

THE  
**Imitation of Christ:**

FOUR BOOKS.

BY  
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1877.

# CONTENTS.

## BOOK I.

### ADMONITIONS PROFITABLE FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

	Page
CHAPTER I. Of the imitation of Christ, and of contempt of the world and all its vanities . . . . .	29
— II. Of thinking humbly of oneself . . . . .	31
— III. Of the knowledge of truth . . . . .	33
— IV. Of prudence in action . . . . .	36
— V. Of the reading of Holy Scripture . . . . .	37
— VI. Of inordinate affections . . . . .	38
— VII. Of fleeing from vain hope and pride . . . . .	39
— VIII. Of the danger of too much familiarity . . . . .	40
— IX. Of obedience and subjection . . . . .	41
— X. Of the danger of superfluity of words . . . . .	42
— XI. Of seeking peace of mind, and of spiritual progress . . . . .	43
— XII. Of the uses of adversity . . . . .	45
— XIII. Of resisting temptation . . . . .	46
— XIV. On avoiding rash judgment . . . . .	49
— XV. Of works of charity . . . . .	50
— XVI. Of bearing with the faults of others . . . . .	52
— XVII. Of a religious life . . . . .	53
— XVIII. Of the example of the holy fathers . . . . .	54
— XIX. Of the exercises of a religious man . . . . .	56
— XX. Of the love of solitude and silence . . . . .	59
— XXI. Of compunction of heart . . . . .	63
— XXII. On the contemplation of human misery . . . . .	65
— XXIII. Of meditation upon death . . . . .	68
— XXIV. Of the judgment and punishment of the wicked . . . . .	72
— XXV. Of the zealous amendment of our whole life . . . . .	75

## BOOK II.

### ADMONITIONS CONCERNING THE INNER LIFE.

CHAPTER I. Of the inward life . . . . .	83
— II. Of lowly submission . . . . .	86
— III. Of the good, peaceable man . . . . .	87

		Page
CHAPTER IV.	Of a pure mind and simple intention . . . .	89
— V.	Of self-esteem . . . . .	90
— VI.	Of the joy of a good conscience . . . . .	92
— VII.	Of loving Jesus above all things . . . . .	94
— VIII.	Of the intimate love of Jesus . . . . .	95
— IX.	Of the lack of all comfort . . . . .	97
— X.	Of gratitude for the grace of God . . . . .	101
— XI.	Of the fewness of those who love the cross of Jesus . . . . .	103
— XII.	Of the royal way of the holy cross . . . . .	105

## BOOK III.

## ON INWARD CONSOLATION.

CHAPTER I.	Of the inward voice of Christ to the faithful soul . . . . .	115
— II.	What the truth saith inwardly without noise of words . . . . .	116
— III.	How all the words of God are to be heard with humility, and how many consider them not . . . . .	117
— IV.	How we must walk in truth and humility before God . . . . .	120
— V.	Of the wonderful power of the Divine Love . . . . .	122
— VI.	Of the proving of the true lover . . . . .	125
— VII.	Of hiding our grace under the guard of humility . . . . .	128
— VIII.	Of a low estimation of self in the sight of God . . . . .	131
— IX.	That all things are to be referred to God, as the final end . . . . .	132
— X.	That it is sweet to despise the world and to serve God . . . . .	134
— XI.	That the desires of the heart are to be examined and governed . . . . .	136
— XII.	Of the inward growth of patience, and of the struggle against evil desires . . . . .	138
— XIII.	Of the obedience of one in lowly subjection after the example of Jesus Christ . . . . .	140
— XIV.	Of meditation upon the hidden judgments of God, that we may not be lifted up because of our well-doing . . . . .	141
— XV.	How we must stand and speak, in everything that we desire . . . . .	143
— XVI.	That true solace is to be sought in God alone . . . . .	145
— XVII.	That all care is to be cast upon God . . . . .	146
— XVIII.	That temporal miseries are to be borne patiently after the example of Christ . . . . .	147
— XIX.	Of bearing injuries, and who shall be approved as truly patient . . . . .	149
— XX.	Of confession of our infirmity and of the miseries of this life . . . . .	151
— XXI.	That we must rest in God above all goods and gifts . . . . .	153
— XXII.	Of the recollection of God's manifold benefits . . . . .	156
— XXIII.	Of four things which bring great peace . . . . .	159
— XXIV.	Of avoiding of curious inquiry into the life of another . . . . .	161

	Page
CHAPTER XXV. Wherein firm peace of heart and true profit consist . . . . .	162
— XXVI. Of the exaltation of a free spirit, which humble prayer more deserveth than doth frequent reading . . . . .	164
— XXVII. That personal love greatly hindereth from the highest good . . . . .	166
— XXVIII. Against the tongues of detractors . . . . .	168
— XXIX. How when tribulation cometh we must call upon and bless God . . . . .	169
— XXX. Of seeking Divine help and the confidence of obtaining grace . . . . .	170
— XXXI. Of the neglect of every creature, that the Creator may be found . . . . .	173
— XXXII. Of self-denial, and the casting away all selfishness . . . . .	175
— XXXIII. Of instability of the heart, and of directing the aim towards God . . . . .	177
— XXXIV. That to him who loveth, God is sweet above all things and in all things . . . . .	178
— XXXV. That there is no security against Temptation in this life . . . . .	180
— XXXVI. Against vain judgments of men . . . . .	182
— XXXVII. Of pure and entire resignation of self for the obtaining liberty of heart . . . . .	183
— XXXVIII. Of a good government in external things, and of having recourse to God in dangers . . . . .	185
— XXXIX. That man must not be immersed in business . . . . .	186
— XL. That man hath no good in himself, and nothing whereof to glory . . . . .	187
— XLI. Of contempt of all temporal honour . . . . .	189
— XLII. That our peace is not to be placed in men . . . . .	190
— XLIII. Against vain and worldly knowledge . . . . .	191
— XLIV. Of not troubling ourselves about outward things . . . . .	193
— XLV. That we must not believe everyone, and that we are prone to fall in our words . . . . .	194
— XLVI. Of having confidence in God when evil words are cast at us . . . . .	197
— XLVII. That all troubles are to be endured for the sake of eternal life . . . . .	199
— XLVIII. Of the day of eternity and of the straitnesses of this life . . . . .	201
— XLIX. Of the desire after eternal life, and how great blessings are promised to those who strive . . . . .	204
— L. How a desolate man ought to commit himself into the hands of God . . . . .	208
— LI. That we must give ourselves to humble works when we are unequal to those that are lofty . . . . .	212
— LII. That a man ought not to reckon himself worthy of consolation but more worthy of chastisement . . . . .	213
— LIII. That the grace of God doth not join itself to those who mind earthly things . . . . .	215

	Page
CHAPTER LIV. Of the diverse motions of nature and grace . . . . .	217
— LV. Of the corruption of nature and the efficacy of Divine grace . . . . .	221
— LVI. That we ought to deny ourselves and to imitate Christ by means of the Cross . . . . .	224
— LVII. That a man must not be too much cast down, when he falleth into some faults . . . . .	226
— LVIII. Of deeper matters, and God's hidden judg- ments, which are not to be inquired into . . . . .	228
— LIX. That all hope and trust is to be fixed in God alone . . . . .	233

## BOOK IV.

### OF THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

A Devout Exhortation to the Holy Communion . . . . .	239
CHAPTER I. With how great reverence Christ must be received . . . . .	240
— II. That the great goodness and charity of God is shown to men in the Sacrament. . . . .	246
— III. That it is profitable to communicate often . . . . .	249
— IV. That many good gifts are bestowed upon those who communicate devoutly . . . . .	252
— V. Of the dignity of this Sacrament, and of the office of the priest . . . . .	256
— VI. An inquiry concerning preparation for Communion . . . . .	258
— VII. Of the examination of conscience, and purpose of amendment . . . . .	259
— VIII. Of the oblation of Christ upon the cross, and of resignation of self . . . . .	261
— IX. That we ought to offer ourselves and all that is ours to God, and to pray for all. . . . .	263
— X. That Holy Communion is not lightly to be omitted . . . . .	265
— XI. That the Body and Blood of Christ and the Holy Scriptures are most necessary to a faithful soul . . . . .	269
— XII. That he who is about to communicate with Christ ought to prepare himself with great diligence . . . . .	273
— XIII. That the devout soul ought with the whole heart to yearn after union with Christ in the Sacrament . . . . .	275
— XIV. Of the fervent desire of certain devout persons to receive the Body and Blood of Christ . . . . .	277
— XV. That the grace of devotion is acquired by humility and self-denial . . . . .	279
— XVI. That we ought to lay open our necessities to Christ and to require His grace . . . . .	281
— XVII. Of fervent love and vehement desire of receiving Christ. . . . .	283
— XVIII. That a man should not be a curious searcher of the Sacrament, but a humble imitator of Christ, submitting his sense to holy faith . . . . .	286

**B O O K I.**

**ADMONITIONS PROFITABLE FOR THE  
SPIRITUAL LIFE.**

## CHAPTER I.

Of the imitation of Christ, and of contempt of the world and all its vanities.

*He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness,\** saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ, and they teach us how far we must imitate His life and character, if we seek true illumination, and deliverance from all blindness of heart. Let it be our most earnest study, therefore, to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ.

2. His teaching surpasseth all teaching of holy men, and such as have His Spirit find therein *the hidden manna.\*\** But there are many who, though they frequently hear the Gospel, yet feel but little longing after it, because they have not the mind of Christ. He, therefore, that will fully and with true wisdom understand the words of Christ, let him strive to conform his whole life to that mind of Christ.

3. What doth it profit thee to enter into deep discussion concerning the Holy Trinity, if thou lack humility, and be thus displeasing to the Trinity? For verily it is not deep words that make a man holy and upright; it is a good life which maketh a man dear to God. I had rather feel contrition than be skilful in the definition thereof. If thou knewest

\* John VIII. 12.

\*\* Rev. II. 17.

the whole Bible, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what should all this profit thee without the love and grace of God? *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*, save to love God, and Him only to serve. That is the highest wisdom, to cast the world behind us, and to reach forward to the heavenly kingdom.

4. It is vanity then to seek after, and to trust in, the riches which shall perish. It is vanity, too, to covet honours, and to lift up ourselves on high. It is vanity to follow the desires of the flesh and be led by them, for this shall bring misery at the last. It is vanity to desire a long life, and to have little care for a good life. It is vanity to take thought only for the life which now is, and not to look forward to the things which shall be hereafter. It is vanity to love that which quickly passeth away, and not to hasten where eternal joy abideth.

5. Be oftentimes mindful of the saying,\* *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing*. Strive, therefore, to turn away thy heart from the love of the things that are seen, and to set it upon the things that are not seen. For they who follow after their own fleshly lusts, defile the conscience, and destroy the grace of God.

\* Eccles. i. 8.

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## CHAPTER II.

Of thinking humbly of oneself.

THERE is naturally in every man a desire to know, but what profiteth knowledge without the fear of God? Better of a surety is a lowly peasant who serveth God, than a proud philosopher who watcheth the stars, and neglecteth the knowledge of himself. He who knoweth himself well is vile in his own sight, neither regardeth he the praises of men. If I knew all the things that are in the world, and were not in charity, what should it help me before God, who is to judge me according to my deeds?

2. Rest from inordinate desire of knowledge, for therein is found much distraction and deceit. Those who have knowledge desire to appear learned and to be called wise. Many things there are, to know which profiteth little or nothing to the soul. And foolish out of measure is he who attendeth upon other things rather than those which serve to his soul's health. Many words satisfy not the soul, but a good life refresheth the mind, and a pure conscience giveth great confidence towards God.

3. The greater and more complete thy knowledge, the more severely shalt thou be judged, unless thou hast lived holily. Therefore be not lifted up by any skill or knowledge that thou hast; but rather fear concerning the knowledge which is given to

thee. If it seemeth to thee that thou knowest many things, and understandest them well, know also that there are many more things which thou knowest not. *Be not high-minded*, but rather confess thine ignorance. Why desirest thou to lift thyself above another, when there are found many more learned and more skilled in the Scripture than thou? If thou wilt know and learn anything with profit, love to be thyself unknown and to be counted for nothing.

4. That is the highest and most profitable lesson, when a man truly knoweth, and judgeth lowly of himself. To account nothing of one's self, and to think always kindly and highly of others, this is great and perfect wisdom. Even shouldest thou see thy neighbour sin openly or grievously, yet thou oughtest not to reckon thyself better than he, for thou knowest not how long thou shalt keep thine integrity. All of us are weak and frail; hold thou no man more frail than thyself.

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## CHAPTER III.

Of the knowledge of Truth.

HAPPY is the man whom Truth by itself doth teach, not by figures and transient words, but as it is in itself.\* Our own judgment and feelings often deceive us, and we discern but little of the truth. What doth it profit to argue about hidden and dark things, concerning which we shall not be even reproved in the judgment because we knew them not? Oh grievous folly, to neglect the things which are profitable and necessary, and to give our minds to things which are curious and hurtful! Having eyes, we see not.

2. And what have we to do with talk about genus and species? He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh, is free from multiplied questionings. From this One Word are all things, and all things speak of Him; and this is the Beginning, which also speaketh unto us.\*\* No man without Him understandeth or rightly judgeth. The man to whom all things are one, who bringeth all things to one, who seeth all things in one, he is able to remain steadfast of spirit, and at rest in God. O God, who art the Truth, make me one with Thee in everlasting love. It wearieth me oftentimes to read and to

\* Ps. xciv. 12: Numb. xii. 8.

\*\* John viii. 25 (Vulg.)

listen to many things; in Thee is all that I wish for and desire. Let all doctors hold their peace; let all creation keep silence before Thee: speak Thou alone to me.

3. The more a man hath unity and simplicity in himself, the more things and the deeper things he understandeth; and that without labour, because he receiveth the light of understanding from above. The spirit which is pure, sincere, and steadfast, is not distracted though it hath many works to do, because it doth all things to the honour of God, and striveth to be free from all thoughts of self-seeking. Who is so full of hindrance and annoyance to thee as thine own undisciplined heart? A man who is good and devout arrangeth beforehand within his own heart the works which he hath to do abroad; and so is not drawn away by the desires of his evil will, but subjecteth everything to the judgment of right reason. Who hath a harder battle to fight than he who striveth for self-mastery? And this should be our endeavour, even to master self, and thus daily to grow stronger than self, and go on unto perfection.

4. All perfection hath some imperfection joined to it in this life, and all our power of sight is not without some darkness. A lowly knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God than the deep searchings of man's learning. Not that learning is to be blamed, nor the taking account of anything that is good; but a good conscience and a holy life is better than all. And because many seek knowledge rather than

good living, therefore they go astray and bear little or no fruit.

5. O if they would give that diligence to the rooting out of vice and the planting of virtue which they give unto vain questionings: there had not been so many evil doings and stumbling-blocks among the laity, nor such ill living among houses of religion. Of a surety, at the Day of Judgment it will be demanded of us, not what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how holily we have lived. Tell me, where now are all those masters and teachers, whom thou knewest well, whilst they were yet with you, and flourished in learning? Their stalls are now filled by others, who perhaps never have one thought concerning them. Whilst they lived they seemed to be somewhat, but now no one speaks of them.

6. Oh how quickly passeth the glory of the world away! Would that their life and knowledge had agreed together! For then would they have read and inquired unto good purpose. How many perish through empty learning in this world, who care little for serving God. And because they love to be great more than to be humble, therefore they "*have become vain in their imaginations.*" He only is truly great, who hath great charity. He is truly great who deemeth himself small, and counteth all height of honour as nothing. He is the truly wise man, who counteth all earthly things as dung that he may win Christ. And he is the truly learned man, who doeth the will of God, and forsaketh his own will.

## CHAPTER IV.

## Of prudence in action.

WE must not trust every word of others or feeling within ourselves, but cautiously and patiently try the matter, whether it be of God. Unhappily, we are so weak that we find it easier to believe and speak evil of others, rather than good. But they that are perfect, do not give ready heed to every news-bearer, for they know man's weakness, that it is prone to evil and unstable in words.

2. This is great wisdom, not to be hasty in action, or stubborn in our own opinions. A part of this wisdom also is not to believe every word we hear, nor to tell others all that we hear, even though we believe it. Take counsel with a man who is wise and of a good conscience; and seek to be instructed by one better than thyself, rather than to follow thine own inventions. A good life maketh a man wise toward God, and giveth him experience in many things. The more humble a man is in himself, and the more obedient towards God, the wiser will he be in all things, and the more shall his soul be at peace.

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## CHAPTER V.

## Of the reading of Holy Scripture.

It is Truth which we must look for in Holy Writ, not cunning of words. All Scripture ought to be read in the same spirit in which it was written. We must rather seek for what is profitable in Scripture, than for what ministereth to subtlety in discourse. Therefore we ought to read books which are devotional and simple, as well as those which are deep and difficult. And let not the weight of the writer be a stumbling-block to thee, whether he be of little or much learning, but let the love of the pure Truth draw thee to read. Ask not, who hath said this or that, but look to what he says.

2. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Without respect of persons God speaketh to us in divers manners. Our own curiosity often hindereth us in the reading of holy writings, when we seek to understand and discuss, where we should pass simply on. If thou wouldst profit by thy reading, read humbly, simply, honestly, and not desiring to win a character for learning. Ask freely, and hear in silence the words of holy men; nor be displeased at the hard sayings of older men than thou, for they are not uttered without cause,

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