

MAY VIII.

THE APPARITION OF ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL.

ALMIGHTY God displayeth the riches of his goodness, power, and glory in the production of his creatures; and in them he manifesteth his own perfections. The whole world is as it were one great temple, where the divine presence shines, as it did in the Jewish at the time of its dedication, in a visible glory. We owe to him a tribute of praise and thanksgiving for all his works, but more particularly for the noble and pure intelligences on whom he has stamped his own spiritual image in a more perfect manner. He hath enriched them with the treasures of his grace, and of spotless sanctity, and hath made them the immortal and blessed inhabitants of his heavenly kingdom. They are, by the perfection of their nature, superior to man,¹ who seems to hold the lowest rank in the scale of rational beings, and to be the link between the spiritual and the material world; he being, by his body, allied to matter, and by his soul to the celestial intelligences. He is therefore in natural perfections essentially inferior and subordinate to those pure spirits; nevertheless, in grace he may surpass them; and the Church assures us, that the Blessed Virgin transcends their highest Orders. Upon their creation, God placed them in a state of meriting; and, whilst Lucifer and his adherents fell by pride, and were changed into devils, the good spirits persevering in justice, were confirmed in grace, and crowned with glory.

It is manifest, from the holy scriptures, that God is pleased to make frequent use of the ministry of the heavenly spirits in the dispensations of his providence in this world, and especially

1 Hebr. ii. 7. Ps. viii. 6.

towards man. Hence the name of Angel (which is not properly a denomination of nature, but office) has been appropriated to them, especially to a certain Order among them. The fathers from the sacred oracles distinguish nine Orders of these holy spirits—namely, the Seraphims, Cherubims, and Thrones; Dominations, Principalities, and Powers; Virtues, Archangels, and Angels.¹ Though many think that the apostle hath not enumerated all the ranks of those noble beings,² St. Gregory the Great,³ and the ancient author of the book, *On the Celestial Hierarchy*, commonly ascribed to St. Dionysus the Areopagite, divide these nine Orders into three hierarchies, and each of these again into three ranks. Each Order among them has its characteristical perfections and functions, by which the spirits which compose it, in a particular manner, set forth and glorify some attribute of the Deity: one, his supreme dominion and power, another his strength; the Cherubims his omniscience or boundless knowledge, the Seraphims his infinite love. Archangels are those spirits whom God makes his ambassadors in the execution of his greatest designs. The angels he employs in his ordinary dispensations to men. Their numbers are exceeding great, they being represented in scripture by thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand: and it is written in the book of Job, *Is there any numbering of his soldiers?*⁴ These numberless armies of glorious spirits are the bright ornament of the heavenly Jerusalem. They are called by St. Clemens of Alexandria,⁵ *The first-begotten of God*. And by St. Sophronius,⁶ *The living images and representatives of God*. As a skilful architect, he polishes

¹ Ephes. i. 21. Col. i. 16.

² St. Hier. in Ephes. i. St. Chrysostom, Hom. 3. in Ephes. and Hom. 4. de Incompreh. &c.

³ Hom. 34. in Evang.

⁴ Job xxv. 3.

⁵ Strom. i. 6.

⁶ Or. de Angel. excel.

more those stones which he destines to a more noble rank, and to more excellent purposes.

The angels are all pure spirits;¹ that is, they are uncompounded immaterial substances, or subsisting simple beings, which have no parts, as bodies and matter have. In them nothing is to be found of colour, shape, extension, or any other qualities of matter. They are, by a property of their nature, immortal, as every spirit is. For a simple entity, or what has no parts, can only perish by annihilation, which is a supernatural act of divine omnipotence, no less than creation. On the contrary, a body being compounded of parts, is naturally mortal; being obnoxious to continual vicissitudes, and liable to perish by a separation or dissolution of its parts. Hence the bodies of the elect, after the general resurrection, will be immortal only by a gift of grace. As in their nature, so in its properties and appendices, do the angels surpass inferior creatures. Their subtilty, quickness of penetration, extensive knowledge and science in natural things, are undoubtedly perfect in proportion to the excellency of their beings, inasmuch as they are pure intelligences. It is no less certain that they enjoy the faculty of communicating to each other their thoughts and conceptions, which St. Paul calls the tongues of angels. Their discourse can only be intellectual, as Theodoret observes,² but must on that account be the more perfect. The prophets frequently express it as a peculiar and distinguishing property of God alone, that he is the searcher of hearts; so that his all-seeing eye always penetrates into their most hidden recesses, and no creature can conceal any thing from Him, before whom all things are light. In what manner the angels communicate their thoughts or understand

¹ Ps. ciii. 4. Heb. i. 14. Ephes. vi. 12. Vide Patres apud Petav. l. de Angelis. St. Ignat. ep. ad Trallian, &c.

² Theodoret, in 1 Cor. xiii. 1.

those of others, we are not able clearly to determine. St. Thomas and divines usually teach, with St. Gregory,¹ that God speaks to his angels by interiorly discovering to them his will, and by inspiring them with a sweet inclination to execute all his orders; and that these pure spirits speak to one another by the interior desire or will of communicating their thoughts and sentiments. By whatever means the angels understand the language of their fellow spirits, by the like they may hear the desires of a human soul, such at least as are addressed to them, or which it concerns them to know. Our guardian angels may in an instant convey or intimate our concerns to spirits that are remote; and God also can immediately reveal our thoughts when he pleases to them. That they know our concerns, and by charity interest themselves in them, is certain, or there could not be *joy in heaven, and before the angels of God over one sinner doing penance.*² Even devils can suggest to our minds evil thoughts, paint in the imagination dangerous objects, frequently see the consent of the human heart, and accuse men at the divine tribunal. That spirits have a natural power of exerting their agency on bodies, is proved from several instances in holy writ, not only of good angels, but also of devils, when God doth not restrain their natural strength. Evil spirits slew the seven first incontinent husbands of Sara, hurled the swine into the lake, and carried Christ in the air. Angels have the power of moving or conveying themselves from place to place; in which they are swift even as our thought: and such is their activity, that it is not easy for us to conceive it. If light comes from the sun to our eye in seven minutes, it must travel 200,000 miles in a second. Yet this is corporeal motion, which essentially requires succession of time. But the motion of a spirit, from the

¹ Moral. l. 2. c. 15.

² Luke xv. 7, 10.

highest heaven to the lowest point in the universe, is instantaneous.¹

This is an imperfect abstract of what divines deliver from the oracles of holy writ, concerning the nature and properties of the good spirits. But unspeakably more transcendant and more admirable are the noble spiritual endowments of grace, and the riches of immortal glory, with which they are adorned. They are the spotless ministers, who approach nearest to the throne of God; and, in the contemplation of his infinite beauty, and incomprehensible perfections, drink plentifully of the fountain of his holy joy and love; pouring forth, with all their strength, without intermission, to eternity, a perfect spiritual homage of profound adoration and praise, to the glory of his holy name. Though in this imperfect state of human nature we can have but very weak notions of the transcendent powers and faculties of superior spiritual beings, revelation has, in part, supplied the defect, and drawn aside the veil, letting us into some knowledge of this immaterial world of spirits. The holy scripture accordingly admonishes us to watch and stand upon our guard against the malice and snares of the wicked apostate spirits, who, by their evil suggestions, endeavour to seduce and draw us into sin. It also assures us, that the good angels are often employed by God in ministering to us, and that they frequently lend us their friendly succours. It farther informs us, that when the material curtain of our body, which at present hides from our eyes the invisible spiritual world, shall be rent asunder, immediately a sudden torrent of light will break in upon us, and we shall see ourselves in the midst of those bright legions. The wicked indeed shall find themselves in darkness, under the arrest and tyranny of the accursed spirits, which were here their tempters,

1 S. Aug. Serm. 277. ol. 102. de div. t. 5. p. 1118.

and will be hereafter their tormentors, and their companions in unquenchable flames. But a guard of holy angels will conduct the soul of every just man, like Lazarus, to the abodes of light, and it shall be associated to the millions of millions of happy spirits, being itself a kindred spirit.

Among the holy archangels, three are particularly distinguished in holy writ: SS. Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.¹ St. Michael, whom the Church honours this day, was the prince of the faithful angels who opposed Lucifer and his associates in their revolt against God. Michael, in Hebrew, signifies, *Who is like God?* This was, as it were, his motto, when by humility he repressed the pride of that apostate angel,² and set up the standard against him. He continues to protect the saints from his assaults. When the body of Moses was ordered to be secretly buried, lest it should prove an occasion of idolatry or superstition to the Jews, who had been accustomed to see the superstitious practices of the Egyptians towards their dead princes and friends, the devil attempted to prevent the execution of the divine order, that he might insult the body, or make it an object of the people's sin. But St. Michael checked his insolence, not commanding him in his own name, but with humility intimating to him the command of God to desist.³ As the devil is the sworn enemy of God's holy Church, St. Michael is its special protector against his assaults and stratagems: in this

¹ Gabriel, which in Hebrew signifies *the strength of God*, was his ambassador in the greatest of all mysteries, the Incarnation of his Son. He was also the messenger of God, to deliver his most solemn promise of the same mystery to the prophet Daniel. Raphael signifies *the healing of God*. This archangel conducted young Toby to Rages, cured his father's blindness, chased away the devil Asmodæus, and bound him; that is, took away his power of hurting: for this, as St. Austin observes, (S. Aug. l. 20. de civ. c. 7, 8,) is what in the scriptures is called *binding* wicked spirits, (Matt. xii. 29; Mark iii. 27; 2 Pet. ii. 4; Apoc. xx. 2.)

² Apoc. xii. 7.

³ Jud. ix.

quality he was the defender of the Jewish synagogue, as is gathered from Daniel,¹ and Zachary;² and it appears from the most ancient books of the Rabbins, that he was always acknowledged such by the Hebrews; who even think he was the angel that conducted them into the promised land, and was the instrument or minister of God in giving them the law, and in other signal favours. This holy archangel has ever been honoured in the Christian Church, under the same title as her guardian unto God, and as the protector of the faithful; for God is pleased to employ the zeal and charity of the good angels and their leader against the malice of the devil. To thank his adorable goodness for this benefit of his merciful providence, is this festival instituted by the Church in honour of the good angels: in which devotion she has been encouraged by several apparitions of this glorious archangel. Among others it is recorded, that St. Michael, in a vision, admonished the bishop of Siponto to build a church in his honour on Mount Gargano, now called Monte-de-Sant-Angelo, in the Capitanate, near Manfredonia, in the kingdom of Naples. This history is confirmed by Sigebert in his chronicle, and by the ancient tradition of the churches of that country,³ and is approved authentic by the judicious critic Mabillon, who visited those places, and examined the records and monuments.⁴ This church was erected in the fifth century, and is a place of great devotion. When the emperor Otho III. had, contrary to his

1 Ch. xii.

2 Ch. i.

3 Baronius shows many circumstances of this vision, related by some moderns to be apocryphal. On this and other apparitions of St. Michael, see Charles Stengelius, the German monk's treatise, printed in 1629, under the following title: *S. Michaelis principatus, apparitiones, templa, cultus et miracula ex sacris litteris, SS. PP. et historiis ecclesiasticis eruta*. Or rather, *Selecta quædam de S. Michaelis Archangelo, ejus apparitionibus, festis et cultu, imprimis in Monte Gargano, illucque factis peregrinationibus*, a D. Francisco Dominico Hæberlin, *Academiæ, Juliæ Carolinæ vicerectore*. Helmstadii. An. 1753, in 8vo.

4 *Acta Sanct. Ord. S. Bened. sec. 3. par. 1. p. 85. not. 4.*

word, put to death, for rebellion, Crescentius, a Roman senator; being touched with remorse, he cast himself at the feet of St. Romuald, who, in satisfaction for his crime, enjoined him to walk barefoot, on a penitential pilgrimage, to St. Michael's on Mount Gargano: which penance he performed in 1002, as St. Peter Damian relates. In France, Aubert, bishop of Avranches, moved, it is said, by certain visions, built, in 708, a church in honour of St. Michael, on a barren rock which hangs over the sea, between Normandy and Brittany. In the tenth age, this collegiate church was changed into a great Benedictin abbey. In imitation of this was the famous church of St. Michael refounded in Cornwall, in the reign of William the Conqueror, by William earl of Moreton, on a mountain which the tide encompasses. It is said by Borlace, the learned and accurate antiquarian of Cornwall, that this church of St. Michael was first built in the fifth century. The Greeks mention, in their Menæa, a famous apparition of St. Michael at Chone, the ancient Colossæ in Phrygia. Many apparitions of good angels in favour of men are recorded, both in the Old and New Testament. It is mentioned in particular of this special guardian and protector of the Church, that, in the persecution of Antichrist, he will powerfully stand up in her defence: *At that time shall Michael rise up, the great prince, who standeth for the children of thy people.*¹ He is not only the protector of the Church, but of every faithful soul. He defeated the devil by humility; we are enlisted in the same warfare. His arms were humility and ardent love of God; the same must be our weapons. We ought to regard this archangel as our leader under God: and, courageously resisting the devil in all his assaults, to cry out, Who

can be compared to God? On the Good Angels, see more, September 29, and October 2.

SAINT PETER, ARCHBISHOP OF TARENDAISE.

NOW CALLED MONSTIERS, IN SAVOY.

HE was a native of Dauphiné. A strong inclination to learning, assisted by a good genius and a happy memory, carried him very successfully through his studies. At twenty years of age he took the Cistercian habit at Bonnevaux, a monastery that had been lately filled by a colony sent by St. Bernard from Clairvaux. They employed a great part of the day in hewing wood, and tilling the ground in the forest, in perpetual silence and interior prayer. They eat but once a day, and their fare was herbs or roots, mostly turnips of a coarse sort. Four hours in the twenty-four was the usual allowance for sleep; so that, rising at midnight, they continued in the church till it was morning, and returned no more to rest: which was the primitive custom of that Order. Peter practised the greatest austerities with fervour and alacrity: he was most exactly obedient, obliging to all, humble and modest. His pious parents, after the birth of four children, lived in perpetual continency, and the practice of rigorous abstinence, prayed much, and gave large alms: their house they seemed to turn into an hospital, so great was the number of poor and strangers they constantly entertained, whom they furnished with good beds, whilst they themselves often lay on straw. The father and his two other sons at length followed Peter to Bonnevaux, and the mother and daughter embraced the same Order in a neighbouring nunnery. The year after Peter had taken the monastic habit, his example was followed by Amedeus, nearly related to the emperor Conrad III. and sixteen