

CHAPTER IV

THERE ARE THREE STAGES IN THE PREPARATION FOR ETERNITY: TO KNOW ONESELF (AND WITH ONESELF ALL THINGS); TO RULE ONESELF; AND TO DIRECT ONESELF TO GOD.

1. It is evident, then, that the ultimate end of man is eternal happiness with God. The subordinate ends, also, at which we aim in this transitory life, are evident from the words of the divine soliloquy which the Creator uttered when about to make man. "Let us make man," He said, "in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Gen. i. 26).

2. From which it is plain that man is situated among visible creatures so as to be

- (i.) A rational creature.
- (ii.) The Lord of all creatures.
- (iii.) A creature which is the image and the joy of its Creator.

These three aspects are so joined together that they cannot be separated, for in them is laid the basis of the future and of the present life.

3. To be a rational creature is to name all things, and to speculate and reason about everything that the world contains, as we find it in Gen. ii. 19, or, in the words of

Solomon (Wisdom vii. 17), to know how the world was made and the operation of the elements; the beginning, ending, and midst of the times; the alterations of the turning of the sun, and the change of seasons; the circuits of years and the positions of stars; the natures of living things and the furies of wild beasts; the violence of winds and the reasonings of men; the diversities of plants and the virtues of roots; in a word, everything that is secret and that is manifest. To man belong the knowledge of handicrafts and the art of speaking, lest (as says the son of Sirach) anything should remain unknown, be it small or great, in any department of knowledge (Eccles. v. 12) For thus, if he know the properties of all things, will he be able to justify his title of "rational being."

4. To be the lord of all creatures consists in subjecting everything to his own use by contriving that its legitimate end be suitably fulfilled; in conducting himself royally, that is, gravely and righteously, among creatures (adoring only one above him, his Creator; recognising God's angels, man's fellow-servants, as his equals, and considering all other things as far beneath him). Thus will he preserve the dignity which has been granted to him. He should enslave himself to no creature, not even to his own flesh and blood; but should use all freely in his service, and not be ignorant where, when, how, and to what extent each may prudently be used, how far the body should be gratified, and how far our neighbour's interests should be consulted. In a word, he should be able to control with prudence his own movements and actions, external and internal, as well as those of others.

5. Finally, to be the image of God is to represent the perfection of his Archetype, who says Himself "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. xix. 2).

6. From this it follows that man is naturally required to be: (1) acquainted with all things; (2) endowed with power over all things and over himself; (3) to refer himself and all things to God, the source of all.

Now, if we wish to express these three things by three well-known words, these will be :

- (i.) Erudition.
- (ii.) Virtue or seemingly morals.
- (iii.) Religion or piety.

Under Erudition we comprehend the knowledge of all things, arts, and tongues ; under Virtue, not only external decorum, but the whole disposition of our movements, internal and external ; while by Religion we understand that inner veneration by which the mind of man attaches and binds itself to the supreme Godhead.

7. In these three things is situated the whole excellence of man, for they alone are the foundation of the present and of the future life. All other things (health, strength, beauty, riches, honour, friendship, good-fortune, long life) are as nothing, if God grant them to any, but extrinsic ornaments of life, and if a man greedily gape after them, engross himself in their pursuit, occupy and overwhelm himself with them to the neglect of those more important matters, then they become superfluous vanities and harmful obstructions.

8. To illustrate the matter by an example. The time-piece (either the sun-dial or the mechanical clock) is an elegant and very necessary instrument for measuring time, and its essential excellence depends on the accurate joining together of all its parts. The case which is added, the chasings, the engravings, and the gildings are accessories which add something to its external appearance, but nothing to its utility. Were any to prefer a handsome clock to a good one, men would laugh at him for not realising in what the essential excellence of the object consisted. In the same way, the value of a horse consists in its strength, combined with spirit, speed, and promptness in obeying its rider's wishes. A flowing tail or one tied in a knot, hair combed and standing erect, gilded bits, gay coverings, and trappings of whatever kind, add decorative beauty, it is true, yet we call a man a fool if we see that he measures a horse's excellence by them.

Finally, a sound condition of health depends on the proper cooking of food, and on our digestive organs being in good order. To sleep softly, to dress well, and to fare delicately, add nothing to our health, but rather detract from it, and therefore a man is a fool who prefers dainties to wholesome viands. But much more, and to his own damnation, is that man a fool who, wishing to be a man, gives more heed to the ornaments than to the essentials of human existence. The Preacher, therefore, pronounces those ignorant and impious who think that our life is a pastime or a simple pursuit of wealth, and says that the praise and the blessing of God is very far from them (Wisdom xv. 12, 19).

9. It follows, therefore, that we advance towards our ultimate end in proportion as we pursue Learning, Virtue, and Piety in this world.

These three are undoubtedly the main issues of our life ; all else are side channels, hindrances, or ornamentations.