

CHAPTER V

THE SEEDS OF THESE THREE (LEARNING, VIRTUE, AND
PIETY) ARE NATURALLY IMPLANTED IN US

1. By the word *nature* we mean, not the corruption which has laid hold of all men since the Fall (on which account we are naturally called the children of wrath, unable of ourselves to have any good thoughts), but our first and original condition, to which, as to a starting-point, we must be recalled. It was in this sense that Ludovicus Vives¹⁶ said, "What else is a Christian but a man restored to his own nature, and, as it were, brought back to the starting-point from which the devil has thrown him?" (Lib. i. *De Concordia et Discordia*). In this sense, too, must we take the words of Seneca, "This is wisdom, to return to nature and to the position from which universal error (that is to say, the error of the human race, originated by the first men) has driven us," and again, "Man is not good but becomes so, as, mindful of his origin, he strives toward equality with God. No man who is viciously inclined ventures the ascent towards the place whence he descended" (*Epist.* 93).

2. By the voice of nature we understand the universal Providence of God or the influence of Divine Goodness which never ceases to work all in all things; that is to say, which continually developes each creature for the end to which it has been destined. For it is a sign of the divine wisdom to do nothing in vain, that is to say, without a definite end or without means proportionate to that end.

Whatever exists, therefore, exists for some end, and has been provided with the organs and appliances necessary to attain to it. It has also been gifted with a certain inclination, that nothing may be borne towards its end unwillingly and reluctantly, but rather promptly and pleasantly, by the natural instinct that pain and death will ensue if any obstacle be placed in the way. And so it is certain that man also is naturally fitted for the understanding of facts, for existence in harmony with the moral law, and above all things for the love of God (since for these we have already seen that he is destined), and that the roots of these three principles are as firmly planted in him as are the roots of any tree in the earth beneath it.

3. In order, therefore, that we may thoroughly understand the saying of the son of Sirach, that Wisdom has placed everlasting foundations in man (Ecclesiasticus i. 14), let us examine the foundations of Wisdom, of Virtue, and of Piety, which have been laid in us, that we may see what a marvellous instrument of wisdom man is.

4. It is evident that man is naturally capable of acquiring a knowledge of all things, since, in the first place, he is the image of God. For an image, if it be accurate, necessarily reproduces the outlines of its archetype, as otherwise it will not be an image. Now omniscience is chief among the properties of God, and it follows that the image of this must be reflected in man. And why not? Man, in truth, stands in the centre of the works of God and possesses a lucid mind, which, like a spherical mirror suspended in a room, reflects images of all things that are around it. All things that are around it, we say; for our mind not only seizes on things that are close at hand, but also on things that are far off, whether in space or in time; it masters difficulties, hunts out what is concealed, uncovers what is veiled, and wears itself out in examining what is inscrutable; so infinite and so unbounded is its power. If a thousand years were granted to man, in which, by grasping one thing after another, he might continually learn something fresh, he would still find some spot from which

the understanding might gain fresh objects of knowledge.

So unlimited is the capacity of the mind that in the process of perception it resembles an abyss. The body is enclosed by small boundaries; the voice roams within wider limits; the sight is bounded only by the vault of heaven; but for the mind, neither in heaven nor anywhere outside heaven, can a boundary be fixed. It ascends as far over the heavens above as below the depths beneath, and would do so if they were even a thousand times more vast than they are; for it penetrates through space with incredible speed. Shall we then deny that it can fathom and grasp all things?

5. Philosophers have called man a Microcosm or Epitome of the Universe, since he inwardly comprehends all the elements that are spread far and wide through the Macrocosm, or world at large; a statement the truth of which is shown elsewhere. The mind, therefore, of a man who enters this world is very justly compared to a seed or to a kernel in which the plant or tree really does exist, although its image cannot actually be seen. This is evident; since the seed, if placed in the ground, puts forth roots beneath it and shoots above it, and these, later on, by their innate force, spread into branches and leaves, are covered with foliage, and adorned with flowers and fruit. It is not necessary, therefore, that anything be brought to a man from without, but only that that which he possesses rolled up within himself be unfolded and disclosed, and that stress be laid on each separate element. Thus Pythagoras used to say that it was so natural for a man to be possessed of all knowledge, that a boy of seven years old, if prudently questioned on all the problems of philosophy, ought to be able to give a correct answer to each interrogation; since the light of Reason is a sufficient standard and measure of all things. Still it is true that, since the Fall, Reason has become obscure and involved, and does not know how to set itself free; while those who ought to have done so have rather entangled it the more.

6. To the rational soul, that dwells within us, organs of sense have been supplied, which may be compared to emissaries and scouts, and by the aid of these it compasses all that lies without. These are sight, hearing, smell, sound, and touch, and there is nothing whatever that can escape their notice. For, since there is nothing in the visible universe which cannot be seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or touched, and the kind and quality of which cannot in this way be discerned, it follows that there is nothing in the universe which cannot be compassed by a man endowed with sense and reason.

7. In addition to the desire for knowledge that is implanted in him, man is imbued not merely with a tolerance of but with an actual appetite for toil. This is evident in earliest childhood, and accompanies us throughout life. For who is there that does not always desire to see, hear, or handle something new? To whom is it not a pleasure to go to some new place daily, to converse with some one, to narrate something, or have some fresh experience? In a word, the eyes, the ears, the sense of touch, the mind itself, are, in their search for food, ever carried beyond themselves; for to an active nature nothing is so intolerable as ease and sloth. Even the fact that the ignorant admire learned men is but a sign that they feel the promptings of a certain natural desire. For they would wish themselves to be partakers of this wisdom, could they deem it possible. But, since they despair, they only sigh, and marvel at those whom they see in advance of them.

8. The examples of those who are self-taught show us most plainly that man, under the guidance of nature, can penetrate to a knowledge of all things. Many have made greater progress under their own tuition, or (as Bernard¹⁶ says) with oaks and beeches for their teachers, than others have done under the irksome instruction of tutors. Does not this teach us that, in very truth, all things exist in man; that the lamp, the oil, the tinder, and all the appliances are there, and that if only he be sufficiently skilled to strike sparks, to catch them, and to kindle the