

PART ONE

GREGORY TO HIS MOST REVEREND AND MOST
HOLY BROTHER, JOHN, FELLOW BISHOP

Most dear brother, you reprove me with kind and humble regard for having wished to escape by concealment from the burdens of the pastoral care. Now, lest these burdens might appear light to some, I am explaining, by writing this book, how onerous I regard them, so that he who is free from them may not imprudently seek to have them, and he who has been so imprudent as to seek them may feel apprehension in having them.

The book is divided into four separate treatises, that it may bring its message to the mind of the reader in an orderly manner—as it were, step by step.

The nature of the case requires that one should carefully consider the way in which the position of supreme rule ought to be approached, and when it is duly reached, how life should be spent in it; how, in a life of rectitude, one should teach others; and, in the proper performance of his teaching office, with what vigilance one should realise each day one's weakness. All this must be ensued lest humility be wanting when office is assumed, the way of life be at variance with the office accepted, teaching divest life of rectitude, and presumption overrate teaching.

Wherefore, before all else, fear must moderate the desire of compassing authority, and when this is attained by one who did not seek it, let his way of life recommend it. Then, too, it is necessary that the rectitude which is dis-

played in the pastor's way of life should be propagated by the spoken word. And, finally, I have only to add that consideration of our own weakness should abase every work accomplished, lest proud conceit empty it of its worth in the eyes of the hidden Judge.

But since there are many who are as inexperienced as I am, not knowing how to assess the measure of their capacity, and who yet desire to teach what they have not learned, who appraise the burden of authority the more lightly in proportion to their ignorance of its far-reaching responsibility, let these take reproof at the beginning of this book. For while in their lack of training and restraint they seek to reach the eminence of a teacher, they must be deterred from the precipitate venture at the very threshold of this our discourse.

CHAPTER I

No one ventures to teach any art unless he has learned it after deep thought. With what rashness, then, would the pastoral office be undertaken by the unfit, seeing that the government of souls is the art of arts! ¹ For who does not realise that the wounds of the mind are more hidden than the internal wounds of the body? Yet, although those who have no knowledge of the powers of drugs shrink from giving themselves out as physicians of the flesh, ² people who are utterly ignorant of spiritual precepts are often not afraid of professing themselves to be physicians of the heart, and though, by divine ordinance, those now in the highest positions are disposed to show a regard for religion, some there are who aspire to glory and

esteem by an outward show of authority within the holy Church. They crave to appear as teachers and covet ascendancy over others, and, as the Truth attests: *They seek the first salutations in the market place, the first places at feasts, and the first chairs in the synagogues.*³

These persons are all the more unfitted to administer worthily what they have undertaken, the office of pastoral care, in that they have attained to the tutorship of humility by vanity alone; for, obviously, in this tutorship the tongue purveys mere jargon when one thing is learned and its contrary taught. Against such as these the Lord complains by the mouth of the Prophet: *They have reigned . . . not by me; they have been princes and I knew not.*⁴ These reign by their own conceit, not by the will of the Supreme Ruler; they are sustained by no virtues, are not divinely called, but being inflamed by their cupidity, they seize rather than attain supreme rule.

Yet the Judge within both advances and ignores them, because those whom He tolerates on sufferance, He actually ignores by the sentence of His reprobation. Therefore, even to some who come to Him after having worked miracles, He says: *Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know you not.*⁵ This unfitness of pastors is rebuked by the voice of the Truth, through the Prophet, when it is said: *The shepherds themselves knew no understanding.*⁶ Again, the Lord denounces them, saying: *And they that held the law knew me not.*⁷ Therefore, the Truth complains of not being known by them, and protests that it does not know the high office of leaders who know Him not, because they who do not know the things that are the Lord's, are ignored by the Lord, as

Paul says: *But if any man know not, he shall not be known.*⁸

This unfitness of the pastors does, in truth, often accord with the deserts of their subjects, because, even if the former have not the light of knowledge through their own fault, it is due to a severe judgment that through their ignorance they, too, who follow, should stumble.

It is, therefore, for this reason that the Truth in person says in the Gospel: *If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit.*⁹ Consequently, the Psalmist in his ministry as Prophet, but not as expressing a wish, says: *Let their eyes be darkened that they see not, and their back bend down Thou always.*¹⁰ For those persons are "eyes" who, set in the forefront of the highest dignity, have undertaken the duty of showing the way, while those who follow on and are attached to them are termed the "back." When, then, the eyes are blinded, the back is bent, for when those who go before lose the light of knowledge, certainly those who follow are bowed down in carrying the burden of their sins.

CHAPTER 2

*Those should not take on the office of governing
who do not fulfil in their way of life
what they have learned by study.*

Further, there are some who investigate spiritual precepts with shrewd diligence, but in the life they live trample on what they have penetrated by their understanding. They hasten to teach what they have learned, not by practice, but by study, and belie in their conduct

what they teach by words. Hence it is that when the pastor walks through steep places, the flock following him comes to a precipice. Therefore, the Lord complains through the Prophet of the contemptible knowledge of pastors, saying: *When you drank the clearest water, you troubled the rest with your feet. And my sheep were fed with that which you had trodden with your feet, and they drank what your feet had troubled.*¹¹ Evidently, the pastors drink water that is most clear, when with a right understanding they imbibe the streams of truth, whereas to foul the water with the feet is to corrupt the studies of holy meditation by an evil life. The sheep, of course, drink of the water befouled by those feet, when the subjects do not follow the instruction which they hear, but imitate only the wicked examples which they see. While they thirst for the things said, but are perverted by the things done, they imbibe mud with their draught as if they drank from polluted fountains of water. Consequently, too, it is written by the Prophet: *Bad priests are a snare of ruin to my people.*¹²

Hence again, the Lord says by the Prophet concerning the priests: *They were a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel.*¹³ For no one does more harm in the Church than he, who having the title or rank of holiness, acts evilly. No one presumes to take to task such a delinquent, and the offence, serving as an example, has far-reaching consequences, when the sinner is honoured out of respect paid to his rank.¹⁴ Yet everyone who is unworthy would flee from the burden of such great guilt if with the attentive ear of the heart he pondered on that saying: *He that shall scandalise one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone*

*should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea.*¹⁵ By the millstone is symbolised the laborious round of worldly life, and by the depth of the sea final damnation is referred to. Therefore, if a man vested with the appearance of holiness destroys others by word or example, it certainly were better for him that his earthly deeds, performed in a worldly guise, should press him to death, rather than that his sacred offices should have pointed him out to others for sinful imitation; surely, the punishment of Hell would prove less severe for him if he fell alone.

CHAPTER 3

The burden of government. Every adversity is to be disregarded, and prosperity feared.

We have briefly said thus much to show how great is the burden of government, lest he who is unfit for it should profane that sacred office, and through a desire of eminence should undertake a pre-eminence that leads to perdition. For that reason, James with fatherly concern utters the prohibition, saying: *Be ye not many masters, my brethren.*¹⁶ Wherefore, even the Mediator between God and man, who excels in knowledge and understanding even the celestial spirits and who reigns in Heaven from eternity, shrank from receiving an earthly kingdom. For it is written: *Jesus, therefore, when He knew that they would come to take Him by force and make Him king, fled again into the mountain Himself alone.*¹⁷ And who could have exercised supreme dominion over men so

blamelessly as He whose rule would have been over subjects whom He had Himself created?

But since He came in the flesh for the purpose of not only redeeming us by His Passion, but of teaching by His life, giving an example to those who follow Him, He would not be a king, but freely went to the gibbet of the Cross. He fled from the exalted glory offered Him and chose the pain of an ignominious death, that His members might learn to flee from the favours of the world, not to fear its terrors, to love adversity for the sake of truth, to shrink in fear from prosperity, for this latter thing often defiles the heart by vainglory, but the other cleanses it by sorrow. In the one, the mind becomes conceited; in the other, even if on occasion it became conceited, it abases itself. In the one, man forgets who he is; in the other, he is recalled, even unwillingly and perforce, to the recollection of what he is. In the one, even his past good works are often brought to naught; in the other, faults, even long-standing, are wiped away. It is a common experience that in the school of adversity the heart is forced to discipline itself; but when a man has achieved supreme rule, it is at once changed and puffed up by the experience of his high estate.

It was thus that Saul, realising at first his unworthiness, fled from the honour of governing, but presently assumed it, and was puffed up with pride.¹⁸ By his desire for honour before the people, and wishing not to be blamed before them, he alienated him who had anointed him to be king.¹⁹ So also David. Well-pleasing in almost all his actions in the judgment of Him who had chosen him, so soon as the burden of his obligations was not upon him, he broke out into festering conceit and showed himself

as harsh and cruel in the murder of a man, as he had been weakly dissolute in his desire for a woman.²⁰ And he who had known how in pity to spare the wicked, learned afterwards without let or hesitation to pant for the death of even the good.²¹ At first he had, indeed, been unwilling to strike down his captive persecutor, but afterwards, with loss to his wearied army, he killed even his loyal soldier. His guilt would, in fact, have removed him a long way from the number of the elect, had not scourgings restored him to pardon.

CHAPTER 4

Preoccupation with the governing of others dissipates the concentration of the mind.

Often it happens that when a man undertakes the cares of government, his heart is distracted with a diversity of things, and as his mind is divided among many interests and becomes confused, he finds he is unfitted for any of them. This is why a certain wise man gives a cautious warning, saying: *My son, meddle not with many matters;*²² for, in fact, the mind cannot possibly concentrate on the pursuit of any one matter when it is divided among many. When it permits itself to be drawn abroad by concerns intruding upon it, it empties itself of its steady regard for its inmost self. It busies itself setting external matters in order, and, ignorant only of itself, it knows how to give thought to a multitude of concerns, without knowing its own self. For when it implicates itself more than is needful with what is external, it is as though it were so preoccupied during a journey as to forget what its

destination was; with the result that it is so great a stranger to the business of self-examination as not even to be aware of the harm it suffers, or to be conscious of the great faults it commits. Ezechias, for example, did not realise that he was sinning, when he showed the storehouse of his aromatic spices to the strangers who had come to him, and in consequence, he fell under the anger of the Judge, to the condemnation of his future offspring, for what he thought he had lawfully done.²³

Often, when there are abundant resources at hand, and things can be done which subjects admire just because they are done, the mind is lifted up in thought, and provokes the complete anger of the Judge, though no overt acts are committed. For He who judges is within, what is judged is within. When, therefore, we transgress in the heart, men do not know what we are engaged upon, but the Judge is the witness of our sin. The king of Babylon, for instance, was not guilty of pride merely when he came to utter proud words, for from the mouth of the Prophet he heard the sentence of reprobation before he had given vent to his pride.²⁴ He had, indeed, already cleansed himself of the sin of his guilty pride, when he proclaimed to all his subject peoples the Omnipotent God whom he found he had offended.²⁵ After this, elated by the success of his power, pleased with his great accomplishments, he first preferred himself in his own conceit to all others, and then, swollen with pride, he said: *Is not this the great Babylon, which I have built to be the seat of the kingdom and by the strength of my power and in the glory of my excellence?*²⁶ This utterance was openly visited with wrathful punishment, which his hidden pride had enkindled.

For the strict Judge first sees invisibly what He afterwards reprehends by open chastisement. Wherefore, too, the Judge turned him into an irrational animal, separated him from human society, and associated him, deprived of his right mind, with the beasts of the field, so that by a manifestly strict and just sentence he who had esteemed himself great beyond all other men, lost his man's estate.

When, therefore, we adduce these examples, it is not to censure the office itself, but to fortify the weak heart against coveting it. We would have no one who is not fully qualified for it, to venture to snatch at supreme rule, and we would not have men who stumble on plain ground, to set their feet on a precipice.

CHAPTER 5

Regarding those who in the position of supreme ruling authority could benefit others by the example of their virtues, but flee from it for the sake of their own peace.

There are those who are gifted with virtues in a high degree and who are exalted by great endowments for the training of others; men who are unspotted in their zeal for chastity, strong in the vigour of their abstinence, replete with feasts of knowledge, humble in their long-suffering patience, erect in the fortitude of authority, gentle in the grace of loving-kindness, strict and unbending in justice. Such, indeed, in declining to undertake supreme rule when invited to do so, deprive themselves, for the most part, of the gifts which they have received

✓ not for their own sakes only, but for the sake of others also.

✓ When these regard their own personal advantage, not that of others, they lose such advantages in wishing to retain them for themselves. Hence it was that the Truth said to the disciples: *A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid, neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.*²⁷ Wherefore, He said to Peter: *Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?*²⁸ And when Simon replied at once that he loved Him, he was told: *If thou lovest me, feed my sheep.*²⁹ If, then, the care of feeding is a testimony of love, he who, abounding in virtues, refuses to feed the flock of God, is convicted of having no love for the Supreme Shepherd. Wherefore, Paul says: *If Christ died for all, then all were dead. And if He died for all, it remaineth that they also who live, may not now live to themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again.*³⁰ Thus, Moses says that the surviving brother must take the wife of his brother who died without children, and raise up children for his brother's name; and should he refuse to take her, she shall spit in his face, and her kinsman shall take the shoe from one of his feet, and call his home the house of the unshod.³¹

Now, the deceased brother is He who, appearing after the glory of the Resurrection, said: *Go, tell my brethren;*³² for He died, as it were, without sons, because He had not yet filled up the number of the elect. The surviving brother is ordered to take the wife, because it is fitting that the care of Holy Church should be assigned to him who is best fitted to rule it well. If he proves unwilling, the woman spits in his face, because, whosoever does not

care to assist others by the favours which he has received, is reprobated by Holy Church also for the good he has, and, as it were, she casts spittle in his face, and a shoe is taken from one foot, so that his house may be called the house of the unshod, for it is written: . . . *your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*³³

If, therefore, we have the care of our neighbours as well as of ourselves, we protect each foot with a shoe. But a man who, thinking only of his own advantage, disregards that of his neighbours, loses with disgrace the shoe, as it were, of one foot.

So, there are those who, endowed, as we have said, with great gifts, in their eagerness for the pursuit of contemplation only, decline to be of service to the neighbour by preaching; they love to withdraw in quietude and desire to be alone for meditation. Now, if they are judged strictly on their conduct, they are certainly guilty in proportion to the public service which they were able to afford. Indeed, what disposition of mind is revealed in him, who could perform conspicuous public benefit on coming to his task, but prefers his own privacy to the benefit of others, seeing that the Only-Begotten of the Supreme Father came forth from the bosom of His Father into our midst, that He might benefit many?

CHAPTER 6

Men who flee from the burden of ruling out of humility, are then truly humble, when they do not resist the divine decrees.

There are some also who flee from this burden only out of humility: they do not wish to be preferred to those others to whom they think they are inferior. Their humility is, indeed, genuine in God's eyes, provided it is accompanied by the other virtues, and when it is not obstinate in declining to undertake what is enjoined to be profitably undertaken. For he is not genuinely humble, who understands that the decision of the Supreme Will is for him to take leadership, and yet refuses that leadership. But when the supreme rule is imposed on him, and provided that he is already endowed with those gifts whereby he can benefit others, he ought, in submission to God's dispositions and removed from the vice of obstinacy, to flee from it in his heart and obey, though to obey is contrary to his inclination.

CHAPTER 7

As it happens, some men laudably desire the office of preaching, and others no less laudably are driven to it by compulsion.

Sometimes, though, there are those who laudably desire the office of preaching, whereas others no less laudably are driven to it by compulsion. We clearly see this when we consider the case of two Prophets, one of whom spon-

taneously offered himself for the mission of preaching, whereas the other protested from fear. Isaias, for instance, when the Lord asked whom He should send, offered himself of his own accord, saying: *Lo, here am I, send me.*³⁴ Jeremias, on the other hand, was sent, yet was humbly reluctant to be obliged to go, saying: *Ah, Ah, Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.*³⁵

Observe how these two gave different utterances externally, which, however, did not proceed from contrary founts of love. For there are two precepts of love, namely, one based on the love of God, the other on love for the neighbour. Isaias, then, desired the active life in the office of preaching, moved thereto by the wish to benefit his neighbours. But Jeremias, zealously eager to cleave to the love of his Creator, but in a contemplative life, remonstrated against being sent. What, therefore, the one laudably desired, the other as laudably shrank from. The one feared that by preaching he should forfeit the benefit of quiet contemplation; the other, that by not preaching he might suffer harm for the lack of arduous work.

Now, we should carefully consider this in both cases: he who protested did not wholly resist, and he who wished to be sent, saw himself cleansed, in anticipation, by a coal from the altar.³⁶ One who has not been cleansed, must not dare to undertake sacred ministries; and one who has been cleansed by supernal graces, must not proudly resist under the guise of humility.

Since, therefore, it is very difficult to recognise that one is cleansed, it is safest to decline the office of preaching, yet it may not, as we have said, be pertinaciously refused, when the Supernal Will that it should be undertaken is perceived. Both obligations were admirably fulfilled by

Moses, who, though unwilling to accept the supreme rule of a great multitude, yet obeyed. For he might have been proud had he undertaken the leadership of a numberless people without fear, and again, he would have been proud, had he refused to obey the command of the Creator. Hence, in both respects he was humble, and in both obedient, namely, in his unwillingness to be set over the people when he regarded himself only, and when he consented, relying on the power of Him who gave the command.

Therefore, from such examples let the rash understand how great their guilt is if, instigated by personal desires, they do not shrink from precedence over others, and seeing that holy men fear to accept this leadership of people when God Himself commands. Moses trembled, though God urged him forward; and yet a man who is weak yearns after the burden of office, and one who is extremely likely to fall under his own burden, is willing to be overwhelmed by putting his shoulders beneath the burdens of others! He cannot bear his own deeds, and increases the burden which he bears!

CHAPTER 8

Regarding those who covet pre-eminence and appropriate a statement of the Apostle to serve their own cupidity.

Now, as often happens, those who covet pre-eminence, seeking support for their own cupidity, take advantage of the Apostle's statement when he says: *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*³⁷ Yet, while

praising the desire, the Apostle forthwith qualifies his praise by adding a reason for fear, promptly adding, as he does: *But it behoveth a bishop to be blameless.*³⁸ When he proceeds with an enumeration of the necessary virtues, he explains what this blamelessness is. He, therefore, approves the desire, but warns these people by his precept, as though he plainly said: "I praise what you seek, but acquaint yourselves first with what you are seeking, lest by neglecting to take the measure of your own fitness, you become the more blameworthy and detestable, in that you hasten to be seen by all on the pinnacle of honour." The great master in the art of ruling urges subjects on by approving of their desire, but deters them by fear, in order that he may restrain his hearers from pride, and by praising the office sought, may dispose them for the kind of life that is required.

We must, however, observe that this was said at a time when whosoever was set over the people was the first to be led to the tortures of martyrdom. So, indeed, it was praiseworthy to seek the episcopate, when, in consequence of holding the office, there was no doubt that its holder would meet with the most severe sufferings. For this reason the office of a bishop is termed a good work when it is said: *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.* Wherefore, that man gives testimony against himself that he is not desiring the office of a bishop, if he seeks the glory of that honour, but not the ministry of a good work. For a man not only fails completely to love the office, but he is ignorant of it, if, yearning for supreme rule, he feasts on the subjection of others in the hidden reveries of his thought, is glad to hear his own praises, feels his heart surge with honour, and re-

joices in the abundance of his affluence. It is, therefore, worldly gain that he seeks under the guise of that kind of honour, whereby worldly gain should have been destroyed, and when the mind thinks to grasp the highest state of humility in order to cherish its own pride, it changes the intrinsic nature of what was exteriorly desired.

CHAPTER 9

The mind of those who crave for pre-eminence, for the most part flatters itself with imaginary promises of performing good works.

✓ Generally those who aspire to pastoral ruling are also proposing to themselves some good works as well, and though they have such aspirations from the motive of pride, busy themselves thinking that they will do great things. Hence it is that the motive hidden within is one thing, and what is taking place on the surface of their conscious mind is another. For the mind often lies to itself about itself, and makes believe that it loves the good work, when actually it does not, and that it does not wish for mundane glory, when, in fact, it does. Being eager for a position of leadership, it is fearful in the quest of it, but audacious once it has been obtained.

In seeking office, the mind is in trepidation lest office will not ensue, but when office has arrived suddenly, the mind thinks that what it has achieved is rightly its due. Then, when the mind has begun to enjoy, in a worldly fashion, the office of superiority which it has got, it readily forgets all the spiritual thoughts it had. When, therefore, thought has been straying inordinately, it must

be promptly directed back to its activities in the past; and if the person considers what he did when subject to authority, he at once knows whether, as superior, he can do what he proposed to do, for a man is quite incapable of learning humility in a position of superiority, if he did not refrain from acting proudly when he was in a position of subjection. He does not know how to flee from praise when it abounds, if he yearned for it when it was absent. He certainly cannot conquer his cupidity when he is advanced to the sustaining of many, if his own resources did not suffice to sustain himself alone. Therefore, let everyone discover from his past life what manner of man he is, lest the phantasy of his thoughts deceive him when he craves for superiority.

Very frequently, when the office of rule is undertaken, the practice of good deeds is relinquished, though it had been maintained when life was undisturbed, for even the unskilled seaman can guide a ship on an even keel in a tranquil sea, but in a sea that is tossed with tempestuous waves, even a skilled seaman is greatly troubled. And, indeed, what else is power in the post of superiority but a tempest of the mind, wherein the ship of the heart is ever shaken by hurricanes of thought, is ceaselessly driven to and fro, until, by sudden excesses of words and deeds, it founders on confronting rocks? How, then, can any course be taken in the midst of these perils, and how can a course be held, unless the superior who comes to the office of governing by compulsion abounds in virtue, and one deficient in virtue declines to come to it even under compulsion? If the former declines altogether, let him take heed that he is not wrapping up in his handkerchief the talents which he has received, and lest he be judged

for hiding them.³⁹ To wrap up talents in a handkerchief is, of course, to hide, in idle and persistent inaction, gifts that have been received. In the case, however, of one who desires to govern, though unfit to do so, let him take heed lest, by the example of his wicked act, he become like the Pharisees, namely, a hindrance to those who strive to enter the Kingdom. Such people, according to the words of the Master,⁴⁰ do not themselves enter, nor permit others to enter. He should also consider that when as chosen superior he espouses the cause of the people, he is coming, as it were, like a physician to a sick person. If, then, in his practice ailments still thrive in him, with what presumption does he hasten to heal the afflicted while he carries a sore on his own face?

CHAPTER 10

The character required of a man who comes to rule.

✓ He, therefore—indeed, he precisely—must devote himself entirely to setting an ideal of living. He must die to all passions of the flesh and by now lead a spiritual life. He must have put aside worldly prosperity; he must fear no adversity, desire only what is interior. He must be a man whose aims are not thwarted by a body out of perfect accord through frailty, nor by any contumacy of the spirit. He is not led to covet the goods of others, but is bounteous in giving of his own. He is quickly moved by a compassionate heart to forgive, yet never so diverted from perfect rectitude as to forgive beyond what is proper. He does no unlawful act himself while deploring those of others, as if they were his own. In the affection of his own heart he sympathizes with the frailties of others,

and so rejoices in the good done by his neighbour, as though the progress made were his own. In all that he does he sets an example so inspiring to all others, that in their regard he has no cause to be ashamed of his past. He so studies to live as to be able to water the dry hearts of others with the streams of instruction imparted. By his practice and experience of prayer he has learned already that he can obtain from the Lord what he asks for, as though it were already said to him, in particular, by the voice of experience: *When thou art yet speaking, I will say, "Here I am."*⁴¹

If, for instance, someone were to come to induce us to intercede for him with a great man incensed against him, but unknown to us, we should at once reply that we could not intercede since we had no knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the man. If, therefore, a man is too embarrassed to intercede with another on whom he has no claim, with what assurance can one take on the role of interceding for the people with God, without the knowledge of being in His favor by reason of the merits of one's life? Or how is one to ask pardon for others, when he does not know whether he himself is reconciled with Him?

In this matter there is yet another reason for anxious fear, namely, whether one who is credited with being able to appease His anger, may not himself provoke it, owing to his own guilt. For we all know full well that when a person is out of favour and is sent to intercede, the mind of the incensed person is moved to greater anger. Wherefore, let the man who is still fettered with worldly desires take heed lest, by arousing the anger of the strict Judge for taking complacency in his position of glory, he become the author of ruin to his subjects.

CHAPTER 11

The type of man who ought not to come to rule.

Therefore, everyone should wisely assess himself, lest he dare to take on the role of government, while vice still reigns in him to his condemnation; a man who is debased by his own guilt must not intercede for the faults of others.⁴²

Wherefore, the voice from on high said to Moses: *Say to Aaron: Whosoever of thy seed throughout their families hath a blemish, he shall not offer bread to the Lord his God. Neither shall he approach to minister to Him.* It is immediately added: *If he be blind, if he be lame, if he has a little, or a great and crooked nose, if his foot or if his hand be broken, if he be crookbacked, or blear-eyed, or have a pearl in his eye, or a continual scab, or a dry scurf in his body, or a rupture.*⁴³

Now, that man is blind who is ignorant of the light of heavenly contemplation; who, oppressed by the darkness of the present life, does not behold the light to come as he does not love it, and, therefore, does not know whither to direct the steps of his conduct. Hence, the Prophetess Anna said: *He will keep the feet of His Saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness.*⁴⁴

A man is lame who does, indeed, see the way he should go, but through infirmity of purpose is unable to follow persistently the way of life which he sees. Because his unstable habit cannot rise to the estate of virtue, he is not strong enough to make his conduct follow in the direction of his desires. Consequently, St. Paul says: *Lift*

*up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight steps with your feet, that no one halting, may go out of the way, but rather be healed.*⁴⁵

A man with a little nose is one who is incapable of discernment, for by the nose we discern sweet odours from stench. Rightly, then, the nose symbolises discernment, whereby we elect virtue and reject sin. Therefore, too, it is said in praise of the bride: *Thy nose is as the tower which is in Libanus.*⁴⁶ For, certainly, Holy Church perceives by her discernment what temptations proceed from various causes, and, as from an eminence, detects the oncoming wars of vice.

But there are some who, disliking to be considered dull, often busy themselves with a variety of inquisitions, more than is needful, and fall into error by their excessive subtlety. Therefore, here the addition: *A great and crooked nose.* Evidently, a great and crooked nose is immoderate subtlety in making distinctions; when this develops inordinately, it distorts the correctness of its own functioning.

Again, a man has a fractured foot or hand, when he is wholly unable to walk in the way of God and is entirely bereft of all share in good deeds. In this he is not like the lame person who can share in good deeds, at least with difficulty; he is bereft of them altogether.

The crookbacked is one who is weighed down by the burden of earthly cares, so that he never looks up to the things that are above, but is wholly intent on what is underfoot in the lowest sphere. If at any time he hears something good about the heavenly fatherland, he is so weighed down by the burden of evil habit, that he does not raise up the face of his heart; he just cannot lift up

the cast of his thought, being kept bowed down by his habitual earthly solicitude. This is the kind of man of whom the Psalmist says: *I have been bowed down and humbled exceedingly.*⁴⁷ Their fault is also reprobated by the Truth in person, saying: *And that seed which fell among thorns, are they who have heard the Word, and going their way, are choked with the cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and yield no fruit.*⁴⁸

The blear-eyed is he whose natural disposition does, indeed, shine forth unto the knowledge of truth, but is obscured by carnal works. For in the blear-eyed the pupils are sound, but owing to a flux of serous matter the eyelids become weak and swollen, and are often worn away by the flow, so that the keenness of the pupils is impaired. And there are those whose perception is weakened by the works of a carnal life—men who were capable of a nice discrimination of what was right, which, however, is obscured by the habit of evil deeds.

The blear-eyed is, then, one whose sense was naturally keen, but whose depraved way of life has confounded it. To such it was well said through the Angel: *Anoint thy eye with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.*⁴⁹ For we anoint our eyes with salve for seeing, when we assist the eye of our understanding with the medicaments of good works, so that we may perceive the brightness of the true light.

But that man has a white film over his eyes, who is prevented from perceiving the light of truth owing to blindness, induced by the arrogant assumption of wisdom or righteousness. For the pupil of the eye, if black, can see, but if it has a white film, it sees nothing; and, obviously, when a man understands that he is foolish and a sinner, his faculty of thought grasps the knowledge of

the interior light. But if he attributes to himself the radiance of righteousness or wisdom, he shuts himself off from the light of supernal knowledge; and in proportion to his arrogant self-exaltation, he futilely endeavours to penetrate the bright light of Truth—as is said of some: *For professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*⁵⁰

A man is “permanently scabrous,” when he is constantly dominated by wantonness of the flesh. For in a case of scabies the internal heat is drawn to the skin, a condition that rightly symbolises lechery. Thus, when the temptation in the heart issues forth into action, then it can be said that the interior heat issues forth as scabies on the skin; and to the visible injury of the body corresponds the fact that as pleasure is not repressed in the thought, it gains the mastery in act. Hence, Paul was anxious to cleanse, as it were, this itch of the skin, when he said: *Let no temptation take hold on you, but such as is human*⁵¹—as though he wished to make plain: “It is, indeed, human to suffer temptation in the heart, but it is diabolical, when in the struggle with temptation one is overcome and does its bidding.”

Further, a man has pustular disease of the skin, if his mind is ravaged by avarice, which, if not restrained in small matters, grows immeasurably. The pustular disease itself invades the body without causing pain, and spreads in the infected without resulting in annoyance, while disfiguring the comeliness of the members. So, too, avarice, while affording the mind of its victim apparent delight, ulcerates it. While filling its thoughts with the acquisition of one thing after another, it kindles enmities, but gives no pain with the wounds it inflicts, because it promises to the fevered mind abundance as the wages of

sin. And the comeliness of the members is lost, because this sin results also in the marring of other fair virtues. Indeed, the whole body, as it were, is befouled, since the mind is overthrown by all vices, as St. Paul testified in saying: *Covetousness is the root of all evil.*⁵²

The ruptured man is he who, though not actually given to baseness, is yet weighed down by it beyond measure by the constant thought of it; though he is not carried away by evil deeds, his mind is ravished with the pleasure of lechery, without any stings of repugnance. As to the blemish of rupture, it is due to the descent of the internal fluids to the genitals, which in consequence produces a troublesome and unseemly swelling. A person, then, is ruptured when he allows all his thoughts to run on lascivious matters, and thus carries in his heart a load of turpitude; and though he does not actually engage in deeds of shame, his mind cannot disengage itself from them. At the same time he lacks the strength to raise himself to the overt exercise of good deeds, because a shameful hidden burden weighs him down.

Whosoever, then, is subject to any of the aforesaid defects, is forbidden to offer loaves of bread to the Lord. The reason is obvious: a man who is still ravaged by his own sins, cannot expiate the sins of others.

And now, since we have briefly shown how one who is worthy should undertake pastoral ruling, and how the unworthy should fear to undertake it, we shall explain how he who has worthily undertaken the office ought to live in the exercise of it.

PART TWO

THE LIFE OF THE PASTOR

CHAPTER I

The conduct required of one who has in due order reached the position of ruler.

The conduct of a prelate should so far surpass the conduct of the people, as the life of a pastor sets him apart from his flock. For one who is so regarded that the people are called his flock, must carefully consider how necessary it is for him to maintain a life of rectitude. It is necessary, therefore, that he should be pure in thought, exemplary in conduct, discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech, in sympathy a near neighbour to everyone, in contemplation exalted above all others, a humble companion to those who lead good lives, erect in his zeal for righteousness against the vices of sinners. He must not be remiss in his care for the inner life by preoccupation with the external; nor must he in his solicitude for what is internal, fail to give attention to the external.

Let us now take up the things which we have touched upon in this brief enumeration, and treat them at somewhat greater length.