

MYSTICAL PRAYER

This short fragment on the early stages of mystical prayer occurs in the Bodleian MS. Douce 262 fol. 132-133, among copies of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and the *Epistle of Privy Counsel* and extracts from Latin mystical works. The MS. is of the late fifteenth century or first years of the sixteenth century, but the fragment of an earlier date. This piece is interesting as showing an early example of devotion to the Heart of Jesus. The spelling has been slightly modernised.

C.K.



WHEN a soul beginneth to feel grace work in him, he waxeth then sorry for his sin, and remembreth his great unkindness done against God and in what peril his soul is in; he weepeth and wailleth his offence and with great sorrow and lamentation crieth and calleth to God for mercy. Then thus continuing he get-

teth him to religion, or at leastwise to confession, there purging himself clean from all rust of sin by contrition and penance doing. Anon he feeleth him clean in body and soul and delivered from gnawing of conscience, which is the greatest pain on earth. Then continently¹ he feeleth great sweetness both in reading and prayer and sermons hearing, thinking that this doth all worldly solace exceed, and great comfort he feeleth in that which not long before was full tedious and painful to him. Then is he prest² and ready to do all things that should please God, and fleeing those things that should displease him. Then learneth he meekness, dread and love, converting evermore his will and prayer to the will of God.

Thus continuing, God, seeing the good will and desire of the soul draweth him more near to himself by a sweet stirring of love and compassion; so that where before that soul wept and sorrowed for his sins and unkindnesses, now wailleth he for love and compassion; so that no comfort nor joy is to him beside the remembrance of Christ's passion and the joys of heaven.

Thus, persevering in purity of conscience, in prayer and meditation, suddenly God sendeth into the soul a burning love of desire so fervently that all bodily might faileth and the corrupt body falleth to the earth. Then thinketh he of no joy, nor pain, nor sin, nor of the passion of Christ, nor of our Lady, nor of nothing in heaven, in hell nor in earth, but only on God; not what God is in kind³ and

¹ Forthwith.

² French *prêt* = ready; with old sense, quick.

³ Kind in this and all medieval contexts means 'nature'; 'kindly' is 'according to the nature of'. So here 'what God is in himself and his attributes'.

manner, but that God is all his desire; so that, for abundance of love that is in the heart, the mouth speaketh: 'Heart, heart, heart!' or, 'God, God, God!' Then is the soul in a still rest that he feeleth God in himself and he in God. So glad is the soul and body then, that marvel it is that the heart of man breaketh not out of the mouth, for love unto God.

Other while (at other times), ere the soul is rapt into God he seeketh, at the first kindling, in the streets of heaven amongst saints and angels, (him) whom his soul desireth, not caring for their company and joy, for his mind is not on them, nor on none other thing, as I said before, but only on God. When he has thus sought and found his love, cometh he with a meek and a fervent desire homely to him.

Notwithstanding, not by and by,⁴ he entereth not into our Lord, but cometh about him with a burning love, and piteously standeth by for God his desire, that he may enter into his heart. But God feigning himself ungentle and uncourteous and as a man taking no heed to his lover, keepeth him off. Nevertheless the silly⁵ soul abideth in a longing desire trusting to have what he came for. Then God, with lovely countenance taketh the soul and putteth him into the midst of his heart. Then all the world, nor I trow, all heaven and hell cannot express the joy that the soul feeleth in his Lord and Love. Amen.

⁴ i.e., not at once.

⁵ silly = simple; cf. expression 'silly sheep', simple sheep.