

The writer's aim in presenting this booklet to the public was: to inspire the sinner and the just with the holy "fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 110:10). This wisdom consists in "seeking first the kingdom of God and His justice" (Matth. 6:33), for "it is vanity to mind this life, and not to look forward into those things that are to come" (Imitation 1:1). The terrors of "The Dark Beyond" should convince us of the truth of the wise man's words: "*Vanity of vanities, and all is vanity*, besides loving God and serving Him alone" (Ibid.). They will teach us to withdraw our hearts from the love of visible things, and to turn to things invisible (Ibid.). The frequent and serious thought of hell will help us to answer the questions of Jesus Christ: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (Matth. 16:26).

I followed the original as closely as possible. But, to chapter 5, I added the vision of St. Teresa, quoted some scripture texts more fully and added a few.

It may be objected that not all the scripture texts adduced refer to hell in the sense of the Sacred Text. I readily concede this. Still these words taken from Holy Scripture may be used to give us a picture of the infernal regions; for, we may argue that, if in this life, where His mercy tempers His justice, God afflicts the sinner with His visitations, He will treat the impenitent sinner with no less severity in the life to come. Besides many of these texts are only to be taken figuratively, to give us an idea, as far as human language can, of the rigors of God's judgment towards the impenitent sinner.

In conclusion I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to my friend, Rev. George Rauch, A.B., LL.B., of Fergus Falls, Minn., for the many kind helps in making this translation. Whatever good it may possess is due to him, and the imperfections the indulgent reader must blame on

THE TRANSLATOR.

# THE DARK BEYOND

## CHAPTER I

### A TIMELY THEME

The well-known Jesuit Father Abel once gave a mission in Pressburg. People came in crowds to hear the famous speaker; even the liberal press praised him till he spoke of hell.

"The reverend Father could have chosen a theme more appropriate" they said. Of course to the tardy debtor the bill is never welcome, nor the hangman to the criminal.

Either there is a hell or there is not. If there is no hell, why fear the mere name? But if there is a hell, then the preaching on hell is appropriate, and especially appropriate for those who do not consider it so.

To speak on hell is as appropriate as to speak on death. Do away with death and you may be silent about hell. But as long as every day finds more than 90,000 souls winging their flight into eternity, the theme on the dark beyond must be appropriate; and so long as you and I may this very day stand at the gate of hell, a little information on the place where we may dwell not only a short time but for all eternity, is desperately appropriate.

The less people will hear of hell the more timely and appropriate is this theme. It is necessary to call a halt with thundering voice to the world that is drunk with the lust of sense, blinded by earthly glory, and thus maddened, rushes on to certain destruction.

Not he is your enemy who tells you the truth about hell, but he who deceives you and causes you to forget its terrors only the surer to cast you into it.

How loudly and frantically we cry "fire" without fear of molesting the sleeper when the house of a sleeping man is ablaze.

Let us cry aloud and unceasingly the word "hell" into modern society, — it will not be so painful as to hear the terrible words of the Judge: *"Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire"* (Matth. 25:41).

Of course the warning words of a Cassandra are not heeded in the giddiness and the intoxication of joy. Once upon a time, the old story has it, the inhabitants of Troy, unmindful of danger, were lost in feasting and joy whilst the threatening Greek army came nearer and nearer. Only one warned them, the prophetess Cassandra. But in vain! They considered her insane and undisturbed their feasting continued; their rejoicing went on till it was too late,

and the wild orgies of the carousers were drowned in the din of the murderous arms of the enemy.

The sinful world of our days also celebrates feast upon feast. Woe to the priest who dares to preach of hell to the dancing world! At first men laugh at his threats, then they are irritated; they cry about extravagance, presumption, disturbing consciences, madness, hallucinations, insanity — till the burning flames of hell consume them.

. . . . .

In the military school of St. Cyr the chaplain, Abbé Rigolot, had one evening given the cadets a stirring address on hell. With a candle in his hand, he was just on his way to his room, when he heard someone calling him. A wild-looking captain, with a white mustache and a sarcastic smile, had followed him. "Permit me to say it, reverend Father, you gave us an excellent sermon on hell, but you forgot one thing: you forgot to tell us whether we shall be roasted, boiled or broiled down there. Could you not tell me?"

For a moment the priest looked into the eyes of the scoffer, then held the candle below his nose and said: "You'll discover that for yourself, Captain."

He then left the astonished officer.

The priest did not think much of the incident; but he thought that he noticed that the captain tried to avoid him. The July Revolution came along and the chaplains were dismissed.

Twenty years later there was a select gathering in a salon. An old soldier with a white mustache approached a venerable priest, Abbé Rigolot, grasped his hand and said with trembling voice: "Reverend Father, I thank you; you saved me."

"I? How is that?"

"You seem not to remember me. I am the Captain of St. Cyr, whom, in answer to his foolish question, you held a burning candle to his nose. Your words: 'You'll discover that for yourself, Captain,' haunted me constantly. From that hour the thought of hell never left me. I fought against it ten years, but finally I had to surrender. I went to confession and became a good Catholic."

. . . . .

"Let us descend into hell while we live, that we may not have to descend into it when we die."

St. Bernard, *Ad Fratres in Monte, de Vita Sol.*



## CHAPTER II

### "THERE IS NO HELL"

"Hell is an invention of priests, a nursery tale, with which you may frighten children, but cannot disturb sensible men."

That is the old and the new discovery, not of the great minds of the world — they all believed in hell — but of beer philosophers and shallow minds.

Firstly: 'Tis a pity, dear friend, that in this matter your opinion is of little importance. If there is a hell, then your "conviction" will not extinguish its fire. The thief may be hanged even if he does not believe in the existence of the gallows.

Secondly: Are you really firmly convinced that there is no hell? Who proved that to you?

An infidel of the 18th century once wrote to Voltaire, the prince of blasphemers, that he had found the metaphysical (absolute) proof that there is no hell. What did the scoffer of Ferney answer? "Then you are happier than I; I have not yet found it."

Let us suppose that no man could prove the existence of hell; *let us suppose that its existence is only probable* — what then?

The Swedish Count Oxenstierna, Jr., tells the following true story.<sup>1</sup> Two sons of high nobility became intimate friends at college. But the course of events soon separated them. The one threw himself into the arms of all worldly pleasures, had a splendid career, was a man of the world, but without faith and morality. And his friend? When after many years the freethinker one day crossed a bridge in Paris he met a poor Capuchin. He stood still; in the monk he recognized his old friend and fellow student. Pityingly he looked at the poor habit and rough cloth, the sandals fastened with straps, and finally said: "Poor friend! What a miserable life you lead! How you are to be pitied if you have to bear all this in vain, if there is no heaven."

"Friend," the monk replied softly, "as far as I know, I have not lost much in giving up the world; but how you are to be pitied — if there is a hell!"

"Christian," said an atheist, "how you will be disappointed if heaven is only a fable." — "Atheist," answered the Christian, "how you will be disappointed if hell is no fable!"

Yes, poor, poor atheists, *if* there is a hell!

*There is a hell!* Do not say: "I don't believe in hell," but rather say: "I do not *like* to believe in hell."

---

<sup>1</sup> Veith, *Charitas*, p. 32.

But no one says that you should *like* to believe in hell. Who indeed likes to believe in it? Very few. But only he denies hell who, on account of his wicked life, has every reason to fear it.

But of what avail is it? Wish that there is no hell — hell does not care for that; strike the word hell from all languages — hell will burn right on. Say with Franz Moor in Schiller's "Robbers": "Empty, deserted, deaf is everything above the stars, — but if there should be something beyond? No, no, there is not! I command, there is not!"

Small and insignificant is man when he resists truth.

When King Louis XI. of France became seriously ill, he struggled against approaching death with fear and desperation. To die, he, the king, to die, with his guilty conscience — that was impossible, that must not be. He promised the physician who would cure him 10,000 crowns annually; he fell on his knees before St. Francis of Paul and begged him to banish death; he had relics placed around his bed to hinder the approach of death, nay, he banished the word "death" from his palace; no one was permitted to mention that terrible word in his presence. When it was mentioned by a servant, the king crept under the bed covers. And he had to die.

Is such behavior worthy of a man? We must be able to look truth straight in the face, whether it is welcome or not.

The ostrich hides its head in the sand in order not to see the approaching hunter. Close your eyes to hell and you will only the surer tumble into it.

Laugh and scoff at the belief in hell, cry as loud as you will "there is no hell!" — all timid children shout and sing in the dark that they may not lose heart.

*But if there is a hell after all?*

## CHAPTER III

### THERE IS A HELL

#### I.

Whoever denies the existence of hell opposes with his little brain the intelligence of all mankind. Such a one is less intelligent than the Jews, the Turks and the very cannibals of the South Sea Islands.

"We find the belief in hell among the Greeks and Romans, among all nations of the earth." — This is conceded by the prince of infidels, Voltaire.

The Englishman Bolingbroke, also an infidel, writes plainly that the doctrine of a future state of reward and punishment seems to be lost in the twilight of antiquity, and is before all historic knowledge. Wherever, in ancient times, we are able to unravel somewhat the net of fact and fiction, we find this belief firmly established among the nations.

Deny hell: From the icy north<sup>2</sup> to the scorched South Sea Islands,<sup>3</sup> from the Indian in the primeval forests<sup>4</sup> to the most forsaken deserts of interior Africa,<sup>5</sup> the noblest men as well as the most abject criminals, the greatest thinkers and the humblest barbarians, the grave lawgiver and the laurel-crowned poet,<sup>6</sup> the eloquent Cicero,<sup>7</sup> the wise Plato,<sup>8</sup> the noble Socrates,<sup>9</sup> and the freethinker

<sup>2</sup> The inhabitants of Greenland believe that hell is a deep underground place without light and warmth, full of fear and terror.

<sup>3</sup> The South Sea Islanders believe that the wicked will come into a dark land, where the sun never shines and where there is only foul water.

<sup>4</sup> He pictures hell to himself as a deep well in which fire burns.

<sup>5</sup> The Egyptian fable of the judgment of the dead and the transmigration of the souls of the wicked is found among many negro tribes.

<sup>6</sup> Orpheus, Musæus, Linus, Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Æschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Vergil, Ovid, Horace, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Orat. 44.

<sup>8</sup> "Those whose condition, on account of the greatness of their crimes, is considered incurable, are cast according to their deserts, into Tartarus, which they never leave." (Phædon, p. 114.) "They are extraordinary, terrible punishments accompanied by excruciating pain of eternal duration." Plato confesses that he had given the matter long and serious thought and had found nothing that is more in agreement with reason and wisdom and truth than the belief in eternal punishment. (Gorgias. Ed. Stallbaum, c. 81. Cf. also De Republ. X. c. 14. Ed. Stallbaum.)

<sup>9</sup> Plato. Gorgias.

Lucretius,<sup>10</sup> in short men of all tongues, religions, customs and degrees of civilization agree that there is a hell.

Balme writes:<sup>11</sup> "Vergil was neither a Capuchin nor a priest nor a Catholic; neither was he lacking in good taste, and still it is difficult to imagine a greater combination of horrors than those he shows us in hell.

"Just in the gate, and in the jaws of hell,  
 Revengeful Cares and sullen Sorrows dwell  
 And pale Diseases, and repining Age,  
 Want, Fear, and Famine's unresisting rage,  
 Here Toils, and Death, and Death's half-brother Sleep  
 (Forms terrible to view), their sentry keep;  
 With anxious Pleasures of the guilty mind;  
 Deep Frauds before, and open Force behind;  
 The Furies' beds; and Strife, that shakes  
 Her hissing tresses, and unfolds her snakes."  
 (Vergil's *Æneis*, bk. vi. vv. 384-393. Dryden's translation.)

There we see Tantalus, tortured by everlasting thirst, swimming with his lips to the water, without ever being able to quaff a drop; there we see Sisyphus forever groaning in his effort to roll that heavy boulder; we behold Ixion, tied to a wheel of serpents, whirled without rest by the storm; Tityrus there appears spread out nine acres, exposed to the fury of a giant vulture that constantly devours his ever growing liver; Pirithous, like Ixion, is under a terrible boulder that threatens every moment to crush him.

"The queen of Furies by their side is set,  
 And snatches from their mouth the untasted meat;  
 Which if they touch, her hissing snakes she rears,  
 Tossing her torch, and thundering in their ears."  
 (Ibid. 820-3.)

Deeply moved the poet concludes:

"Had I a hundred mouths, a hundred tongues,  
 And throats of brass, inspired with iron lungs,  
 I could not half those horrid cries repeat,  
 Nor half the punishments those crimes have met."  
 (Ibid. 851-4.)

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<sup>10</sup> De Nat. Rer. I. 108; III. 37.

<sup>11</sup> Letters to a Sceptic, p. 51.

*Whence this agreement of all nations?*

Did man, perhaps, invent hell for his own amusement? Surely, men would not invent hell for themselves, especially a hell that is eternal.

Infidels themselves prove that man rebels against the belief in hell. How man struggles against the belief in some threatening misfortune! Against hope he hopes at the deathbed of a dear relative or friend, and when there is no more hope, his mind is often upset and yet in his madness he seeks the dear departed. And then thousands and millions should believe in their own eternal misery, nay, the whole world should believe in hell without the most convincing proofs.

The belief in hell is inborn in us; "It is," as Mgr. Segur says in his excellent little book on hell, "a light of divine origin, which shines without our cooperation, like a black diamond set in our soul, shining with its dark glow. No one can tear this belief from our hearts, for God Himself has put it there. We may conceal this diamond and its dusky fire; we can turn away our eyes and forget it for a while; we can deny it in words, still we believe in it, and conscience never ceases to cry out: *There is a hell!*"

## II.

Hell is that terrible something in the next world which human depravity has called into being and still brings forth. If there were no hell, it would instantly arise from the mire of human degenerateness.

*There is a hell as surely as there is a world.*

Without hell the world would be unintelligible. "Take away hell as the end of the wicked," says Hettinger in his "Apology," Vol. 4, "and you have lost all understanding for the beginning, the origin and the essence of evil; then every difference between good and evil, God and man, angel and devil must necessarily disappear; then the masterpiece of the divine plan and of divine Providence falls to the ground, everything is confusion to our mind, everything crumbles in our hands."

*There is a hell as sure as there are monsters of iniquity.*

Or should the villain who breathes forth his soul with blasphemy on his lips share the lot of the innocently murdered child?

In the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, the pastor of Ampeluis was summoned before the tribunal. Scornfully the fanatics asked him: "Do you believe in hell?" "Yes," the brave confessor calmly answered, "to believe in

hell I have only to consider you and your conduct; had I ever doubted it, I would have to believe it now."

*There is a hell as sure as there are good people.*

Does not one innocent person deserve more consideration than a hundred villains? But what is it after all that can sufficiently shield the good from the rage of the wicked? What is there that prevents the world from becoming an arena of wild beasts? Only hell.

If there were no hell, this world would become a hell. Once the archscoffer Voltaire, when at table a friend of his somewhat loudly denied hell, said: "Hush! If my servants hear that, I am no longer safe from them, for they may murder me." And on another occasion he remarked that if the mighty of this world would lose this faith, some of them might have him ground to powder in a mortar.

*There is a hell as certainly as there is a God in heaven.*

In this life the wicked man is so often guilty of blasphemy, and it seems as though there were no God; he mocks at the Almighty and no thunderbolt strikes him. Shall the creature forever triumph over the Creator? Shall the King of heaven surrender to the worm of the earth? Impossible!

Hell is the immovable rock on which the raging flood of human passion must forever be broken; it is the stronghold behind which God triumphantly guards His infinite majesty; it is the fiery abyss into which the evil-doer, after having, like Lucifer, stormed the fortress of heaven, casts himself with the cry of despair: "*There is a hell!*"

. . . . .

But it is objected: "God is merciful and He can find no joy in torturing helpless creatures."

Who says that God delights in the tortures of the damned? What blasphemy! Not God, but his own wickedness, casts the sinner into hell. No one goes to hell without his own fault.

Yes, God is merciful and hence He comes from heaven to free you from hell. He dies on the cross like a malefactor. For a trifle a God does not die. And if the Heavenly Father punishes so fearfully our sins in His innocent and dearly beloved Son, why should He hesitate to cast us, if we defy him, into the everlasting abyss? St. Thomas of Villanova says in this connection: "I am more terrified by the redemption in love than by the punishment of the angels."

Yes, God is merciful, infinitely, incomprehensibly merciful, and just for that reason there is a hell; for he who offends such a good and merciful God justly deserves hell. Hell is only the terrible rebound of abused divine mercy.

Now just God's mercy has created hell: His mercy towards the good, His favorites, to free them from the society of the wicked; his mercy towards the sinner, to convert many of them and lead them to heaven by the terrors of hell.

And even if mercy had no part in hell, God is not only merciful, He is also *holy*. He loves good and hates evil in an infinite degree, with His whole divine essence, with the whole power of His immensity; and He would rather descend from His throne in heaven and cease to be God, if that were possible, than to admit but one sinner among the glorious host of His saints in heaven. As light hates darkness, so God hates sin. Hence there is no bridge between heaven and hell, between God and the reprobate (Cf. Luke 16:26); the flames of hell forever burn because light remains light forever, darkness forever darkness, good forever good and evil forever evil.

Besides God is *just*. "*A fire is kindled in my wrath, and shall burn even to the lowest hell: and shall devour the earth with her increase, and shall burn the foundations of the mountains*" (Deut. 32:22). He who lays violent hands on God, the infinite, the most beautiful, the infinitely good, the most amiable, deserves an infinite, that is, eternal punishment.

It is folly to say that there is no proportion between an eternal hell and a short sinful act. Since when is the punishment to last only as long as the sin? A certain Thomas once blew up the steamer "Mosel" in which 72 people were killed and hundreds wounded. It was the deed of a moment. Should he therefore also suffer only for a moment? No, the punishment must be in proportion to the *gravity* and not to the *duration* of the offence. All human justice punishes the murderous attack on an earthly prince with a certain eternal punishment by excluding the criminal finally and forever from human society, nay, even from life itself. What punishment then does an attack on God, the infinite majesty, deserve, that is, a mortal sin? Certainly an infinite punishment, because the insult is naturally the greater the higher the offended person. But how can a finite creature endure an infinite punishment? Only by enduring it forever, eternally.

Let us beware of all morbid sentimentality. Reason is above feeling. He who is merciful to the villain harms the good man. God is no weak father who only threatens with the rod, but never strikes and thereby becomes the laughingstock of the street boys.

God is merciful, but also wise. Only an eternal hell can hold the world in balance; only an eternal hell can guard God's majesty from the fury of degenerate creatures.

Of what use is the fear of mere temporal punishment, when the fire of passion flares up in the human heart, when temptation with its artifices benights reason? Man is capable of an eternal existence and only eternity affects him. What would men be if there were no eternal hell, since now, even with the belief in an eternal punishment, so many are so wicked?

If hell were not eternal, the godless villain could with defiance say to his Creator: "Great God! to defy you I will satisfy my passions, will adore myself, will tear down Thy altars and make Thy name a laughingstock among the nations; punish me as long as you will, but there will be a time when you will no longer do so; then with a curse on my lips I shall still enter your heaven or with proud defiance sink back into nothingness."

Can that be? No, never! *"O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!"* (Rom. 11:33). Hettinger says in his "Apology" (IV. 15): "God works in eternal wisdom, justice and love; angels fall, souls are lost; but above all these ruins of fallen spirits and above the lamentations of lost souls resound the choirs of the angels and millions of the saved: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God!"

"Justice the founder of my fabric moved:  
To rear me was the task of power divine,  
Supremest wisdom, and primeval love."  
(Dante, Hell, III. 4.)

"No one ever came back from hell, therefore I don't believe in it."

Why, are the damned in hell to be sent as special messengers to you, if the ordinary messengers, God's priests, are not heard by you? That is just the terrible thing about hell that there is no escape from it.

Of what use would it be to have one of the reprobates appear? He would not be believed. Just read what Christ says of the parable of Dives (Luke 16:19 – 31). "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they believe, if one rise again from the dead" (Ibid. 31).

The infidel Rousseau writes: "If with my own eyes I were to see a person raised to life, I do not know what I would do; I believe I would sooner become insane than believing." (*Lettres écrites de la montagne.*) And the wicked Diderot confesses: "If the whole of Paris would run together and assure me that a dead person had been restored to life, I would sooner believe that the whole of Paris had lost its reason, than admit the possibility of a miracle."

That is very simple: You can deny the existence of the sun in the firmament, for not to see it you need only close your eyes.



But are you certain that no one ever by a special permission of God returned from the other world. It is not impossible. Even Schopenhauer admits that: "The *a priori* rejection of the possibility of a real apparition of deceased persons can rest only on the conviction that by death a human being is totally annihilated. For as long as this is wanting, there is no reason why a being, that in some way still exists, should not manifest itself, or should not act on another, though the other may be in another state of being." The testimony of this fashionable philosopher is all the stronger as apparitions threaten to undermine his whole philosophical system.

It has never entered the heads of theologians to prove the existence of hell from more or less attested apparitions, for superstition, deceit and exaggeration have played a great part in this delicate matter; but certain occurrences are worthy of belief, are at times even vouched for by the courts, that even the most sceptical must be induced to look deeper into the matter.<sup>12</sup> He who denies all apparitions should read 1 Kings 28: 13 ff. It is amusing to see how enlightened men, who ridicule the simple faith of the common people, in weak moments will betray a fear of ghosts. If such eminent specialists of natural science as Wallace, the astronomer Huggins, the mathematician De Morgan, a genius like Leibnitz, a neo-heathen like Machiavelli, poets like Shakespeare, Lord Byron, Wieland, Lessing, Goethe, E. M. Arndt, Jean Paul, philosophers like Schopenhauer and Schelling believed in apparitions, and even Kant<sup>13</sup> reluctantly admits them, then a man of smaller mind need not be ashamed to confess: "There may be something in it after all."

In his little book on hell, the venerable prelate Segur relates the following strange event.<sup>14</sup>

My grandfather, Count Rostopchine, governor of Moscow, was a great friend of General Orloff, who was famous for his bravery, but was a complete sceptic.

One day after a choice supper, at which wine had not been partaken of sparingly, Count Orloff began with one of his friends, General V., to ridicule religion, especially the belief in hell.

"But if perchance," said Orloff, "there should be something behind the curtain of this world?"

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Bishof Schneider, *Der neuere Geisterglaube*.

<sup>13</sup> For additional names see Schneider, 1. c.

<sup>14</sup> According to the law of the Church this and all other narratives in this book claim only human authority.

"Well," said the general, "he of us who leaves first shall come back and inform the other how things are behind the curtain. What do you think of that?"

"A capital idea!"

And each, though gray, gave his word of honor to keep this promise.

A few weeks later one of the great wars of Napoleon broke out. General V. was ordered to an important post on the field of battle.

Two or three weeks later one early morning the door of my grandfather's room, who was just dressing himself, was violently opened and Count Orloff rushed in clothed in his dressing gown and slippers, his hair dishevelled, his looks confused and his face pale as death.

"What Orloff! Is it you? At this hour and in this attire? What do you want? What has happened?"

"Friend," Count Orloff stammered, "I think I am going insane. I've seen General V."

"General V.? Why, did he come back?"

"No, no!" Orloff answered, throwing himself on a sofa and resting his head on his hands; "no, he is not back; and it is just that which frightens me."

My grandfather did not know what it all meant and tried to calm his friend. "Tell me what has happened to you and what all this means."

Then Count Orloff tried to subdue his excitement and related the following:

"My dear Rostopchine! Some time ago General V. and I promised each other on our word that the one who should die first should tell the other whether there is anything behind the curtain of this world. This morning, it can hardly be more than half an hour ago, I lay quietly in my bed; I had been awake for some time and did not in the least think of my friend, when suddenly the curtains of my bed were forcibly torn open and I saw General V. standing two paces away from me; he was pale and his right hand was on his chest; he told me: 'There is a hell, I am in it,' and he disappeared. I got up at once and ran away to look for you. I am losing my head. It is a strange thing, I don't know what to think of it."

My grandfather tried to quiet him as well as he could. He spoke of hallucinations, overheating of the brain, queer dreams and other strange and inexplicable things. Finally he brought the Count back to his hotel in his coach.

Ten or twelve days later a courier brought my grandfather from the army among other news also that of the death of General V. On the same day and at the same hour when Count Orloff had seen and heard him, a deadly bullet struck him as he was reconnoitering.

*"There is a hell, I am in it!"*

## III.

But even if no damned person ever returned from hell, there is one who certainly came from the other world, Jesus Christ, who created heaven and earth and hell. Does His word not count for more than if a hundred denizens of hell would come and relate the terrors of the infernal regions with glowing tongues?

And He speaks plainly: over seventy times Holy Scripture announces hell to us; Christ Himself speaks of it twenty-five times in the Gospels, fifteen times especially of hell fire. "*Depart from me into everlasting fire*" (Matth. 25:41).

He speaks of the worm that dieth not and the fire that shall not be extinguished (Mark 9:45), of the exterior darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matth. 25:30).

Thus speaks the good and mild Saviour who weeps over the misery of His people, who bleeding, prays for His torturers; thus speaks the eternal and immense God who could say to the world: "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away*" (Matth. 24:35).

*There is a hell!*

## CHAPTER IV

WHERE IS HELL?<sup>15</sup>

Without special divine revelation no one can know this for certain. But most probably hell is very near us; close to our feet flare up the threatening flames of the infernal prison. This can hardly be doubted as is clear from many and plain passages of Holy Scripture,<sup>16</sup> and according to the unanimous conviction of the Holy Fathers and theologians.<sup>17</sup>

*"The earth broke asunder under their (Core, Dathan and Abiron) feet: and opening her mouth, devoured them . . . And they went down alive into hell, the ground closing upon them"* (Num. 16:31 f).

Who knows perhaps the poison-fuming abysses of our volcanoes are the admonishing chimneys<sup>18</sup> of hell; perhaps the mysterious tremblings of the earth, which frighten people so much, are only caused by the gigantic waves of the everlasting fiery sea, when threatening they knock on the wall that separates two worlds. How meet that earth itself should wreak vengeance on him who through his crimes has desecrated it, that is, that he who sought the end of his existence in the pleasures of the world, should also be a prisoner in the earth's glowing walls.

But if here we do not know where hell is, may we never find it to our own sorrow hereafter!

"Let us not ask where hell is, but let us avoid it," says St. Chrysostom.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The essence of hell is its pain. Even if a devil or damned soul is allowed to leave hell for a time, the punishment follows them nevertheless. "It may be, that while at large, roaming through earth and air, they (the demons), suffer less than when confined to hell." (MacEvilly on Matth. 8:29.)

<sup>16</sup> Num. 16:31 f; 1 Kings 28:13 f; Eccli. 24:45, 46:23; Matth. 12:40; Eph. 4:9; Phil. 2:10; Apoc. 5:3, 12:9, etc.

<sup>17</sup> For their names see Bautz, *Die Hölle*, § 3.

<sup>18</sup> St. Bernard calls them the little chimneys of the eternal fire: "Fumariola quædam et ignis æterni missilia."

<sup>19</sup> Hom. 31. in ep. ad Rom. n. 5.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT IS HELL?

I will not paint hell too hot for three reasons:

1. It is more than hot enough.
2. Every exaggeration is a kind of lie, and all lying is an abomination before God, the eternal Truth.
3. I also have to tremble before hell, for *"man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred"* (Eccl. 9:1).

St. Theresa was permitted to cast a look into hell; she does not consider herself able to describe even approximately the terrors of the eternal prison.

Here are her own words:

"One day as I was in prayer, on a sudden I found myself in hell. I know not how I was carried thither; I understood that our Lord was pleased that I should see the place which the devils had prepared for me there, and which I had deserved by my sins. I was there only a very short time; yet though I should live many years, I do not believe I should ever be able to forget it. The entrance appeared to resemble that of an oven, very low, very narrow, and very dark. The ground seemed like mire, exceedingly filthy, stinking, insupportable, and full of a multitude of loathsome vermin. At the end of it there was a certain hollow place, as if it had been a kind of a little press in the wall, into which I found myself thrust and close pent up. Now, though all this which I have said was far more terrible in itself than I have described it, yet it might pass for a pleasure in comparison with that which I felt in this press. This torment was so dreadful that no words can express the least part of it. I felt my soul burn in so dismal a fire that I am not able to describe it. I have experienced the most intense physical pain, which, in the judgment of physicians, can be endured in this world, as well by the shrinking up of all my sinews, as by many other kinds of torments. But all these are nothing, in comparison with what I suffered there, joined to the horrid thought, that this was to be without end or intermission forever, and even this itself is still little, if compared to the agony the soul is in. It seems to her that she is stifled; her anguish and torture go to a degree of intensity that cannot be expressed. It is too little to say, that it seems to her that she is butchered, and rent to pieces; because this would express some violence from without that tended to her destruction; whereas, here, it is she herself that is her own executioner, and tears herself to pieces. Now as to that interior fire and unspeakable despair which come to complete so many horrid torments, I own that I am not able to describe them. I saw not who it was that tormented me; but I perceived myself to burn, and at the same time to be cut as it were and hacked to pieces. In so

frightful a place there is no room for the least hope of comfort. There was no such a thing as even sitting or lying down. I was thrust into a hole in the wall; and those horrible walls close in upon the poor prisoners, and press and stifle them. There is nothing but thick darkness, without any mixture of light; and yet I know not how it is, that though there is no light there, yet one sees there all that may be most mortifying to the sight. Although it is about six years since that which I here relate happened, I am even now in writing of it, so terrified that my blood chills in my veins; so that whatsoever evils or pains I now suffer, if I do but call to remembrance what I then endured, all that can be suffered here appears to be just nothing."

So far the saint, whose relation deserves to be pondered at leisure; for if such and so horrible torments had been prepared for her, whose life, from her cradle, setting aside a few worldly vanities, which for a short time she had followed, had been so innocent, what must sinners expect!<sup>20</sup>

But we need no special revelations, for what God Himself tells us about hell in Holy Scripture is so terrible that it cuts one to the quick.

*Just open your Bible and read.*<sup>21</sup>

What says the seer in the Apocalypse? *"And a mighty angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying: with such violence as this shall Babylon,<sup>22</sup> the great city, be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all"* (18:21).

Where to?

Into destruction (Phil. 3:19) — into the eternal punishment of destruction (2 Thess. 1:9) — into a land of misery and darkness, where the shadow of death, and no order, but everlasting horror dwelleth (Job 10:22) — into the exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matth. 8: 12) — into the place of torments (Luke 16:28) — into a pit and prison (Is. 24:22; Apoc. 20:3) — and shall be imprisoned in darkness (Wis. 18:4) — into the lower hell, unto torments (2 Pet. 2:4) — into the bottomless pit (Apoc. 9:1, 2) — into the devouring deep and pit (Ps. 68:16) — into an oven of fire (Ps. 20:10) — into a torrent of brimstone (Is. 30:33) — into a great press of the wrath of God (Apoc. 14:19) — into a pool of fire (Apoc. 20:14) — into a pool burning with fire and brimstone (Apoc. 21:8) — to the bottom of the pit (Is. 14:19) — into corruption (Gal. 6:8) — into the gates of death (Job 38:17) — into the inner chambers of death (Prov. 7:27) — into the second death (Apoc. 20:14, 21:8) (which is the supernatural death of the soul, the loss of grace forever) — into the winepress where God will trample upon them in His indignation and will

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<sup>20</sup> See Challoner, *Think Well On't*, chap. 14, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the applicability of the following texts to hell, see the preface.

<sup>22</sup> The picture of the proud and voluptuous sinner.

tread them down in His wrath (Is. 63:3) — to the bottom of the pit, as a rotten carcass (Is. 14:19) — into the pit of destruction (Ps. 54:24).

What a terrible land!

*What do we see there? Fire!*

As mentioned in Holy Scripture — this fire is raging (Heb. 10:27), burning and devouring (Deut. 32:22; Ps. 20:10; Is. 33:14), smoking (Apoc. 9:2), tormenting (Luke 16:24; Apoc. 14:10); consuming (Heb. 10:27), avenging (2 Thess. 1:8), everlasting (Matth. 25:41; Is. 33:14); this fire is kindled in the wrath of God and shall burn even to the lowest hell, and shall devour the earth and her increase, and shall burn the foundations of the mountains (Deut. 32:22); it is burning coals (Ps. 139:11), fire and brimstones and storms (Ps. 10:7); rottenness and worms are there (Eccli. 19:3), fire and worms (Jud. 16:21; Eccl. 7:19), the worm that shall not die and the fire that shall not be quenched (Is. 66:24), the smoke of torments (Apoc. 14:11), everlasting reproach and perpetual shame (Jer. 23:40), evils (Deut. 32:23), every sorrow (Job 20:22), hunger (Ps. 58:7; Is. 65:13), thirst (Is. 65:13), straitening and burning (Job 20:22), a terrible fear (Wis. 5:2), fire and trembling (Is. 33:14), weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matth. 13:42, 25:30; Luke 13:28; Ps. 111:10), torment and sorrow (Apoc. 18:7), death and mourning and famine and fire (Apoc. 18:8), the food of death (Ps. 48:15).

*There the damned* are bound with infernal ropes and chains (2 Pet. 2:4; Apoc. 20:1 . . . ); they are reserved in everlasting chains (Jude 6); they are tortured by fire and worms for all eternity (Jud. 16:21) and with fire and brimstone (Apoc. 14:10); they shall be salted with fire (Mark 9:48); the people shall be as fuel for fire (Is. 9:19); they shall be smoke and a fire all the day (Is. 65:5); their worm shall not die and their fire shall not be quenched (Is. 66:24); they shall be a loathsome sight to all flesh (Is. 66:24); neither have they rest day nor night (Apoc. 14:11); they are consumed in their wickedness (Wis. 5:13); they are trampled upon by God in His indignation and are trodden down by Him in His wrath (Is. 63:3); God shall break their heads and their hairy crown (Ps. 67:22); they shall be utterly laid waste (Wis. 4:19); they are like tow swept together, and their end is a flame of fire (Eccli. 21:10); they are like chaff that will be burned with unquenchable fire (Matth. 3:12); they shall be stubble on fire (Mal. 4:1); they are like cockle bound in bundles to burn (Matth. 13:30); their nourishment is fire and much wood: the breath of the Lord as a torrent of brimstone kindling it (Is. 30:33); they drink of the wine of the wrath of God (Apoc. 14:10).

O terrible pictures! It is true, they are only pictures; but so much the worse. "If pictures already are so dismal," says Father Tilmann Pesch, S. J.,<sup>23</sup> "how awful must be the reality!"

"O fearful land of hell!" tremblingly cries out St. Bernard,<sup>24</sup> "Land of torment and misery! I tremble with my whole body and thrill with horror, when I think of this land, and all my bones shake."

*Severe beyond all comprehension are the torments of the damned.*

Reason enlightened by faith tells us that.

Father Segneri says in his Lenten Sermons (I. 14): "God has, as it were, two hands with which He rules the world: His mercy and His justice. These hands must be equal that there be no disturbing inequality between them. Who does not know how boundless God is in His mercy! It is almost past belief what God does to save the sinner, how He bears with his outrages, endures his mockery, He comes from heaven, becomes a child, suffers and dies for him; woe, woe unto him who does not want His mercy — '*according as His mercy is, so His correction judgeth a man according to his works*' (Eccli. 16:13) — for him the arm of divine justice seizes: as great as was mercy, in the same terrible degree will justice bear down on the head of the unhappy sinner."

As heaven is a mystery of divine mercy, so hell is the unfathomable mystery of God's avenging justice. As God rewards worthy of Himself, so He also punishes "*secundum plenitudinem Deitatis suae*," as Tertullian says, "according to the fullness of His deity," and that is infinite. "*Who knoweth the power of Thy anger?*" (Ps. 89:11). Woe unto the unfortunate sinner who will experience it! Truly, "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:31); for it is awful to offend a thrice holy, infinitely good God Who was crucified for love of us. So long as it is impossible for a creature to understand the infinite malice of mortal sin, so long no one can even divine the awfulness of hell. If the Apostle, rapt in contemplation of the wonderful works of God's love, cries out: "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God has prepared for them that love him*" (1 Cor. 2:9), then trembling we also acknowledge: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that despise His mercy."

What terrors has the eye of man not seen, what fearful things has the ear not heard, and what have all human hearts not endured up to this time! Let us picture to ourselves all possible tortures, count all pains that have been suffered, all the cries of distress, the many tears, consider the terrors of war, let us think with a shudder of all the holy martyrs endured at the hands of

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<sup>23</sup> Das religiöse Leben.

<sup>24</sup> De quinque reg.



bloodthirsty and hell-inspired tyrants — all these sufferings and afflictions are "hardly a shadow" compared with the flames of hell.<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine says:<sup>26</sup> "Whatever a man endures in this life, in comparison with hell, is not only to be considered a trifle, but is nothing." On earth the maledictions of God fall only like single drops, but in hell they fall like rain on the damned. (Cf. Dan. 9:11, and Job 20:23). "*I will heap evils upon them, and will spend my arrows among them*" (Deut. 32:23).

All tortures here below are still natural; they do not transcend our human comprehension; they can yet be invented by man; but in the next world our beggarly conceptions and ideas are at an end; there they measure with different measures and figure with different numbers; what we consider here as great, is often not so beyond, and what seems small to us here, often assumes gigantic proportions there.

"Through me you pass into the city of woe:

Through me you pass into eternal pain:

Through me among the people lost for aye."

(Dante, Hell, III. 1.)

*The hell of the damned is threefold.*<sup>27</sup>

*The first hell* is the torment of *fire* in the company of the devils and the damned.

That is the *hell of sense or feeling*.

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*The second hell* is, as it were, God Himself, since the loss of God and His heaven torments the damned more than fire itself.

That is the *hell of loss*.

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But as the center and focus of these two opposite hells the damned are to themselves the *third hell*.

That is the *hell of despair*.

But the hell of this *threefold hell* is *its eternity*.

This threefold hell the sinner creates for himself.

1. Whoever sins grievously separates himself from *God*: as a punishment he remains forever separate from Him, his last end and aim.

2. The sinner turns to creatures, in preference to God: in punishment he is exposed to the fury of all creatures, especially to fire, the most painful.

<sup>25</sup> St. Chrys., Hom. 9. in ep. ad Cor. n. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Sermon. 109. de temp.

<sup>27</sup> That is the punishment of hell. Cf. St. Bonaventure, Brevil. p. 7, c. 6.

3. His own self induces the sinner to sin: in punishment he becomes his own everlasting torturer.

*"What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption"* (Gal. 6:8).

*This threefold hell begins for the sinner here on earth.*

As hell is nothing but the offspring of sin, so in every sin there is a spark of hell. Already here on earth sin is often its own curse. Restless, without God, partly oversatiated by creatures, partly tormented by them, at variance with himself, the sinner confirms the words of the Archangel Raphael to Tobias: *"They that commit sin and iniquity, are enemies to their own soul"* (Tob. 12:10).

But even the greatest sinner here below is not entirely forsaken by God. God's sun still shines also for him; the sun of grace still casts his rays on him; he still stands in the shadow of the Cross of Golgatha; the way to the fatherly heart of God is still open to him — till the fatal catastrophe overtakes him.

## CHAPTER VI

### 1. THE FIRST HELL

#### *1. The Fire.*

1. History relates that for a long time King Charles of Navarre suffered from nervousness. A famous physician, who had been summoned from afar, had the king sewed into cloths saturated with spiritus. With this stimulant the physician hoped to warm the unstrung nerves and excite them to new action. But, what happened! The servant who had sewed the cloths together, wishing to burn off the thread with the candle, came too close to the saturated cloths and in a moment the whole body of the king was wrapped in flames. All fled terror-stricken. The king screamed and writhed in pain; he rolled about in his burning cloths till death freed him from his torments.<sup>28</sup>

What must the king have suffered in that short time!

A number of years ago the Abbé Pinault taught physics and chemistry in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice. One day in some inexplicable manner the phosphorus, which he handled, took fire and in a moment his hand was wrapped in flames; in a few minutes his hand was only a charred formless mass; the nails had disappeared. From excessive pain the poor man lost consciousness, but still day and night he screamed in a heart-rending manner. If now and then he could say anything it was: "O my children, my children, don't go to hell, by no means go to hell!"

We shudder when we read the martyrdom of St. Lawrence. A large gridiron is placed over a fire till it is red-hot. Rough executioners grasp the saint and fasten his bare body on this fearful instrument of torture. His whole body turns and shudders with pain at the touch of the glowing iron. Thus the heroic martyr of Christ lies fastened, whilst the glowing irons cut deeper and deeper into his roasting flesh. What torments!

#### 2. Are those the torments of hell?

No; for "more furious than the fires of earth are the fires of hell," says St. Alphonse. Earthly fire is terrible. How fiercely the flames of the Babylonian furnace flared up to kill them that threw in the three young men. Still all the fires of earth are in reality merciful, a gift of God, an immense blessing; their painful effects are only an addition. But down below rages a fire, kindled by the wrath of the Almighty, a fire whose essence is revenge, whose sole and everlasting purpose is to torture; a fire which burns but produces extreme darkness, which swallows up its victims but does not consume them, which

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<sup>28</sup> Diessel, *Das Leiden in ewiger Nacht.*, p. 32.

tortures them but does not take away consciousness; a fire that does not produce mere weeping but howling and gnashing of teeth; a fire compared to which our fire is, in the opinion of St. Anselm, only "a painted fire," nay, as St. Vincent Ferrer says "It is coldness itself."

3. The damned will not only lie on a gridiron like St. Lawrence, roasted by a slow fire. No; that would be saying too little! Listen to the Saviour. The damned "*shall be salted with fire*" (Mark 9:48).

What a picture! Around the reprobate immense torrents of fire; in his entrails seething fire. (Cf. Ezech. 28:18.) What he sees is fire, what he speaks is fire, what he breathes is fire, what he eats and drinks is fire — fire, fire, and nothing but fire — for all eternity!<sup>29</sup>

4. How will this fire of wrath "*render to every man according to his works!*" (Ps. 61:13). Created by God to punish the different vices and crimes, it fulfills in an extraordinary degree the purpose that God has in view, by producing in everyone the torments which correspond to his sins. "*By what things a man sinneth, by the same also he is tormented*" (Wis. 11:17).

How will this fire rage in the head of the proud and infidel; how in the eyes of the lewd woman, that have looked at sinful things, that have through their enticements ensnared so many; how they stare in agonizing pain and see — never another ray of light (Job 10:21, 22); but in spite of all this darkness of hell the eye sees the most awful objects: the horrid prison (Is. 24:22), innumerable, terrible phantoms (Wis. 17:13, 14), the host of torturing devils, the immeasurable waves of the raging ocean of fire (Apoc. 21:8; Is. 14:19).

*The ears* that have so often listened with pleasure to impure language, how they burn! They hear the eternal, maddening hiss of the flames; they hear "*the weeping and gnashing of teeth*" (Matth. 8:12); they hear the marrow-piercing shrieks of pain; they hear the curses of former *friends*; they hear the scorn, the taunts and the jeers of the devils!<sup>30</sup>

*The nose*, how it will be punished by fire! the stench (Is. 34:3) in the infernal pool of burning brimstone where millions of half-decayed carcasses of the damned are burning (Ibid.)!

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<sup>29</sup> Till Judgment Day hell-fire tortures only the soul of the reprobate. What a humiliation for a spirit, to be fettered in raging pain to a lifeless being! Cf. St. Thomas in 4 Dist. 44. qu. 3. a. 2. — Suppl. qu. 70. — 4. c. Gent. c. 90. — After the Resurrection the fire will also torment the body, as the good will enjoy heaven with the body.

<sup>30</sup> St. Alphonsus remarks that it would be a great torture to be compelled to hear always the same piece of music, no matter how beautiful. How painful then must be those infernal noises!

*The tongue* of the blasphemer and curser, the detractor, the calumniator, the lewd talker, or of him who has sacrilegiously received the Body of the Lord in Holy Communion, how it glows in those flames!

*The mouth* that has given so much scandal, how it now breathes the blaze of hell!

*The palate* that was addicted to drunkenness, how it now suffers infernal thirst, a thirst which grows more parching the longer the flames rage, which increases from minute to minute, from hour to hour, from day to day, from year to year — O that a Lazarus would come to moisten that parched tongue and palate of Dives with but one drop of water! (Luke 16:24). Oh the raging thirst! Unhappy drunkard, will you keep on drinking?

*The hands* that have been steeped in blood and stained with shameful deeds, how they will suffer for their sins: "*According to the multitude of his devices so also shall he suffer*" (Job 20:18).

*The feet* that have carried the vain worldling to dangerous places, to false friends, into the proximate occasion of sin; that have moved so often in sinful dancing, how they will be fettered in fire with glowing chains! (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Apoc. 20:1 f).

## 2. *The Company in Hell.*

### a) THE DAMNED.

Take the meanest scoundrel from the scum of the people just as he is, in rags, dirty and covered with vermin, spreading a pestilential odor all around him, lead him into an aristocratic ballroom — and look for a partner for him! With what terror will the guests disperse, how insulted they will feel at such arrogance! — But now, poor worldling, suppose you had to be in his company forever in hell!

What company will you meet in the dark beyond? The scum of humanity, from the fratricide Cain to the last harlot of the time of Antichrist.

Sometimes a small defect in the character of a person, who is otherwise good, will make his company almost unbearable. Do we not sometimes find a real hell in some homes where man and wife hate each other, but must live together day after day? How terrible then must it be to be packed together with millions of the damned!

1. They are creatures, terrible in their *ugliness*, disfigured by sin, distorted by pain, eaten up by sepulchral decay, burning corpses (Is. 66:24), giving forth a fearful stench (Is. 34:3).

A cruel tyrant, Maxentius, we read in old books, once took fearful vengeance on one of his enemies. He had him tied to a decaying corpse till he

decayed also. What ghastly torments! But only a weak picture of the state of the damned!

An English writer relates the following: At Oxford there was a cheerful company at table. Among other subjects they began to speak of gruesome things, and a certain girl said that she was most afraid of a skeleton. Maxwell, a medical student, whose attentions the girl had refused, no sooner heard this, when a mean plan suggested itself to him. He left unnoticed, took a skull from his room and smeared a solution of phosphorus into the eyesockets to make them glow with an unearthly light, and then laid the skull into the girl's bed. Late that evening the girl came home much elated, wished her parents good night and went to her bedroom. She uncovers the bed and suddenly sees the gruesome grin of the skull. With a piercing cry she fell backwards to the floor. Her parents hastened to the room and found her lying like dead. After several hours the pitiable child was brought to life; but terror had upset her reason and she remained insane till her death.<sup>31</sup>

If the mere sight of the skull of a man who had died a natural death can cause such terror, how horrifying must be the company of all those who died the supernatural, the everlasting death — the society of all the dead!

2. They are creatures whose whole nature is now only *wickedness*. If there was a good instinct in them in this life, in the moment they separated from God, the source of all good, and entered the terrible realms of darkness, the last remnant of virtue was changed into malice.

But are there not even here on earth monsters whose very sight makes one shudder and whose degradation is disgusting? But what an ocean of malice must be collected in hell, when the wickedness of every one has reached its hellish completion!

3. They are creatures — and that is the worst — full of *infernal hatred*. Had God left some love in the hearts of the damned, hell would be a little more endurable. But no, love is a virtue and therefore does not enter the infernal pool. Like a lot of wounded, wild beasts, the damned in hell become one another's fiercest torturers. This can not be doubted, for, says the learned Lessius:<sup>32</sup> "If here below God allows even His saints to be terribly persecuted by the wicked, why should He protect the frantic hordes of hell from their mutual rage and persecution?" "*The terrible ones shall go and come upon him*" (Job 20:25). St. Thomas says:<sup>33</sup> "The great number of the damned increases the tortures of the individual."

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<sup>31</sup> Diessel, Das Leiden in ewiger Nacht, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> De perfection, div. lib. 13, c. 29.

<sup>33</sup> In 4 Dist. 50. Qu. 2. art. 1.

*God is Just.* Even in this life He has united in His inscrutable wisdom the destinies of individuals. As one can be an angel for hundreds, a guide to heaven, so also one can lead innumerable souls to hell; thus a man makes heaven the more beautiful and happy the more he has led to that blessed abode; thus hell will be the more terrible for any one, the more he has sent before or caused to follow him. *"What things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap"* (Gal. 6:8).

As many reprobates, so many hells!

4. This society will be the worse the closer its members were connected with one another on earth.

"Accurst father!" cries the unhappy son, "why did you bring me up so godlessly?"

"Accurst mother! Had I died before you bore me, or had you rather crushed me on the floor as an infant, than that by your foolish fondness you pampered and spoiled me!"

"Accurst child! Did we carry you on our arms and cherish you despite a thousand troubles and cares, to suffer these fearful pains?"

"Accurst sinful wife, to please whom I have abused the holy state of matrimony, do you now come to gloat over my torment?"

"Accurst woman!" howls the libertine with gnashing teeth. "Treacherous snake! by your indecent dress, your lustful looks and your flirtations you led me astray — I'll pay you back!"

"Miserable seducer!" she hisses full of hatred. "Away from me, out of my sight!"

NEVERMORE! Oh, if they could but flee from one another! No! Once they would not separate forever, now that hell fire has burnt out of their limbs their impure lust, it is but just that they should be together forever against their will, forever to see and hate each other. *"Every one shall eat the flesh of his own arm: Manasses Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasses, and they together shall be against Juda"* (Is. 9:20).

To these dreadful reproaches and curses are added the cries of pain, the fury, the rage, the gnashing of teeth, the howling, the bawling, the chattering of teeth, the rattling of chains — *a deafening, hellish noise — without change — day and night — for all eternity!* (Cf. Matth. 13:42, Apoc. 14:11).

. . . . .

## b) THE DEVILS.

Many will not believe in the devil till the eternal Judge will tell them: *"Depart from me, you cursed into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels"* (Matth. 25:41). *"There are spirits that are created for*

*vengeance, and in their fury they lay on grievous torments. In the time of destruction they shall pour out their force: and they shall appease the wrath of him that made them"* (Eccli. 39:33, 34).

St. Catherine of Siena in a vision saw a devil and the mere sight was so terrible, that she begged God most earnestly to take away the vision. She declared that she would rather walk barefooted on burning coals till the end of time than once more to see something so terrible. We read something similar in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. He declared to Brother Egidius after such a vision: "If God does not by a miracle keep a man alive, it is impossible to endure the sight of a hellish spirit even for a single second!" The sight of but one devil — a single second! How agonizing must it then be not only to see thousands and thousands of devils, but to be mercilessly exposed to their *fury*!

*The sinner wanted it!* God invited him to His royal service, destined him to be partaker of His kingdom, as immeasurable reward, promised him a golden crown of victory and a heavenly throne — he would not serve, would not bow his head before the Almighty, now he bows it with gnashing teeth before the most detestable of creatures. Future generations may fall on their knees before his picture, for centuries his name may be celebrated, grand monuments may perpetuate his fame,— but he writhes under Satan's feet like a worm that is crushed.

The unhappy Roman emperor, Valerian, who persecuted the Christians in the third century, being conquered, had to serve Sapor, the Persian king, as a footstool. What degradation for a once mighty ruler! Man, the king of the visible creation, destined to be the child of God, a prince of heaven, anointed as the ruler of the world and hell, has become the toy of the devil. Is that degradation not a thousand times greater?

*With what fiendish laugh* will Satan receive the reprobate sinner! "Does the fire pain you? — But see, that is the thanks I owe you, that you, to avoid the sweet service of God, preferred my slavery! It was kind of you to listen to my promptings! I did not love you as your God did, I rather hated you from the very first moment of your existence; I did not become a poor child for you, did not shed my blood for you, but like a wild beast hunted you to destruction. Come now and drink for your reward of the wine of the wrath of God (Apoc. 14:10); gladly I share my tortures with you, come, I shall be your reward for eternity, since you refused God as your reward."

Yes, how terribly the devil treated the possessed in the time of Christ! He threw them into the fire, robbed them of speech and hearing, and tortured them in the most fearful manner. (Cf. Matth. 17:14 and other passages.) And still at that time his power was limited. With what rage will he fall upon the poor reprobate over whose soul the Blood of Christ flowed; with what delight will he drag the image of God from flame to flame; with what scorn will he point



to the character of the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation or even of Holy Orders; with what fiendish joy will he tear the body that has been sanctified by the Flesh of the Son of God in Holy Communion! —

*From the snares of the devil, deliver us, O Lord!*

## CHAPTER VII

### II. THE SECOND HELL

#### *The Hell of Loss.*

"Take a thousand hells with all imaginable pains, and they are as nothing compared to the loss of God," says St. Chrysostom.<sup>34</sup>

Only he loses *everything who loses God!*

The loss is the greater the greater the good which is lost: but God is the *infinite good*.

Oh, if I could only describe to you what is meant by the word *God!* Oh, of what beauties would I have to speak to you, sounds so sublime as no ear ever heard, sights so enrapturing that your eyes would shine with astonishment, your heart would jubilate with delight! And if I would continue to tell you more and more beautiful things, so bewitchingly beautiful that you would forget the world — and if all the angels of heaven would come and with their angelic tongues would describe the beauties of God — more and more beautiful from minute to minute — from day to day — till the end of time: what they all would have said, *compared to God would be nothing!*

*"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him"* (1 Cor. 2:9).

How beautiful then must GOD HIMSELF BE!

Let us imagine an innocent child, beautiful as an angel, gifted with all the ornaments of mind and heart! Who would not be attracted to it? — Now let us imagine a being that possesses the beauty, the goodness, the power, the wisdom, in short all the perfections of all men, everything beautiful that can be found in man; let us add all the glory, the power, the wisdom and goodness of the angels, the loveliness of all the saints and heavenly spirits! — Imagine all this beauty and magnificence and loveliness increased to infinity, let us multiply all this in our mind thousands and thousands of times a day, a year, nay, the whole of eternity — all this beauty and loveliness, which we have thus computed, will compare with God's real beauty as a particle of dust with the whole world, as a ray of light with the sun.

How the saints rejoiced in the mere thought of God! Tears of joy and ecstasy filled their eyes, and their heart beat faster with the glow of love.

"My God and my all!" St. Francis of Assisi, rapt in love and adoration, repeated incessantly for whole nights.

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<sup>34</sup> Hom. 24 in cap. 7. Matth.

"My God and my all!" Yes, what can there be beautiful and noble that God does not possess? For God is the origin and source of all goodness and beauty. If there is any noble impulse in the human heart, it is only there because God has placed it there. All earthly beauty and perfection is only a faint and imperfect reflection of the infinite beauty and perfection of God, only a lost ray, as it were, of the immense divine sun of beauty and love.

If a mortal man would see but the thousandth part of that beauty for a moment, he would die from excess of joy! St. Francis of Sales in a vision saw the wound in the hand of Christ and almost died of joy.— And this great, beautiful, infinitely perfect God we shall POSSESS for all eternity, shall find our heaven in His enrapturing sight! What delight to see God in all His loveliness, to be satiated with the fullness of His joys, to be inebriated with the torrents of His love, to rest on His loving heart for all eternity! *"Fear not, . . . I am thy reward exceeding great"* (Gen. 15:1).

Oh, how our heart yearns for God, how our whole being thirsts after Him! St. Augustine rightly says: "Thou hast created us, O God, for Thyself, and our heart is restless till it rests in Thee." And the Psalmist yearningly cries out: *"What have I in heaven and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth? For Thee my flesh and heart hath fainted away: Thou art the God of my heart and the God that is my portion forever"* (Ps. 72:25, 26).

To be sure, creatures flit around us here below, and our heart which is necessarily drawn by love, only too often mistakes these rays of beauty for the real source, the mirror for the reality, like a madman who plunges into a lake to reach the stars that are reflected in it.<sup>35</sup>

The sinner turns his back upon God.

Now he is in the throes of death. Yet a few heavy sighs and his soul is in eternity. Then will break in upon that soul the disastrous catastrophe, which no creature can divine. The step into another world has been taken. The earth with its pleasures and joys has vanished; the deceiving and bewitching form of earthly delights has disappeared like smoke.— All alone the soul stands before the boundless ocean of eternity. Suddenly an immensely great knowledge of the infinite perfections of God flashes through the soul; like scales falling from her eye, the soul now sees clearly what formerly, blinded by creatures, she did not see: *There is only one who can make her happy, the ocean of happiness, the sun of beauty, the great, the eternal, the infinite God.* He who makes millions unspeakably happy, Who inebriates His children in heaven with infinite bliss, *He is also her end and aim for all eternity*; with a power of which we have no idea the soul strives after God — But — *"Away from me!"*— She wants to throw herself unto the heart of the all-lovable God, but

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hettinger, Apologie IV

without mercy the angered arm of His justice casts her into the fearful hell; she desires happiness, light, life, but is cast into exterior darkness, which glows in fire and still seems ice and coldness,— *into eternal death. "Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire"* (Matth. 25:41).

As iron is attracted by the magnet, so the condemned soul is attracted by God, but an invisible power repels her. Like one parched with thirst, the soul eagerly longs for one drop of the divine ocean of bliss, but her only drink is fire. Like a stream that casts itself from dizzy heights into the sea, the soul wishes to cast herself into the ocean of the infinite essence of God, but an indestructible barrier breaks her power, unmoved by her sighs and groans. As a child in a dark prison moans and cries for its mother and imploringly stretches forth its hands toward her, but is always repelled, so the condemned soul finds herself thrown back without mercy by the justice of God whom she has despised in the time of mercy.<sup>36</sup> This condition is more terrible than death: an eternal, awful striving without hope of success.

*God, Who is the delight of the saints in heaven, is also the torment of the damned in hell.* What torment! "This torture is as great as God Himself," says St. Bernard.<sup>37</sup>

When Esau thoughtlessly sold his birthright, he "roared out with a great cry" (Gen. 27:34). Absalom, in punishment, was not allowed to see the face of his father for several years, and the punishment was so great that he told the messenger to the king: "I beseech that I may see the face of the king, and if he be mindful of my iniquity, let him kill me" (2 Kings 14:32). King Philip II. of Spain, in punishment, once banished a courtier from his presence, and the man died of grief.

The Jesuit Father Abel, the popular preacher and author, relates the following incident: A number of years ago I visited the insane asylum at Hall, Tyrol, to learn the cause of some forms of insanity. I came into a ward where two ladies sat at a piano, whilst at a large table were others variously occupied. At the head of the table sat a girl of rare beauty; she might have been about 19 or 20 years of age, crocheting some fine altar-lace. Of course I never thought that she could be insane. I approached her and asked: "Young lady, for what church are you making this beautiful lace?" No answer. "But lady, I see no pattern that you copy." Again no answer. I looked at the director who accompanied me; he perceived that I had mistaken her for one of the attendants, and by a sign he set me right. This discovery affected me so that I had to leave the room. "How is it possible that this girl is insane?" I asked. "You see, Father, this girl was engaged to a man of Bozen. Shortly before they

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Wilmer's *Lehrbuch der Religion*, II.

<sup>37</sup> Lib. 5 de Consid. cap. 12

were to be married she went to see her betrothed. He stood on the stairway of the first story and cried to her: 'Away with you! I will have no more to do with you!' This one sentence robbed her of her reason."<sup>38</sup>

"Away with you! I will have no more to do with you!" If this one sentence of a man can affect a person in such a fearful manner, how terrible must be the thunder of the eternal Judge in the ears of the damned: "*Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!*" (Matth. 25:41).

"Depart from ME!" Thus cries out the Almighty, whose mere look casts the whole horde of reprobates into destruction; thus cries out the most beautiful, "*on whom the angels desire to look*" (1 Pet. 1:12); thus cries out the all-good God, Who loves all His other creatures, Who has a kind word even for the poorest mortal, and a loving look for the smallest worm.

"*Depart from me, you cursed!*" Woe if God curses! (Cf. Zach. 5:4; Mark 11:21.) More terrible than lightning does God's curse strike its victim, like the weight of a mountain it crushes him for all eternity!

"*He loved cursing, and it shall come unto him: and he would not have blessing, and it shall be far from him. And he put on cursing, like a garment: and it went in like water into his entrails, and like oil in his bones. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him; and like a girdle with which he is girded continually*" (Ps. 108: 18, 19).

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<sup>38</sup> Zurück zum praktischen Christentum, p. 29.

## CHAPTER VIII

### III. THE THIRD HELL

#### *The Hell of Despair.*

All around him the fire of hell — above him the more fearful hell of the loss of God — the condemned sinner sees a new hell growing out of himself.

*"Their worm dieth not"* (Mark 9:47). It is the worm of the guilty conscience, which day and night gnaws at and lacerates the heart of the sinner.

Even the heathen philosophers of ancient Greece portrayed in a stirring manner the tortures of conscience in the Promethean myth. Prometheus, in punishment for his criminal revolt against the deity, is chained to a rock of the Caucasus. Every morning an immortal vulture comes and tears open his side and devours his liver which continually renews itself.

Often the criminal suffers terribly from the pangs of conscience. Cain, the murderer of his brother, restlessly roams over the earth with the cry of despair: *"My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon. . . . I shall be a vagabond and fugitive on the earth: every one, therefore, who findeth me shall kill me"* (Gen. 4:13, 14).

The wicked Herod fears that the victim of his lust, the innocently killed St. John the Baptist, has risen from the dead (Matth. 14:2).

Judas hangs himself in his despair (Matth. 27:3 . . .).

Oliver Cromwell laughed when he signed the death warrant of King Charles I. of England and joked even at the execution; later, when he had reached the pinnacle of his power, he did not dare to sleep in the same room two successive nights.

In the '60's the papers related that two brothers had committed a terrible crime. Years passed by and the crime remained unpunished. But the furies of conscience pursued the two criminals in such a manner that one of them, whilst at work, begged the other to kill him with a hoe, which he did, and then gave himself up to justice.

Still, however terribly conscience may torment the sinner here below, he will try to flee from it: he casts himself into the tumult of worldly pleasures to overpower it; he takes to drink to drown it; he heaps sin upon sin to bury it; he laughs at it to master it; he tries to smother it with doubts of faith — till death robs him of the last vestige of distraction, and he carries the conscience, which now awakens with all its terrors, along into eternity as an everlasting and terrible accuser and tormentor.

Pope Innocent III. says that the worm of conscience torments the condemned sinner in a threefold manner: by the thought of the past, the present and the future.

The sinner looks to the *past*.

"If I only had lived differently!"—"Oh, if I only had listened to the voice of conscience!"—"If I had but avoided that person!"—"Had I but listened more attentively to the word of God!"—"If I had but once made a good, upright and contrite confession!"—"If I had prayed in temptation as I was instructed!"—Or, "Why did I not join the Catholic Church which I knew to be the true church, or could so easily have known?"—"If I only had!" "If I only had!!" "If I only had!!!" But O miserable sinner, IT IS NOW TOO LATE!!

Terrified he looks back: his whole black past rises as a witness against him; all the sins of his life, innumerable as the hairs of his head, blacker than hell itself, all his misdeeds in thought, desire, word and action are reviewed and appear before him like ghastly phantoms and cry out to him: "We are yours! Monster, who hast brought us forth!" Terrified he turns away. In vain! Like millions of poisonous serpents the sins of impurity surround him. His conscience, which on earth was asleep, awakens at last; formerly hard as a rock, since the lightning of God's justice has enlightened it, it has become a thousand times more tender than that of an innocent child that blushes at the mere shadow of a sin. Now he sees his sins in their true light, in all their hideousness, in their full wickedness: SHAME OVERPOWERS HIM. "O me miserable, if I only had lived differently; it was so easy with God's grace which was never wanting! Too late! ETERNALLY TOO LATE!!" Like a horde of wild beats his sins will cast themselves upon him, like the weight of mountains they will crush his despairing soul.

Besides his many misdeeds he sees, like lost stars, the innumerable graces, the abuse of which only increases his guilt. How easy it would have been to save himself, if he had only wished to!

"Remember!" (Luke 16:25), the hellish worm in his conscience says sarcastically:

"Remember! Did not the baptismal waters once flow over your now fiery brow? How beautiful you were then, you little angel! How dazzling was your soul in heavenly glory; how your Guardian Angel rejoiced; how heaven opened above you and the Holy Ghost lovingly dwelt in your innocent, young heart — you reprobate!"

"Remember! How your pure infant eyes shone when your mother told you about the kind heavenly Father, about the Infant Jesus and His holy mother Mary, and the holy angels, and of their great love towards us — you reprobate!"

"Remember! How nicely and devoutly you folded your little hands when for the first time you pronounced the sweet names of Jesus and Mary — you reprobate!"

"Remember! Did you ever think of such a thing on the most beautiful day of your life, the day of your first Holy Communion? O how happy you were then, how your heart glowed with devotion and how the sweet Saviour loved you, beautiful child of God — you reprobate!"

"Remember! How the Blood of the Saviour flowed over your soul to wash away sin when you received absolution; how often was your body sanctified with the Flesh of the Son of God in Holy Communion — you reprobate!"

"Remember! How often you were admonished in all charity, how you were warned most earnestly! How often your confessor exhorted and begged you to mend your ways; how your Guardian Angel admonished you through your conscience; how your good mother, perhaps with many tears, conjured you to change your life — you — lost in an ocean of graces, beside thousands of altars and priests! *Were there perhaps more graces necessary — to be damned! You raving maniac, why did you cast yourself wantonly into hell forever?*"

"Oh, if I only had done differently! If I only had!! If I only had!!! Mercy! Only once more!!" Poor reprobate! You would not have it in life, and in hell there is no more mercy! —

Oh, if the poor condemned sinner could come back to earth again! How differently he would live! How would he hide himself in the most lonely wilderness as a hermit; how gladly he would live on bread and water; how he would perform the severest penances till the end of time! Unhappy wretch — *too late! Eternally too late!!*

Howling, the ocean of despair swallows him up, and like a thousand daggers reproach pierces his heart — *forever*.

The wretched sinner tries to escape from these reproaches, tries to close his eyes on the past — he looks upon *the present*. What does he see? All the terrors of hell are before him! That is the reward for a brief enjoyment of sin! Trembling he turns away his eyes; he looks heavenward: there in enrapturing grandeur he sees the golden portals. There is the land of the blessed, the heavenly, beautiful Jerusalem, the city of bliss, where there is no sadness, no complaint, no tear, no pain (Apoc. 21:4), the everlasting home, where his poor heart yearns to rest on the loving heart of God in blissful peace — there he could be if on earth he had only wished to be there!

Gnashing his teeth he looks up. Oh, there in grand procession go thousands of the blessed, clothed in white garments, palms in their hands; in spirit he sees their crowns of triumph, hears as from afar their charming melodies, sees them enjoy the bliss *"that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it*



*entered into the heart of man" (1 Cor. 2:9) — thousands, perhaps, who were more strongly tempted than he; he sees the repentant thief who is converted on the cross, Mary Magdalen who with tears of love washes away her sins; pale with envy, he sees his own relatives and friends.—"Had I but lived differently!" he exclaims a thousand times; he may extend his fiery arms and beg for mercy; he may weep streams of fiery tears — TOO LATE! Crackling flames surround him, and his mad ravings are joined to the howling of all the damned: "We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honor. Behold how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints. Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us, and the sun of understanding hath not risen upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways, but the way of the Lord we have not known. What hath pride profited us? or what advantage hath the boasting of riches brought us? All these things are passed away like a shadow, and like a post that runneth on" (Wis. 5:4-9).—"Besides in life we never had a really happy moment, for 'there is no peace to the wicked' (Is. 48:22); we sold heaven for the perishable so-called joys of sin, and we have made ourselves unspeakably miserable — forever!"*

*"The wicked shall see, and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away: the desire of the wicked shall perish" (Ps. 111:10).*

But is there a star of hope in the future? — O misery! One look into the future crushes the reprobate.

In the next chapter we will see what are his prospects for the future.

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## CHAPTER IX

## THE HELL OF HELLS

*Eternity.*

Let the terrors of hell be doubled, let its tortures be increased a thousandfold, but take away its eternity and hell will be hell no more.

God has said it. Whether we shudder at the thought, whether our mind becomes confused at the consideration — clear and irrevocable is God's word: *"Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire!"* (Matth. 25:41); *"Their worm dieth not and the fire is not extinguished"* (Is. 66:24; Mark 9:45, 47); *"And these (the wicked) shall go into everlasting punishment"* (Matth. 25:46); *"Who obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ shall suffer eternal punishment in destruction"* (2 Thess. 1:8, 9); *"The chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire"* (Luke 3:17); *"The smoke of their torments shall ascend up forever and ever"* (Apoc. 14:11)

The gates of hell are closed forever. Above the gates the Almighty has written in flaming words:

"Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch' entrate!"

"All hope abandon, ye who enter here."

(Dante, Hell, III. 9.)

What men have believed at all times, what heathens relate in their myths of the eternally rolling stone of Sisyphus, of the thirst of Tantalus, never to be quenched, of the ever returning vulture of Prometheus, is true: *"They shall be tormented day and night forever and ever"* (Apoc. 20:10).

"Forever and ever!" How long is that?

"Madame! On the 24th day of this month it will be 100,000 hours that I languish in this dungeon. Another 200,000 hours still remain for me to suffer here." Thus read the short but eloquent petition of a prisoner to a lady in waiting at the court of Louis Philippe of France.

A 100,000 hours the poor prisoner had counted. And still that is only about 11½ years. But who counts the hours of eternity? Let us rather say: Who counts the centuries, the millenniums?

To a sick person a sleepless night seems endless. He hears the tick of the clock, and thus every second of these endless hours seems to tarry in his ear; every one seems an eternity to him. Will this long, long night never come to an end? — How long then will one night appear on the fiery bed of hell? Oh, if it were but one night!

*"Forever and ever, for eternity!"* Does that mean till there are no more mountains, till the sun and the moon have disappeared from the heavens? *No, longer!* Does it mean million times million and that again multiplied by million times million years? *No, longer!*

How many figures do we need to write a million? Only seven. You can write them in less than two seconds. Now write till the end of the day, write without ceasing till the end of your life, write, if you can, till the end of time; put all the printing presses of the world to work printing numbers till judgment day. Will hell continue as many years as that number expresses? *No, longer!*

Take a handful of water and count the drops. Count all the drops of all streams, lakes and seas. Imagine an ocean as large as the whole universe, and imagine a little bird would come every thousand years to drink but a single drop from this immense ocean. When will that bird have emptied that ocean? And when the ocean is emptied, *hell will not have been shortened one second!*

*"Forever and ever, for all eternity!"* That means *without* end. We can pronounce the word, but we can not grasp its meaning, for it surpasses all human understanding. *"For all eternity"* means *as long as God lives!*

What terrible certainty for the reprobate! What an ocean of torments is always before him! Gigantically, with the weight of a mountain the awful monster of eternity presses on him! With a clear eye he must stare into eternity and in his dread he anticipates every moment of that endless woe. As the whole weight of a ball rests on a point, no matter how it may be turned, so the infinite ball of eternity ever rests on the condemned sinner with the whole of its crushing weight.

Ever torment — never deliverance! Ever despair — never consolation! Ever — never!! That is the pendulum stroke of the infernal clock whose hand does no more indicate hours, but Ever — Never. O terrible fate of the damned: to live only in order to suffer; to live eternally in order to suffer eternally!

EVER — NEVER!

Oh, if the reprobate could but die! Even if he were compelled to suffer a hundred death agonies, how gladly he would die! But no! Holy Scripture expressly states this terrible truth: *"In those days men shall seek death, and shall not find it: and they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them"* (Apoc. 9:6). Did you hear it? Yes, had the damned only a faint glimmer of hope, that through double, ten or a hundredfold tortures of hell they could find death, they would eagerly rush into the most horrible torments, where the flames would be fiercest and the pool of suffering unbearable.— But in vain! They suffer the torments of death indeed, but they are deprived of its consolations; they cannot die, though their condition is a continual death, an everlasting dying. Ever — Never!!

With gnashing teeth they curse themselves, curse their own folly and blindness in life, curse the day of their birth, curse the mother that bore them, curse the whole world, curse heaven, curse the devil, curse God Himself! But — EVER — NEVER!!

That is hell!!

### *A Picture of Hell.*

"I would rather be in hell with Goethe than in heaven with the Jesuits." Thus spoke a man on board a steamer as he glanced triumphantly, conscious of his cleverness, at the circle of acquaintances assembled in a salon.

"Yes," continued the scoffer, "in hell we find society of high rank. There we find, if the Jesuits are right, and they must certainly know, emperors, kings, army officers, ministers of state, poets, bankers, all the opera and theatre performers, the philosophers of the ancient and modern heathen schools, etc. You see, gentlemen, these are personages of learning and wit, so that one will not be lonesome as in —" He could not finish.

"A wreck in sight!" came the shout from the man in the masthead. In a moment the whole ship was in an uproar. Ten minutes more and the wreck was seen by the passengers.

A ship without sails, without rudder, without crew, at the mercy of the waves affords an inexpressibly sad sight. It is a floating coffin. And what misery and heart-rending woe may be associated with it! All were visibly affected as we drew nearer and nearer to the deserted ship. Now it was very near. We shouted. No answer. Death seemed to reign there. A boat was fitted out and several of us, also the scoffer, went in and rowed to the wreck. Soon we were on board; a few rats ran away slowly. Everything was swept away from the deck. We went down into the cabins: nowhere a living being. But with a shudder we saw the traces of a terrible struggle; a fearful scene had been enacted here. We entered the great salon — everywhere pieces of glass, drinking vessels, remnants of food and traces of blood. Now we understood the situation somewhat. The crew most likely had mutinied, had plundered the ship, thrown the captain into the sea or killed him in some other way, and then with their booty fled to land in the largest boat.

Whilst we thus looked around, suddenly one of the company uttered a loud cry, pointing to the farther end of the salon. There sat an old man with gray beard and hair, apparently sound asleep, his face buried in his arms that rested on the table. I hurried to awake him and shook him. No sign of life. I raised his head which was cold and stiff. I was terrified; his bloodshot eyes met mine with a dull stare. His face, haggard and pale, was terribly emaciated, and his tongue, black and shriveled up, protruded from his mouth.

"Starved to death!" cried the ship's surgeon. "That man must have suffered terribly!"

"Starved?" I asked and pointed to the surroundings. Was not the floor strewn with biscuits and the daintiest preserves set near him? On a hanging table, a few feet from him, was a glass of clear water and a bottle of wine. How in the world was starvation possible?

"It must be so," repeated the surgeon. "The man slowly starved to death. Nothing but the agony of thirst could parch his tongue in such a manner; nothing but starvation could distort so terribly his otherwise manly and young face and turn his thick hair gray."

"But how can that be?"

The mystery was soon solved. We noticed under the sleeves of his jacket the shining steel bands of handcuffs. The short chain, which held them firmly together, was fastened to the massive table with a clinching iron, which was driven through the table and bent on the other side.

But more horrifying was the sight of the poor man's feet which were fastened to the floor with iron clamps. The flesh of his feet was eaten away by the rats. All around we found new traces of the horrible crime. The monsters had rubbed the feet of the captain — for it was he — with pork and poured hot lard over them to attract the rats which, while he was yet alive, had gnawed away the flesh from his shackled feet.

I shall never forget the look on the face so terribly distorted by pain and starvation. The fearful agony had left an awful expression on those features. We could fancy hearing the heart-rending cries for rescue, the moans and groans of despair.

"A face as if from hell!" one cried horrified.

"A faint picture of a reprobate," I remarked with a glance at our scoffer. He was silent and deadly pale.

The captain had gnawed at the table and had eaten all the oilcloth within his reach. On the left arm we saw the marks of his teeth, made when he had tried to quench his burning thirst with his own blood. His wrists were black and swollen. The poor man must have struggled hard to reach food in spite of his fetters.

"How long did the unhappy man have to suffer till death ensued?" someone asked after a long pause.

"From eight to ten days, perhaps longer, depending on circumstances," replied the surgeon.

"And in hell?" — one said.

"Forever!" all replied at once.

Not another word was spoken. Deeply moved we all left the gradually sinking wreck. From a distance we looked upon it, till it disappeared, lost in the bottomless deep — forever!

I have travelled since then over the wide, wide world, and often temptations, grievous temptations, have assailed me, but a thought of the wreck sufficed to make me shudder at the abyss into which I was in danger of falling. *"In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin"* (Eccli. 7:40).

What became of the scoffer, I do not know, but since that hour he became very grave.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Taken from the Stuttg. *Sonntagsblatt*. 1888.

## CHAPTER X

### CAN WE GO TO HELL?

My dear reader! It is not my intention to terrify you; I shall not say more than I know for certain; and this is certain: There is a hell, and at this very moment many are burning in it.

We know this beyond a doubt of the fallen angels. Once heavenly spirits, exalted princes, friends of God, they committed but one sin of thought, and in the same moment they were cast into hell by divine justice. Before beautiful angels, they became hideous devils, and have already burnt thousands of years.

How many people go to hell?

I do not know; that is one of the unsearchable mysteries of God's justice. The loving heart of the Saviour pardoned even the bloodstained thief: hence, says St. Augustine, no one need despair of God's mercy; the unrepenting thief is lost: as a warning against presumption.

But suppose that of one million persons only one were lost: would that not be terrible enough? And if all others were saved what would it avail you if *you alone* were lost? But, O my God, if we consider on the one hand the sayings of Christ and on the other the boundless levity and carelessness of so many worldlings, though no man can hope to penetrate the hidden ways of God's mercy, we must fear that many are lost. *"The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away"* (Matth. 11:12). *"Enter ye at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and straight is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it"* (Matth. 7:13, 14).

What is required to go to hell? ONLY ONE MORTAL SIN! Neither murder nor adultery nor positive defiance of God are necessary, but one mortal sin of thought is sufficient. The Apostle admonishes us: *"Do not err: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor liars with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God"* (1 Cor. 6:9, 10).

What would we see if the curtain could be withdrawn for a moment? Let us in thought descend into hell and view the throng of the damned! There we find one, perhaps, who suffers for theft. Another writhes in the sea of flames: he could tell us: "I have missed Mass on Sunday." There is another, gnashing his teeth,— how he suffers in the infernal pool! Let us ask him what he has done. He could stretch out his glowing hands and tell us: "I have raised these hands against my parents." "And you?" we ask another. "I have calumniated my neighbor." "And you?" "I was a drunkard. Oh, for a drop of water!" "And you,

who seem to be so grievously tormented in the flames of hell?" "I suffer on account of impurity."—

This is no imagination, but reality. For these very reasons the damned burn in hell this very moment. And we live so thoughtlessly, forgetting that under our feet such terrible things may be taking place. While you read this, hell burns on, its flames flare up, the condemned howl with pain and despair. What fearful tortures they suffered since this morning! Perhaps there are some there who lived with you, laughed and sinned with you; perhaps some who were better than you; perhaps many who suffer for but one mortal sin! And you heap sin upon sin, crime upon crime, shame upon shame — as though God had created hell only for others and not for you also! You think you will escape hell? That is just what most of the damned thought. If those only would go to hell who expect to go there, then hell would not be very large.

The saints feared that they might be lost — and you? Thousands leave the world and go into deserts and monasteries to lead a life of penance, and still have to hear the admonition of the Holy Ghost: *"With fear and trembling work out your salvation"* (Phil. 2:12).

St. Peter Damian confesses that at the thought of hell his hair stood on end. St. Francis Borgia became very sad. Being asked the reason, he replied: "I thought of hell." St. Bernard, who had saved innumerable souls, had worked astonishing miracles, yet trembled almost on the threshold of heaven. St. Paul, who had converted half the world, who was rapt into the third heaven, chastises his body, lest having preached to others, he should become a castaway (1 Cor. 9:27). St. Jerome flees into the desert: wild beasts howl around him, the desert hears his sighs and groans, its sands are moistened with his tears, he strikes his bleeding chest with a heavy stone. St. Jerome, why all this? "On account of the fear of hell."<sup>40</sup>

These saints would rather have shed their blood than offended God even by a venial sin, and still in their humility they fear that they might be lost — AND YOU? Does a mortal sin stain your soul at this moment? Have you really transgressed the law of God in an important matter, with clear knowledge and full consent? If that is the case, lay this book aside for a while and imagine that the chair on which you sit is aglow, the table before you is in flames and the fires of hell pour in upon you — could that not become reality, if you continue in sin? But perhaps you have committed two mortal sins. Then you have deserved hell twice: every one will suffer according to the measure of his guilt. *"As much as she hath glorified herself, and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give ye to her"* (Apoc. 18:7).

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<sup>40</sup> Ep. 18 aut. 24.



One mortal sin — one hell; two mortal sins — two hells; ten mortal sins — ten hells; a hundred mortal sins — a hundred hells.—

And you intend to live on in this dangerous state? Do you not hear the thunders of God's justice rolling terribly over your guilty head? You unhappy habitual sinner, with one foot you already stand in hell. It is high time to amend! You may die this evening or this night. If so, what then? Will you live on in this state for another hour? *Do you perhaps feel strong enough to endure the pains of hell?* If that is the case, then you may be without fear. The saints indeed, who were used to severe penance, trembled at the thought of hell — but you need not! You may live on in your folly — but, my friend, before you do so, I ask you to make a little experiment: just hold your hand to a hot stove for an hour, or at least for a minute, and if you can not bear that, then listen to the warning words of the Prophet Isaias (33:14): "*Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*"<sup>41</sup>

*You unjust man!* You have stolen from and cheated others, through your fault others have been injured. Can you endure hell? If not, quickly restore the stolen goods, repair the injury, for "*know you not that neither unjust, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor extortioners, shall possess the kingdom of God?*" (1 Cor. 6:9, 10.)

*"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

*Revengeful man!* You will not forgive and forget. Can you endure hell? If you can, then hate on; feed your heart on thoughts of revenge. But if you cannot lie in fire even one night, then quickly be reconciled with your enemy! "*If you will not forgive men, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your offenses*" (Matth. 6:15).

*"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

*Drunkard!* Through your shameful vice you lower yourself below the brute, cause untold sorrow and distress to your family; your wife and family suffer want and disgrace, whilst you think only of satisfying your insatiable thirst — can you endure hell? If you can, go on overfeeding your body, so that later it may be the better fuel for the fire of hell; continue to excite your craving for alcoholic drinks that you may the more feel the infernal thirst! What will you choose: the little thirst and self-denial of total abstinence, *for that is your only hope of safety*, or the eternal thirst of hell? "*Drunkards shall not possess the kingdom of God*" (1 Cor. 6:10). That you may choose wisely, listen to the inspired Prophet: "*Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*"

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Mentges, 5. Sonnt. in der Fasten.

*Abstinence or Hell!!!*

*Sacrilegious Man!* You have concealed your sins in confession, and have laid violent hands on the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion: you certainly must be able to endure hell, for you desire hell, since you have renounced all grace and mercy, "*eating judgment to yourself*" (Cf. 1 Cor. 11:29). But poor wretch! Can you really endure hell? You fear the admonitions of the father confessor, and you are not afraid of the shame and confusion on judgment day before heaven and earth and hell? (Cf. Apoc. 6:16). I beg you for the sake of your poor soul, go quickly and make a good, general confession lest hell swallow you up, for God even now by my words calls you to sincere penance. *Confess or burn!*

*"Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"*

*Impure Man!* You bear the fetters of this shameful vice; perhaps for years you have committed the most shameful sins which sadden your Guardian Angel, and at which the very walls could blush with shame, you slave of impurity — can you endure hell? If you can, and if neither the love of God, nor the loss of heaven, nor a remnant of a sense of honor or shame, nor anything else, can induce you to give up this debasing vice, then do not care for the threats of the Almighty! Keep on to wallow in the mire of sin; sacrifice your health, your honor, your peace of soul! But before you do so, just hold your finger into the fire whilst you read the following texts: "*The impure shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone*" (Apoc. 21:8), and "*He that joineth himself to harlots, will be wicked, rottenness and worms shall inherit him*" (Eccli. 19:3); "*Which of you can dwell with devouring fire? Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?*"

Finally, O sinner, whatever sin may burden your conscience, I beg you for the sake of your immortal soul, be merciful to yourself! For God's sake! do not wantonly make yourself unspeakably miserable for all eternity, when with a little effort, you can make yourself unspeakably happy for all eternity!! Kneel down at once, raise your sinful hands to heaven and cry to the good and merciful God: "Grace and mercy, O God! Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy!" Then go to confession as soon as possible, lest you die in your sins,— and curse your folly for *all eternity*.

Listen to God, speaking to you in the words of Holy Scripture: "*To-day if you hear my voice, harden not your heart!*" (Ps. 94:8).

## CHAPTER XI

### CAN WE AVOID HELL?

In the twelfth century there lived in Paris the famous and learned philosopher Abelard. But alas, he led a very worldly life. He had a frightful dream. It seemed to him that he was poised, held by an invisible hand, between heaven and earth. Suddenly, like an arrow, he sinks downward. Below him a bottomless abyss opens and with mad speed he goes down into the earth. A sudden cry — already he is in bottomless depths. He becomes dizzy — he keeps right on. He would like to stop — impossible! Cold sweat covers his forehead — he goes down faster! He feels a dismal heat — his hair is singed — the heat grows more intense: at last he stands before the fatal entrance of the prison of hell. With a crash the gate opens, and he sees an immense city of fire! The streets are fire; the pavement is glowing stone; the gutters boiling sulphur; the houses built of burning walls. In every house a reprobate is tormented. Abelard is forced to enter, driven by an invisible power. Madly he rushes over the burning ground, through burning houses amid the general howling and moaning. There he sees a house at which the devils are still building; on top only one fiery stone is wanting. "For whom is this house?" he cries. "Ha," the devils laugh, "for the famous philosopher, Abelard of Paris. Just one more mortal sin and he will be here!" He was thunderstruck. He awoke; it had been a dream. "But," he said to himself, "I will not commit that one mortal sin!" That was his resolution.

*You also still live. You are not yet in hell! What consoling certainty! Can you still avoid hell?*

St. Thomas Aquinas was once asked by his sister, who no doubt admired the wonderful purity of this angel in the flesh: "Brother, what must I do to gain heaven?" The doctor of the Church answered: "To gain heaven you need only to wish it!"

Indeed you can escape hell, if you only wish to. Your salvation depends on two: on God and yourself. "*He (God) will have all men to be saved*" (1 Tim. 2:4); it is only for you to will it also. Resolutely employ the right *means*!

1. First of all make a *good confession*.

During a mission, preached by the zealous P. Brydaine († 1767) at Aix in the Provence, the following incident took place. The Father was just about to begin his meal, when an old army officer in great excitement rushed into the dining-room and asked to speak to the missionary Father.

"Come quick, Father," he said in a commanding tone, "I have to tell you something confidentially." He violently grasped the priest's hand and pulled him into the adjoining room; locked the door; threw down his hat and drew his

sword. The missionary became alarmed, but already the officer threw himself at his feet with many tears and said:

"P. Brydaine, I want to go to confession, but immediately, otherwise I do not know what will happen to me. I traveled 27 miles to see you; my heart threatens to burst. Since I heard your sermon on hell, I can endure this no longer; my conscience has become my hangman and leaves me no rest day and night. Understand well: you will not leave this room before you have taken this load from my heart."

Deeply moved, the missionary embraced the poor sinner, heard his confession and reconciled him with his God. At his departure the good officer begged the priest's pardon for having caused him so much alarm and added:

"I feared death might take me away in my sins and that hell might swallow me up. Believe me, Father, when a man has such an enemy at his heels, he can not be at rest even though he has a heart of steel."

Six months later the officer appeared before the judgment seat of God, for which he could prepare himself by severe penance. *It was high time!*<sup>42</sup>

Who knows whether you still have so much time? If your conscience is not at rest, then, for God's sake, do not put off your conversion!!

*"To-day if you shall hear His (God's) voice, harden not your hearts"* (Ps. 94:8). Perchance this is the *Last Call* of grace for you! *A hundred years hence — what will you then wish to have done?*

2. If you are in the state of grace, then flee like death what alone can cast you into hell — *Mortal Sin!* Hell's fiery glare reveals with dazzling brightness the wickedness and folly of a grievous offense against God. When temptations assail you; when the fires of sensuality burn in your members; or when the wicked world with its thousand allurements calls you: quickly cast a look into the surging ocean of hell fire!

A pious lay brother spent his whole life in the monastery kitchen as cook. He stood at the fireplace and wept without ceasing thinking of the fire of hell. He attained a high degree of perfection.

St. Chrysostom had a picture of hell in his room. A look at the picture banished the allurements of temptation in a moment.

For 25 years the hermit Martinian had led a life of severe penance; he was known for his sanctity far and wide. Then the enemy of salvation used a depraved woman to tempt him to bring even this servant of God to fall. The temptress pressed him hard with her allurements; a fierce struggle raged in his heart; when about to yield he ran to a fire and jumped in with his bare feet. What pain! — O the fire of hell! — The temptation was overcome.

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<sup>42</sup> Carron, Vie de Brydaine.

3. Very frequently go to the Holy Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, for only then you can remain in the state of sanctifying grace, which is a necessary condition of salvation. Our Holy Father, Pope Pius X., most earnestly admonishes us to resume the salutary practice of daily Communion of the first Christians. What was good for them is good for us. Go at least frequently. Listen to Christ Himself regarding the wonderful effects of Holy Communion: "*Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, abideth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. . . . He that eateth this bread, shall live forever.*" (John 6:54, 55, 57, 58, 59.)

4. Do penance in this life, at least by bearing patiently the sufferings God sends you. "Fire or penance, tears or flames!"<sup>43</sup> Which is easier?

Father Nierenberg, a wonder of learning and piety in his time, was confined to his bed for ten years by a very painful illness. His friends tried to console him. But he replied, smiling: "Non est ignis.— It is not the fire." His pain increased; hardly a member of his body was free from suffering: "Non est ignis — It is not the fire." His nerves were contracted; all bent up he lay motionless: "Non est ignis — It is not the fire." His flesh began to decay, so that it had to be cut off piece by piece, sometimes to the bone. Quivering with pain, he still said: "Non est ignis — It is still no fire."

O let us kiss the chastizing hand of divine love; "*He will strike, and He will cure us*" (Osee 6:2). Let us cry out with St. Augustine: "Lord, here cut, here burn, but spare me in eternity!"

5. Hasten with full confidence to the arms of divine mercy! God does not wish to make you unhappy, be convinced of that. "*The Lord is sweet to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works*" (Ps. 144:9). Let the bleeding, open Heart of the God-Man be your refuge! Seek shelter there when you consider the terrors of judgment! Bl. Margaret Mary Alacoque, the favorite pupil of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, said: "How sweet it is to die when one has honored the Heart of Him who will one day judge us!"

6. *Daily pray for a happy death!* O terrible moment on which your whole eternity depends! Recommend your last hour especially to St. Joseph, who died in the arms of Jesus and Mary, for he is the patron of a happy death. Daily say at least one Hail Mary in his honor.

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<sup>43</sup> St. Leonard of Port Maurice, *Die Schrecken der Ewigkeit*.

7. Above all, do not forget the *Blessed Virgin Mary*! A child of Mary will never be lost; for the child belongs to the mother. Seek shelter in the folds of her protecting mantle when the thunders of divine justice terrify you! Grasp her mild hand and cry to her with suppliant confidence: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death! Amen."

*"Let the thought of the eternal fire go to sleep with you every evening and let it awake with you every morning."* (St. John Climacus.)

THE END



