

CENTURIES OF MEDITATIONS

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**[Author's inscription on the first leaf of
"Centuries of Meditations"]**

**This book unto the friend of my best friend
As of the wisest Love a mark I send,
That she may write my Maker's prais therein
And make her self therby a Cherubin.**

THE FIRST CENTURY

1

~~AN empty book is like an infant's soul, in which anything may be written. It is capable of all things, but containeth nothing. I have a mind to fill this with profitable wonders. And since Love made you put it into my hands I will fill it with those Truths you love without knowing them : with those things which, if it be possible, shall shew my Love ; to you in communicating most enriching Truths : to Truth in exalting her beauties in such a Soul.~~

2

Do not wonder that I promise to fill it with those Truths you love but know not ; for though it be a maxim in the schools *that there is no Love of a thing unknown*, yet I have found that things unknown have a secret influence on the soul, and like the centre of the earth unseen violently attract it. We love we know not what, and therefore everything allures us. As iron

at a distance is drawn by the loadstone, there being some invisible communications between them, so is there in us a world of Love to somewhat, though we know not what in the world that should be. There are invisible ways of conveyance by which some great thing doth touch our souls, and by which we tend to it. Do you not feel yourself drawn by the expectation and desire of some Great Thing ?

3

I will open my mouth in Parables, I will utter things that have been kept secret from the foundation of the world. Things strange yet common, incredible, yet known ; most high, yet plain ; infinitely profitable, but not esteemed. Is it not a great thing that you should be Heir of the World ? Is it not a great enriching verity ? In which the fellowship of the Mystery which from the beginning of the World hath been hid in God lies concealed ! The thing hath been from the Creation of the World, but hath not so been explained as that the interior Beauty should be understood. It is my design therefore in such a plain manner to unfold it that my friendship may appear in making you possessor of the whole world.

4

I will not by the noise of bloody wars and the dethroning of kings advance you to glory : but by the

gentle ways of peace and love. As a deep friendship meditates and intends the deepest designs for the advancement of its objects, so doth it shew itself in choosing the sweetest and most delightful methods, whereby not to weary but please the person it desireth to advance. Where Love administers physic, its tenderness is expressed in balms and cordials. It hateth corrosives, and is rich in its administrations. Even so, God designing to show His Love in exalting you hath chosen the ways of ease and repose by which you should ascend. And I after His similitude will lead you into paths plain and familiar, where all envy, rapine, bloodshed, complaint and malice shall be far removed ; and nothing appear but contentment and thanksgiving. Yet shall the end be so glorious that angels durst not hope for so great a one till they had seen it.

5

The fellowship of the mystery that hath been hid in God since the creation is not only the contemplation of the work of His Love in the redemption, tho' that is wonderful, but the end for which we are redeemed ; a communion with Him in all His Glory. For which cause St. Peter saith The God of all Grace hath called us unto His Eternal Glory by Jesus Christ. His Eternal Glory by the method of His Divine Wisdom being made ours ; and our fruition of it the end for which our Saviour suffered.

True Love as it intendeth the greatest gifts intendeth also the greatest benefits. It contenteth not itself in showing great things unless it can make them greatly useful. For Love greatly delighteth in seeing its object continually seated in the highest happiness. Unless therefore I could advance you higher by the uses of what I give, my Love could not be satisfied in giving you the whole world. But because when you enjoy it you are advanced to the Throne of God and may see His Love ; I rest well pleased in bestowing it. It will make you to see your own greatness, the truth of the Scriptures, the amiableness of Virtue, and the beauty of Religion. It will enable you to contemn the world, and to overflow with praises.

7 ✓

✓ To contemn the world and to enjoy the world are things contrary to each other. How then can we contemn the world, which we are born to enjoy? Truly there are two worlds. One was made by God, the other by men. That made by God was great and beautiful. Before the Fall it was Adam's joy and the Temple of his Glory. That made by men is a Babel of Confusions : Invented Riches, Poms and Vanities, brought in by Sin. Give all (saith Thomas à Kempis) for all. Leave the one that you may enjoy the other.

What is more easy and sweet than meditation ? Yet in this hath God commended His Love, that by meditation it is enjoyed. As nothing is more easy than to think, so nothing is more difficult than to think well. The easiness of thinking we received from God, the difficulty of thinking well proceeded from ourselves. Yet in truth, it is far more easy to think well than ill, because good thoughts be sweet and delightful : Evil thoughts are full of discontent and trouble. So that an evil habit and custom have made it difficult to think well, not Nature. For by nature nothing is so difficult as to think amiss.

9

Is it not ~~easy~~ easy to conceive the World in your Mind ? To think the Heavens fair ? The Sun Glorious ? The Earth fruitful ? The Air Pleasant ? The Sea Profitable ? And the Giver bountiful ? Yet these are the things which it is difficult to retain. For could we always be sensible of their use and value, we should be always delighted with their wealth and glory.

10

To think well is to serve God in the interior court : To have a mind composed of Divine Thoughts, and set in frame, to be like Him within. To conceive aright and to enjoy the world, is to conceive the Holy Ghost,

and to see His Love : which is the Mind of the Father. And this more pleaseth Him than many Worlds, could we create as fair and great as this. For when we are once acquainted with the world, you will find the goodness and wisdom of God so manifest therein, that it was impossible another, or better should be made. Which being made to be enjoyed, nothing can please or serve Him more, than the Soul that enjoys it. For that Soul doth accomplish the end of His desire in Creating it.

11

Love is deeper than at first it can be thought. It never ceaseth but in endless things. It ever multiplies. Its benefits and its designs are always infinite. Were you not Holy, Divine, and Blessed in enjoying the World, I should not care so much to bestow it. But now in this you accomplish the end of your creation, and serve God best, and please Him most : I rejoice in giving it. For to enable you to please GOD, is the highest service a man can do you. It is to make you pleasing to the King of Heaven, that you may be the Darling of His bosom.

12

Can you be Holy without accomplishing the end for which you are created ? Can you be Divine unless you be Holy ? Can you accomplish the end for which you were created, unless you be Righteous ? Can you then

be Righteous, unless you be just in rendering to Things their due esteem ? All things were made to be yours, and you were made to prize them according to their value ; which is your office and duty, the end for which you were created, and the means whereby you enjoy. The end for which you were created, is that by prizing all that God hath done, you may enjoy yourself and Him in Blessedness.

13

! To be Holy is so zealously to desire, so vastly to esteem, and so earnestly to endeavour it, that we would not for millions of gold and silver, decline, nor fail, nor mistake in a tittle. For then we please God when we are most like Him. We are like Him when our minds are in frame. Our minds are in frame when our thoughts are like His. And our thoughts are then like His when we have such conceptions of all objects as God hath, and prize all things according to their value. For God doth prize all things rightly, which is a Key that opens into the very thoughts of His bosom. It seemeth arrogance to pretend to the knowledge of His secret thoughts. But how shall we have the Mind of God, unless we know His thoughts ? Or how shall we be led by His divine spirit, till we have His Mind ? His thoughts are hidden : but He hath revealed unto us the hidden Things of Darkness. By His works and by His attributes we know His Thoughts : and by thinking the same, are Divine and Blessed.

When things are ours in their proper places, nothing is needful but prizing to enjoy them. God therefore hath made it infinitely easy to enjoy, by making everything ours, and us able so easily to prize them. Everything is ours that serves us in its place. The Sun serves us as much as is possible, and more than we could imagine. The Clouds and Stars minister unto us, the World surrounds us with beauty, the Air refresheth us, the Sea revives the earth and us. The Earth itself is better than gold because it produceth fruits and flowers. And therefore in the beginning, was it made manifest to be mine, because Adam alone was made to enjoy it. By making one, and not a multitude, God evidently shewed one alone to be the end of the World and every one its enjoyer. For every one may enjoy it as much as he.

Such endless depths live in the Divinity, and in the wisdom of God, that as He maketh one, so He maketh every one the end of the World : and the supernumerary persons being enrichers of his inheritance. Adam and the World are both mine. And the posterity of Adam enrich it infinitely. Souls are God's jewels, every one of which is worth many worlds. They are His riches because His image, and mine for that reason. So that I alone am the end of the World : Angels and men being all mine. And if others are so, they are made to

enjoy it for my further advancement. God only being the Giver and I the Receiver. So that Seneca philosophized rightly when he said "*Deus me dedit solum toti Mundo, et totum Mundum mihi soli*": God gave me alone to all the World, and all the World to me alone.

16

That all the World is yours, your very senses and the inclinations of your mind declare. The Works of God manifest, His laws testify, and His word doth prove it. His attributes most sweetly make it evident. The powers of your soul confirm it. So that in the midst of such rich demonstrations, you may infinitely delight in God as your Father, Friend and Benefactor, in yourself as His Heir, Child and Bride, in the whole World, as the Gift and Token of His love ; neither can anything but Ignorance destroy your joys. For if you know yourself, or God, or the World, you must of necessity enjoy it.

17

To know GOD is Life Eternal. There must therefore some exceeding Great Thing be always attained in the Knowledge of Him. To know God is to know Goodness. It is to see the beauty of infinite Love : To see it attended with Almighty Power and Eternal Wisdom ; and using both those in the magnifying of its object. It is to see the King of Heaven and Earth take infinite

delight in *Giving*. Whatever knowledge else you have of God, it is but Superstition. Which Plutarch rightly defineth, *to be an Ignorant Dread of His Divine Power, without any joy in His goodness*. He is not an Object of Terror, but Delight. To know Him therefore as He is, is to frame the most beautiful idea in all Worlds. He delighteth in our happiness more than we : and is of all other the most Lovely Object. An infinite Lord, who having all Riches, Honors, and Pleasures in His own hand, is infinitely willing to give them unto me. Which is the fairest idea that can be devised.

18

The WORLD is not this little Cottage of Heaven and Earth. Though this be fair, it is too small a Gift. When God made the World He made the Heavens, and the Heavens of Heavens, and the Angels, and the Celestial Powers. These also are parts of the World : So are all those infinite and eternal Treasures that are to abide for ever, after the Day of Judgment. Neither are these, some here, and some there, but all everywhere, and at once to be enjoyed. The WORLD is unknown, till the Value and Glory of it is seen : till the Beauty and the Serviceableness of its parts is considered. When you enter into it, it is an illimited field of Variety and Beauty : where you may lose yourself in the multitude of Wonders and Delights. But it is an happy loss to lose oneself in admiration at one's own Felicity : and to find GOD in exchange for oneself. Which we

then do when we see Him in His Gifts, and adore His Glory.

19 ✓

You never know yourself till you know more than your body. The Image of God was not seated in the features of your face, but in the lineaments of your Soul. In the knowledge of your Powers, Inclinations, and Principles, the knowledge of yourself chiefly consisteth. Which are so great that even to the most learned of men, their Greatness is Incredible ; and so Divine, that they are infinite in value. Alas the WORLD is but a little centre in comparison of you. Suppose it millions of miles from the Earth to the Heavens, and millions of millions above the stars, both here and over the heads of our Antipodes : it is surrounded with infinite and eternal space : And like a gentleman's house to one that is travelling ; it is a long time before you come unto it, you pass it in an instant, and leave it for ever. The Omnipresence and Eternity of God are your fellows and companions. And all that is in them ought to be made your familiar Treasures. Your understanding comprehends the World like the dust of a balance, measures Heaven with a span, and esteems a thousand years but as one day. So that Great, Endless, Eternal Delights are only fit to be its enjoyments.

20

The laws of GOD, which are the commentaries of His works, shew them to be yours : because they

teach you to love God with all your Soul, and with all your Might. Whom if you love with all the endless powers of your Soul, you will love Him in Himself, in His attributes, in His counsels, in all His works, in all His ways ; and in every kind of thing wherein He appeareth, you will prize Him, you will Honour Him, you will delight in Him, you will ever desire to be with Him and to please Him. For to love Him includeth all this. You will feed with pleasure upon everything that is His. So that the world shall be a grand Jewel of Delight unto you : a very Paradise and the Gate of Heaven. It is indeed the beautiful frontispiece of Eternity ; the Temple of God, and Palace of His children. The Laws of God discover all that is therein to be created for your sake. For they command you to love all that is good, and when you see well, you enjoy what you love. They apply the endless powers of your Soul to all their objects : and by ten thousand methods make everything to serve you. They command you to love all Angels and Men. They command all Angels and Men to love you. When you love them, they are your treasures ; when they love you, to your great advantage you are theirs. All things serve you for serving them whom you love, and of whom you are beloved. *The entrance of His words giveth Light to the simple.* You are magnified among Angels and men : enriched by them, and happy in them.

By the very right of your senses you enjoy the World. Is not the beauty of the Hemisphere present to your eye? Doth not the glory of the Sun pay tribute to your sight? Is not the vision of the World an amiable thing? Do not the stars shed influences to perfect the Air? Is not that a marvellous body to breathe in? To visit the lungs: repair the spirits, revive the senses, cool the blood, fill the empty spaces between the Earth and Heavens; and yet give liberty to all objects? Prize these first: and you shall enjoy the residue: Glory, Dominion, Power, Wisdom, Honour, Angels, Souls, Kingdoms, Ages. *Be faithful in a little, and you shall be master over much.* If you be not faithful in esteeming these; who shall put into your hands the true Treasures? If you be negligent in prizing these, you will be negligent in prizing all. For there is a disease in him who despiseth present mercies, which till it be cured, he can never be happy. He esteemeth nothing that he hath, but is ever gaping after more: which when he hath he despiseth in like manner. (Insatiableness is good, but not ingratitude.)

It is of the nobility of man's soul that he is insatiable. For he hath a Benefactor so prone to give, that He delighteth in us for asking. Do not your inclinations tell you that the World is yours? Do you not covet

all ? Do you not long to have it ; to enjoy it ; to overcome it ? To what end do men gather riches, but to multiply more ? Do they not like Pyrrhus, the King of Epire, add house to house and lands to lands, that they may get it all ? It is storied of that prince, that having conceived a purpose to invade Italy, he sent for Cineas, a philosopher and the King's friend : to whom he communicated his design, and desired his counsel. Cineas asked him to what purpose he invaded Italy ? He said, to conquer it. And what will you do when you have conquered it ? Go into France, said the King, and conquer that. And what will you do when you have conquered France ? Conquer Germany. And what then ? said the philosopher. Conquer Spain. I perceive, said Cineas, you mean to conquer all the World. What will you do when you have conquered all ? Why then said the King we will return, and enjoy ourselves at quiet in our own land. So you may now, said the philosopher, without all this ado. Yet could he not divert him till he was ruined by the Romans. Thus men get one hundred pound a year that they may get another ; and having two covet eight, and there is no end of all their labour ; because the desire of their Soul is insatiable. Like Alexander the Great they must have all : and when they have got it all, be quiet. And may they not do all this before they begin ? Nay it would be well, if they could be quiet. But if after all, they shall be like the stars, that are seated on high, but have no rest, what gain they more, but labour for their trouble ? It was wittily feigned that that young man sat down and

cried for more worlds to conquer. So insatiable is man that millions will not please him. They are no more than so many tennis-balls, in comparison of the Greatness and Highness of his Soul,

23

The noble inclination whereby man thirsteth after riches and dominion, is his highest virtue, when rightly guided ; and carries him as in a triumphant chariot, to his sovereign happiness. Men are made miserable only by abusing it. Taking a false way to satisfy it, they pursue the wind : nay, labour in the very fire, and after all reap but vanity. Whereas, as God's love, which is the fountain of all, did cost us nothing : so were all other things prepared by it to satisfy our inclinations in the best of manners, freely, without any cost of ours. Seeing therefore all satisfactions are near at hand, by going further we do but leave them ; and wearying ourselves in a long way round about, like a blind man, forsake them. They are immediately near to the very gates of our senses. It becometh the bounty of God to prepare them freely : to make them glorious, and their enjoyment easy. For because His love is free, so are His treasures. He therefore that will despise them because he hath them is marvellously irrational : the way to possess them is to esteem them. And the true way of reigning over them, is to break the world all into parts, to examine them asunder : And if we find them so excellent that better could not possibly be

made, and so made they could not be more ours, to rejoice in all with pleasure answerable to the merit of their Goodness. We being then Kings over the whole world, when we restore the pieces to their proper places, being perfectly pleased with the whole composure. This shall give you a thorough grounded contentment, far beyond what troublesome wars or conquests can acquire.

24

Is it not a sweet thing to have all covetousness and ambition satisfied, suspicion and infidelity removed, courage and joy infused? Yet is all this in the fruition of the World attained. For thereby God is seen in all His wisdom, power, goodness, and glory.

25

Your enjoyment of the World is never right, till you so esteem it, that everything in it, is more your treasure than a King's exchequer full of Gold and Silver. And that exchequer yours also in its place and service. Can you take too much joy in your Father's works? He is Himself in everything. Some things are little on the outside, and rough and common, but I remember the time when the dust of the streets were as pleasing as Gold to my infant eyes, and now they are more precious to the eye of reason.