RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Grey Eminence

Aldous Huxley

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DAVID BRADSHAW

The life of Father Joseph, Cardinal Richelieu’s aide, was a shocking paradox. After spending his days directing operations on the battlefield, Father Joseph would pass the night in prayer, or in composing spiritual guidance for the nuns in his care. He was an aspirant to sainthood and a practising mystic, yet his ruthless exercise of power succeeded in prolonging the unspeakable horrors of the Thirty Years’ War. In his masterful biography, Huxley explores how an intensely religious man could lead such a life and how he reconciled the seemingly opposing moral systems of religion and politics.

See also: *The Devils of Loudun*

About the Author

Aldous Huxley was born on 26 July 1894 near Godalming, Surrey. He began writing poetry and short stories in his early twenties, but it was his first novel, *Crome Yellow* (1921), which established his literary reputation. This was swiftly followed by *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) and *Point Counter Point* (1928) – bright, brilliant satires of contemporary society. For most of the 1920s Huxley lived in Italy but in the 1930s he moved to Sanary, near Toulon.

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Huxley's work took on a more sombre tone in response to the confusion of society which he felt to be spinning dangerously out of control. His great novels of ideas, including his most famous work *Brave New World* (published in 1932 this warned against the dehumanising aspects of scientific and material 'progress') and the pacifist novel *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) were accompanied by a series of wise and brilliant essays, collected in volume form under titles such as *Music at Night* (1931) and *Ends and Means* (1937).

In 1937, at the height of his fame, Huxley left Europe to live in California, working for a time as a screenwriter in Hollywood. As the West braced itself for war, Huxley came increasingly to believe that the key to solving the world's problems lay in changing the individual through mystical enlightenment. The exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs was to dominate his work for the rest of his life. His beliefs found expression in both fiction (*Time Must Have a Stop,* 1944 and *Island,* 1962) and non-fiction (*The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945, *Grey Eminence*, 1941 and the famous account of his first mescalin experience, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954.)

Huxley died in California on 22 November 1963.

ALSO BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

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Grey Eminence

Aldous Huxley

With An Introduction By
David Bradshaw

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Note

The author’s translations of French and Latin quotations can be found here.

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894–1963)

ON 26 JULY 1894, near Godalming in Surrey, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into a family which had only recently become synonymous with the intellectual aristocracy. Huxley's grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, had earned notoriety as 'Darwin's bulldog' and fame as a populariser of science, just as his own probing and controversial works were destined to outrage and exhilarate readers and non-readers alike in the following century. Aldous Huxley's mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, and he was a nephew of the redoubtable Mrs Humphry Ward, doyenne of late-Victorian novelists. This inheritance, combining the scientific and the literary in a blend which was to become characteristic of his vision as a writer, was both a source of great pride and a burden to Huxley in his formative years. Much was expected of him.

Three traumatic events left their mark on the young Huxley. In 1908 his mother died of cancer, and this led to the effective break-up of the family home. Two years later, while a schoolboy at Eton, Huxley contracted an eye infection which made him almost completely blind for a time and severely impaired his vision for the rest of his life. The suicide of his brother Trevenen in August 1914 robbed Huxley of the person to whom he felt closest. Over twenty years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Huxley's treatment of the death of the main character's mother and his embodiment of 'Trev' in the novel as the vulnerable Brian Foxe give some indication of the indelible pain which these tragic occurrences left in their wake. To a considerable degree, they account for the darkness, pungency and

cynicism which feature so prominently in Huxley's work throughout the inter-war period.

Within months of achieving a First in English Language and Literature at Balliol College, Oxford in 1916, Huxley published *The Burning Wheel*. Huxley's first collection of verse, and the three which followed it, *Jonah* (1917), *The Defeat of Youth* (1918) and *Leda* (1920), reveal his indebtedness to French symbolism and *fin de siècle* aestheticism. Also discernible, however, beneath the poetry's triste and ironic patina, is a concern with the inward world of the spirit which anticipates Huxley's later absorption in mysticism. These volumes of poetry were the first of over fifty separate works of fiction, drama, verse, criticism, biography, travel and speculative writing which Huxley was to produce during the course of his life.

Unfit for military service, Huxley worked as a farm labourer at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor after he left Oxford. Here he met not only D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler and other Bloomsbury figures, but also a Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919. By then Huxley was working for the *Athenaeum* magazine under the adroit editorship of Middleton Murry. Soon after he became the first British editor of *House and Garden,* worked for *Vogue* and contributed musical criticism to the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* in the early 1920s.

Limbo (1920), a collection of short stories, preceded the appearance of *Crome Yellow* in 1921, the novel with which Huxley first made his name as a writer. Inspired by, among others, Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, Huxley's first novel incorporated many incidents from his sojourn at Garsington as well as mischevious portraits of its chatelaine and his fellow guests. More blatantly still, *Crome Yellow* is an iconoclastic tilt at the Victorian and Edwardian mores which had resulted in the First World War and its terrible aftermath. For all its comic

bravura, which won acclaim from writers such as Scott Fitzgerald and Max Beerbohm, *Crome Yellow* may be read, along with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and Huxley's second novel *Antic Hay* (1923), as an expression of the pervasive mood of disenchantment in the early 1920s. Huxley told his father that *Antic Hay* was 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind'. He went on to say that it was intended to reflect 'the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch'.

Even as a schoolboy Huxley had been an avid browser among the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* and it did not take long for him to acquire a reputation for arcane eclecticism. Moreover, as his prestige as a debunker and an emancipator grew, so Huxley was condemned more roundly by critics of the old guard, such as James Douglas of the *Daily Express,* who denounced the explicit discussion of sex and free thought in his fiction. *Antic Hay* was burned in Cairo, and in the ensuing years many of Huxley's books were censured, censored or banned at one time or another. Conversely, it was the openness, wit, effortless learning and apparent insouciance of Huxley's early work which proved such an appetising concoction for novelists as diverse as Evelyn Waugh, William Faulkner, Anthony Powell and Barbara Pym. Angus Wilson called Huxley 'the god of my adolescence'.

From 1923 onwards Huxley lived abroad more or less permanently, first near Florence and then, between 1930 and 1937, at Sanary on the Côte d'Azur. In *Along the Road* (1925), subtitled 'Notes and Essays of a Tourist', Huxley offered a lively and engaging account of the places and works of art he had taken in since his arrival in Italy, and both the title story of his third collection of tales, *Little Mexican* (1924), and his third novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), are set in that country. According to Huxley, the

theme of *Those Barren Leaves* is ‘the undercutting of everything by a sort of despairing scepticism and then the undercutting of that by mysticism’. For W.B. Yeats, *Those Barren Leaves* heralded the return of philosophy to the English novel, but it was with his fourth novel, *Point Counter Point* (1928), that Huxley cemented his reputation with the reading public as a thought-provoking writer of fiction. *Point Counter Point* is Huxley’s first true ‘novel of ideas’, the type of fiction with which he has become most closely identified. He once explained that his aim as a novelist was ‘to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay’, arguing that the novel should be like a holdall, bursting with opinion and arresting ideas. This privileging of content over form was one of the many things he had in common with H.G. Wells; it was anathema to the likes of Virginia Woolf. Huxley was fascinated by the fact that ‘the same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc’, and one of his key aims in *Point Counter Point* was to offer this multi-faceted view of his principal characters.

Huxley’s more sombre mood in the late 1920s was epitomised by *Proper Studies* (1927), the most important of the four volumes of essays he published during the decade, and the one in which he first set himself unequivocally against what he regarded as the vulgarity and perversity of mass civilisation. Between September 1925 and June 1926 Huxley had travelled via India to the United States, and it was this visit to America which made him so pessimistic about the cultural future of Europe. He recounted his experiences in *Jesting Pilate* (1926). ‘The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values,’ Huxley wrote, ‘a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards’, and it was soon after visiting the United States that Huxley conceived the idea of writing a satire on what he had encountered. *Brave New World* (1932) may be read

as Huxley's contribution to the widespread fear of Americanisation which had been current in Europe since the mid-nineteenth century, but this humorous, disturbing and curiously ambivalent novel offers much more than straightforward travesty. Similarly, although *Brave New World* has become, with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four,* one of the twin pillars of the anti-utopian tradition in literature and a byword for all that is most repellent and 'nightmarish' in the world to come, it was written with Huxley's gaze very much on the crisis-torn present of Britain in 1931. When placed alongside *Brief Candles* (1930), a well-received collection of short stories, *Music at Night* (1931), a typically energetic and wide-ranging volume of essays, and *Texts and Pretexts* (1932), a verse anthology with commentaries designed to show that even in the highly-charged political atmosphere of the early 1930s 'they also serve who only bother their heads about art', Huxley's polygonal appeal as a novelist, thinker and pundit is brought home. In 1934 he published *Beyond the Mexique Bay,* an account of his travels in the Caribbean and Central America, and in 1936, *Eyeless in Gaza*. Stimulated by his conversion to pacifism in November 1935, Huxley's sixth novel imbricates the fears, foibles, prejudices and dissensions of the age with a fictionalisation of his own history. A commitment to questions which are essentially religious, rather than political or philosophical, is evident in Huxley's work for the first time.

When Huxley left Europe for the United States in April 1937 he was at the height of his fame as a novelist and the Peace Pledge Union's leading celebrity. Ironically, he was by now far more concerned with the virtues of non-attachment, anarchism, decentralisation and mystical salvation than with the failings of contemporary society, the role of pacifism in national politics or the art of fiction. If Huxley had been intent on exposing the meaninglessness of life in the 1920s, from the mid-1930s he was preoccupied with seeking the

meaning of existence. *Ends and Means* (1937), in which Huxley tried ‘to relate the problems of domestic and international politics, of war and economics, of education, religion and ethics, to a theory of the ultimate nature of reality’, signalled his departure for the higher ground of mystical enlightenment where he would remain encamped for the rest of his life.

It was to lecture on the issues which dominate *Ends and Means* that Huxley and his friend and guru Gerald Heard had travelled to the United States. Huxley had every intention of returning to Europe, but his wife’s need to live in a hot, dry climate on health grounds and the lucrative prospect of writing for the movies contrived to keep the Huxleys in America until it was too unsafe to return. Huxley’s reaction to Hollywood and its cult of youth finds mordant expression in *After Many a Summer* (1939), the story of a Citizen Kane-like character’s life of grandiose illusion. The materialist excesses of Jo Stoyte are counterpointed by the ascetic convictions of Propter, a modern-day anchorite modelled on Heard. Huxley and Hollywood were not compatible, and his failure to write a popular play in the inter-war years was mirrored in his largely unsuccessful efforts to write for the movies. Walt Disney’s widely reported rejection of Huxley’s synopsis of *Alice in Wonderland* on the grounds that he ‘could only understand every third word’ was symptomatic of Huxley’s problem. His natural bent was for the leisurely and allusive development of an idea; above all else the movie moguls demanded pacey dialogue. His disenchantment with the world of the film studios is evident in the opening pages of *Ape and Essence* (1948), Huxley’s ghastly and graphic projection of Los Angeles as a ruinous, sprawling ossuary in the aftermath of the atomic Third World War. While the threat of global nuclear conflict has receded for the present, Huxley’s discussion of the rapid deforestation, pollution and other acts of ecological ‘imbecility’ which preceded the self-

inflicted apocalypse he describes in the novel, is still chillingly topical.

Huxley spent most of the war years in a small house at Llano in the Mojave Desert in Southern California. In 1926 he had dismissed meditation as ‘the doze’s first cousin’, but it was to a life of quietistic contemplation that Huxley now devoted himself. This phase of his career resulted in the excellent *Grey Eminence* (1941), a biography of Father Joseph, adviser to Cardinal Richelieu; *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), a novel set in Florence in 1929 in which, to borrow Huxley’s words, ‘a piece of the *Comédie Humaine* . . . modulates into a version of the *Divina Commedia*’; and *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), a profoundly influential anthology of excerpts and commentaries illustrating what Huxley called ‘the highest common factor of all the higher religions’. He went on to say with typical humour and humility, ‘The greatest merit of the book is that about forty per cent of it is not by me, but by a lot of saints, many of whom were also men of genius.’ *The Devils of Loudun,* a compelling psychological study of sexual hysteria in seventeenth-century France, which was subsequently turned into a successful film, appeared in 1952. In the same way that Huxley’s astringent social satires caught the mood of the 1920s, so, in the years during and following the Second World War and the enormity of the Jewish Holocaust, his personal concern with spiritual and ethical matters and his consternation at the accelerating arms race, reflected both the tone and unease of the zeitgeist.

Huxley also acquired new readers through his support of the marginal and unconventional, and his detractors, hitherto exercised by what they saw as his immorality or preachiness, began to pour scorn on his alleged faddism. In 1942 he published *The Art of Seeing,* a passionate defence of the Bates method of eye training which aroused a storm of protest from the optometrist lobby. Even more outrageous, for many, was his suggestion in *The Doors of*

Perception (1954) and its sequel, *Heaven and Hell* (1956), that mescalin and lysergic acid were ‘drugs of unique distinction’ which should be exploited for the ‘supernaturally brilliant’ visionary experiences they offered to those with open minds and sound livers. *The Doors of Perception* is indeed a bewitching account of the inner shangri-la of the mescalin taker, where ‘there is neither work nor monotony’ but only ‘a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse’, where ‘the divine source of all existence’ is evident in a vase of flowers, and even the creases in a pair of trousers reveal ‘a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity’. Not surprisingly, *The Doors of Perception* became a set text for the beat generation and the psychedelic Sixties, The Doors naming their band after the book which also earned Huxley a place on the sleeve of The Beatles’ *Sergeant Pepper* album.

Maria Huxley died in February 1955, shortly before Huxley published his penultimate novel, *The Genius and the Goddess*, in which John Rivers recounts the brief history of his disastrous involvement, when he was a ‘virgin prig of twenty-eight’, with the wife of his colleague Henry Maartens, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist. Not for the first time, Huxley’s theme is the havoc which ensues when a man with an idealistic misconception of life born of a cloistered and emotionally deprived upbringing experiences the full, sensual impact of human passion.

Huxley married Laura Archera, a practising psychotherapist, in March 1956. Two years later he published *Brave New World Revisited*, in which he surveyed contemporary society in the light of his earlier predictions. Huxley’s knack of keying in to the anxieties of the moment was as sharp as ever, and this touch is also evident in a series of lectures on ‘The Human Situation’ which he gave at Santa Barbara in 1959, published in one volume in 1977. Both books address problems which are no less pressing today, such as overpopulation, the recrudescence of

nationalism and the fragility of the natural world. Huxley's last novel, *Island*, was published in 1962, the year in which he was made a Companion of Literature, and the year after his Los Angeles home and most of his personal effects had been destroyed in a fire which, Huxley said, left him 'a man without possessions and without a past'.

Island is the story of how the offshore utopia of Pala, where population growth has been stabilised and Mutual Adoption Clubs have superseded the tyranny of the family, and where *maithuna,* or the yoga of love and *moksha,* an hallucinogenic toadstool, ensure that the Palanese have little reason to feel disgruntled, falls victim to the age-old menaces of material progress and territorial expansionism. *Island* is perhaps Huxley's most pessimistic book, his poignant acknowledgement that in a world of increasing greed, mass communication, oil-guzzling transport, burgeoning population and inveterate hostility, a pacific and cooperative community like Pala's 'oasis of freedom and happiness' has little hope of survival. Soon after *Island* was published Huxley commented that the 'weakness of the book consists in a disbalance between fable and exposition. The story has too much weight, in the way of ideas and reflections, to carry.' But, while some readers would agree with this criticism, for others *Island* exemplifies Huxley's particular contribution to twentieth-century letters. In his early days the highbrow incarnate and a reluctant lecturer for the Peace Pledge Union, Huxley became for many a companionable polymath, a transatlantic sage at large, whose unending quest for synthesis and meaning in an ever-more perplexing and violent world provided a paradigm for their own search for peace and understanding.

Before his eyesight was damaged, Huxley's ambition was to specialise in the sciences, and it is significant that in his last published work, *Literature and Science* (1963), he pleads yet again for a *rapprochement* between the two cultures, arguing passionately against the contemporary

stress on their dichotomy. The book begins by emphasising the wide-ranging erudition of T.H. Huxley and Matthew Arnold. Their descendant, one of the most stimulating and provocative writers of the twentieth century, proved himself a worthy inheritor of their abilities over the course of his long and varied career.

Huxley died of cancer at his home in Hollywood on 22 November 1963, unaware that President J.F. Kennedy had been assassinated earlier that afternoon in Dallas. In 1971 his ashes were returned to England and interred in his parents' grave at Compton in Surrey.

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1993

CHAPTER 1

On the Road to Rome

THE FRIAR HAD kilted up his habit, and his bare legs were muddy to the knees. After the spring rains, the road was like a swamp. It had been like a lime-kiln, he reflected, last time he walked this way. He recalled the poem he had written on another of his journeys.

Quand au plus chaud du jour l'ardente canicule
Fait de l'air un fourneau,
Des climats basanés mon pied franc ne recule,
Quoy que je coule en eau.[1] [fn1]

That summer of 1618, when the three of them had taken the road for Spain! Poor Brother Zeno of Guingamp had died of sunstroke at Toulouse. And a week later, near Burgos, Father Romanus had fallen sick with dysentery. In three days it was all over. He had limped into Madrid alone. And alone he was now to limp into Rome. For Father Angelus had had to be left behind with the Capuchins of Viterbo, too sick of the ague to walk another step. God bring him soon to health again!

Ni des Alpes neigeux, ni des hauts Pirenées
Le front audacieux
N'a pu borner le cours de mes grandes journées,
Qui tendent jusqu'aux cieux.

Cher Seigneur, si ta main m'enfonça la blessure
De ce perçant dessein,
J'ay droit de te montrer ma tendre meurtrissure
Et descouvrir mon sein.[2]

‘*La blessure de ce perçant dessein*,’ he repeated to himself. The phrase was particularly felicitous. Almost Latin in its pregnancy – like one of those phrases of Prudentius . . .

The Capuchin sighed profoundly. That wound, he reflected, was still open, and, goaded by the barb of God’s piercing design, he was still hurrying, at the rate of fifteen leagues a day, across the face of Europe. When would that design be carried into execution? When would it be granted to another Godefroy of Bouillon to storm Jerusalem? Not yet awhile, to all appearances – not till the wars were over, not till the House of Austria should be humbled and France grow strong enough to lead the nations on the new Crusade. How long, O Lord, how long?

He sighed again, and the sadness of his thoughts was reflected upon his face. It was the face of a man in middle life, weathered, gaunt with self-inflicted hardship, lined and worn with the incessant labour of the mind. Beneath the broad, intellectual forehead, the prominent blue eyes were widely opened, almost staring. The nose was powerfully aquiline. Long and unkempt, a reddish beard already grizzled, covered his cheeks and chin; but the full-lipped, resolute mouth suggested a corresponding firmness of the jaw beneath. It was the face of a strong man, a man of firm will and powerful intelligence; a man also, under the second nature imposed by a quarter-century of the religious life, of powerful passions and a fierce intensity of feeling.

Bare-footed – for he had taken off his sandals and was carrying them in his hand – he walked on through the mud, engrossed in his melancholy thoughts. Then, recollecting himself, he suddenly realized what he was doing. Who was *he* to criticize God’s ways? His sadness was a recrimination against Providence, a flying in the face of that divine will, to obey which was the only purpose of his life. And it must be obeyed without reluctance, whole-heartedly, joyfully. To be sad was a sin and, as such, an obstacle between his soul and God. He halted and for more than a minute stood there

in the road, covering his face with his hands. His lips moved; he was praying to be forgiven.

When he walked on, it was in a contrite mood. The natural man, he was thinking, the old Adam – what a sleepless hostility to God one carried about in the depths of one's own mind and body! What a fixed resolve to sin! And what resourcefulness in the art of sinning, what skill, when one temptation had been overcome, in discovering another and more subtle evil to surrender to! There was no remedy but in perpetual vigilance. Sentinels for ever on guard against the stratagems of the enemy. *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.* But there was also the great ally – the Divine friend, without whose aid the garrison must infallibly be destroyed. Oh, ask him in! Open the gates! Sweep clean the streets and garnish the town with flowers!

The sun came out from behind the clouds. The Capuchin looked up and, from its position in the sky, calculated that the time must be a little after two o'clock. Rome was still three leagues away. There was no time to stop. He would have to practise his annihilation in the Essential Will as he walked. Well, it would not be the first time.

He repeated the Lord's Prayer slowly and aloud; then addressed himself to the opening phase of his exercise, the act of pure intention. To do the will of God, the exterior will, the interior will, the essential will. To do it for the sake of God alone, and without reference to what he himself desired, or hoped, or might gain in this world or the next . . . To annihilate himself in all he thought and felt and did, so that there should be nothing left but the instrument of God's will and a soul united by God's grace with that divine substance, which was identical with the divine, essential will. He held his mind unwaveringly upon that resolution, while he walked a furlong or more. Then words came once again. 'To expose myself to God, to prepare my soul for his coming, watchfully and with reverence. To turn myself, naked of every other design, every other feeling and

thought and memory, towards such radiance of divine love and knowledge as God may vouchsafe to give. And even if he should vouchsafe to give me nothing, even if it should be his will to leave me without light or consolation, to turn towards him none the less with thankfulness and in perfect faith. *Qui adhaeret Deo, unus spiritus est*.'[3]

To adhere, he repeated, to adhere . . .

From the act of pure intention he passed to that of adoration and humility. 'God for his own sake and not with any thought of myself.' For what was this self of his? A nothing – but an active nothing, capable of sin and therefore capable of cutting itself off from the All. An active nothing that had to be annihilated into passive nothingness, if God's will was to be done.

He had worked hard to annihilate that active nothing, and God in his great mercy had granted him many favours – strength to control at least the grosser impulses of nature, sensible consolations, visions and revelations, access at moments to the outskirts of the divine presence. But for all that, his active nothingness still persisted; he was still capable of negligence and imperfection, even of such downright wickedness as complacency in the recollection of his own work and God's past favours. The old Adam knew how to make use even of the soul's efforts to annihilate the Old Adam, and by taking pride in those efforts, was able to undo their results and strengthen his own resistance to God. Nay, the very graces of God could be turned, unless the soul was unremittingly on guard, into a stumbling block and a source of grievous sins and imperfection. The Son of God, the incarnate source of all grace – how had *he* proclaimed his divinity? By humility, by adoration and love of God.

'Love, love, love,' the Capuchin repeated, 'humility and love, humility of the nothing before the all, love and adoration of the all by the nothing, love . . .'

Horny like a savage's from their incessant marching and counter-marching across the face of Europe, his bare feet

splashed through the puddles, stepped unflinching on the stones, treading the beat of the reiterated words.

‘Love, Christ’s love, love . . .’ It was said that the Cardinal Nephew had been offended by the behaviour of His Catholic Majesty’s ambassador. ‘Christ’s love, Christ’s love . . .’ These Spaniards were for ever undoing themselves by their stupid arrogance. ‘Love, love, love . . .’ Well, so much the better for France. All at once he perceived that the words he was still repeating to himself had become separated from his thoughts, that the flame he had been cherishing was extinguished.

‘Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful.’ He excluded the Cardinal Nephew and the Spanish Ambassador, and re-established the connection between his thoughts and his words. ‘Love, love, love, Christ’s love . . .’ The little flame was alight again. He kept it burning unwaveringly while he walked a quarter of a mile. Then it was time to pass on to operation – the repudiation of distracting thoughts and the resolve to banish them from the mind.

The Cardinal Nephew and the Spanish Ambassador . . . More than five and twenty years had passed since Father Benet of Canfield had taught him how to pray. More than five and twenty years – and his mind was not yet completely under control, the devils of distraction still had power, sometimes, to intrude even into the sanctuary of orison. There was no final remedy but the grace of God. Meanwhile, one could only resolve to banish the distracting thoughts each time they found their way past the defences. If one persisted in the struggle, if one worked hard and patiently, it would be counted, no doubt, as a merit. God knew one’s weaknesses and the efforts one made to overcome them.

Headed in the opposite direction, a train of pack animals from the City jingled slowly past him. The muleteers interrupted their talk for a moment and respectfully doffed their hats. Half blind, as he was, with too much straining

over books and documents, the friar saw their gesture as a blur of movement against the sky. Recognizing its intention, he raised a hand in blessing; then went back once again to his orison.

In the form of prayer he was accustomed to use, an act of discursive meditation succeeded the preparatory exercises. Today the perfection he had chosen as his theme was love. Following the established order of his discourse, he addressed himself first of all to the consideration of God as the source of love. *Pater noster, qui es in coelis. Qui es in coelis.* God, the eternal and Infinite Being. But when a finite being abandoned itself to the Infinite Being, Infinite Being was apprehended as Love. Thus, Infinite Being was at the same time a loving Father – but of children so rebellious and ungrateful that they were for ever doing all in their power to shut themselves out from his love. They shut themselves out from his love and, by that act, cut themselves off from their own happiness and salvation.

'All manner of virtue and goodness,' the Capuchin repeated in a whisper, 'and even that Eternal Good which is God himself, can never make a man virtuous, good, or happy, so long as it is outside the soul.'

He raised his head for a moment. In the blue gap of rain-washed sky between the clouds, the sun was gloriously bright. But if one chose to drop one's eyelids against the light, so – why, then one was blind, one walked in darkness. God was love; but the fact could be fully known only to one who himself loved God.

This thought served as a bridge between the first stage of his meditation and the second, between God as the source of love and his own shortcomings as a lover of God.

He loved God insufficiently because he was insufficiently detached from the world of creatures in which he had to do his work. *Factus est in pace locus ejus.*[4] God can be perfectly loved only by a heart that has been sanctified by the divine presence; and God is present only in a heart at

peace. He is excluded by anxiety, even when that anxiety is a concern about the works of God. God's work must be done; but if it is not done in the peace of perfect detachment, it will take the soul away from God. He himself had come nearest to that perfect detachment in the days when he had worked at preaching and spiritual instruction. But now God had called him to these more difficult tasks in the world of great events, and the peace of detachment had become increasingly difficult of achievement. To dwell in the essential will of God while one was negotiating with the Duke of Lerma, say, or the Prince of Condé – that was hard indeed. And yet those negotiations had to be undertaken; they were a duty, and to do them was God's exterior will. There could be no shrinking from such tasks. If peace eluded him while he undertook them, it was because of his own weakness and imperfection. That highest degree of orison – the active annihilation of self and all creatures in the essential will of God – was still beyond him. There was no remedy but God's grace, and no way to earn God's grace but through constant prayer, constant humility, constant love. Only so could God's kingdom come in him, God's will be done.

It was time to pass to the third phase of his meditation – reflection on the Saviour's acts and sufferings as related to the love of God. *Fiat voluntas tua.*[5] Once in the world's history God's will had been done, fully and completely; for God had been loved and worshipped by one who, being himself divine, was able to give a devotion commensurate with its object.

The image of Calvary rose up before the friar's mind – the image that had haunted him ever since, as a tiny child, he had first been told of what wicked men had done to Jesus. He held the picture in his imagination, and it was more real, more vivid than what he actually saw of the road at his feet. 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Pity and love and adoration suffused his whole being, as with a

sensible warmth that was at the same time a kind of pain. Deliberately, he averted the eyes of his mind. The time had not yet come for such an act of affection and will. He had still to consider, discursively, the ends for which the Saviour had thus suffered. He thought of the world's sins, his own among them, and how he had helped to hew the cross and forge the nails, to plait the scourge and the crown of thorns, to whet the spear and dig the sepulchre. And yet, in spite of it, the Saviour loved him and, loving, had suffered, suffered, suffered. Had suffered that the price of Adam's sin might be paid. Had suffered that, through his example, Adam's children might learn how to conquer evil in themselves. 'Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.' Loving, one was forgiven; forgiven, one became capable of forgiving; forgiving, one could open one's soul to God; opening one's soul to God, one could love yet more intensely; and so the soul could climb a little higher on the ascending spiral that led towards perfect union. *Ama, et fac quod vis*.[6]

'Let there be love,' he repeated, modulating his orison out of Meditation into Affection, transforming it from an act of the discursive intellect into an act of loving, self-renouncing will. 'Let there be love.' And taking his own lovelessness, taking the malignantly active nothing that was himself, he offered it up as a sacrifice, as a burnt offering to be consumed in the fire of God's love.

Lose life to save it. Die, that life may be hid with Christ in God. Die, die, die. Die on the cross of mortification, die in the continuous and voluntary self-noughting of passive and active annihilation.

Die, die, die, die . . . In an act of pure contrition he begged God's forgiveness for being still himself, Joseph of Paris, and not yet wholly the instrument of the divine will, at peace even in action, detached even in the turmoil of business.

Die, help me to die, help me to love so that I may be helped to die. He laid lovelessness upon an inward altar and

prayed that it might be consumed, prayed that from its ashes might arise a new birth of love.

Trotting up from behind, came a young horseman, gaily plumed, with a silver-studded saddle and the damascened butts of two fine pistols in his holsters. He interrupted his whistling to shout a friendly good-day. The other did not answer, did not even raise his bowed head.

‘What, is he deaf?’ cried the horseman, as he drew up level with the friar. Then, for the first time, he saw the face under the grey hood. The spectacle of those lowered lids, those lips almost imperceptibly moving in prayer, that expression of intense and focused calm, abashed the young man into silence. He mumbled a word of apology, raised his hat, as though to the image in a wayside shrine, and crossed himself; then set spurs to his horse and cantered away, leaving the friar to perfect his act of self-immolation undisturbed.

How delicately the sacrifice had to be performed! How subtly, effortlessly, unabruptly! There were occasions when violence might be used to take the Kingdom of Heaven; but this was not one of them. Violent annihilation of the self would defeat its own purpose; for such violence belonged to the merely human will, and to make use of it would only strengthen that will against the will of God. In this act of self-abnegation, a man must somehow operate without effort; or rather he must permit himself to be operated, passively, by the divine will . . .

In the matter of the Valtelline, of course, His Holiness had more reason to fear the closer union between Spain and Austria than to be angry with the French for ousting a papal garrison. The Cardinal Nephew would probably . . .

The friar became aware, once again, that concern with God’s work had drifted like a dark eclipsing cloud between himself and God. Checking his first movement towards a passionate self-reproach that would only have made the eclipse completer, he gently changed the focus of his inner

vision, looking past the Cardinal Nephew, past the Valtelline and Spain and France towards the pure will of God beyond and above and within them. The cloud drifted away; he was exposed once more to the light. Patiently, delicately, he opened himself to its purifying and transforming radiance.

Time passed, and a moment came at length when it seemed to him that he was fit to go on to the next stage of contemplation. The mirror of his soul was cleansed; the dust and vapours that ordinarily intervened between the mirror and that which it was to reflect had been laid to rest or dissolved. If he now turned his soul to Christ, the divine form would be reflected clearly and without blasphemous distortion; the image of the crucified Saviour would be within him, imprinting itself upon his will, his heart, his understanding, a divine model to be imitated, a spirit to inform and quicken.

Tenaciously he held the beloved image behind his half-closed eyelids; and this time he permitted himself the happiness of that adoration, intense to the point of physical pain, that boundless bliss and agony of compassion, from which he had had to turn in the earlier, discursive part of his exercise. Suffering, suffering . . . Tears filled his eyes. Suffering of the Son of God, of God himself incarnate as man. Suffering endured by the loving Saviour of all sinners, this darkest sinner among them. *Recede a me, quia homo peccator sum.*[7] And yet the Saviour came, and took this leper in his arms, and knelt before him, and washed his feet. *Tu mihi lavas pedes?*[8] These feet that have walked in wickedness, that are all caked with the filth of sin and ignorance? Yes, and not only washes his feet, but, for the sinner’s sake, permits himself to be taken, judged, mocked, scourged and crucified. He came back to the Calvary in his heart, to the suffering, the suffering of his God. And the annihilation for which he had striven seemed now to be consummated in a kind of rapture of devotion and compassion, love and pain. He was absorbed into a blissful

participation in the sufferings of God incarnate – of God incarnate and therefore at the same time of the pure essential Godhead out of which the God-Man had proceeded. That body upon the cross was the invisible made visible. Calvary was bathed in the uncreated light, irradiated by it, consubstantial with it. Absorbed into its source and ground, the crucified Christ was annihilated in the light, and there was nothing but the shining rapture of love and suffering. Then, as it were, re-condensing, the light took form again in Jesus crucified, until a new transfiguration once more assimilated Calvary with the glory that surrounded it.

Striding along, the friar's body measured out with its bare feet the furlongs and the minutes, the hour and the miles. Within, his soul had reached the fringes of eternity and, in an ecstasy of adoration and anguish, contemplated the mystery of the incarnation.

A donkey brayed; the outriders in front of a coach sounded their bugles; someone shouted and there was a sudden outburst of women's laughter.

Under the Capuchin's hood, there was a distant consciousness of these things. Eternity receded. Time and self came gliding in again to take its place. Reluctantly, the friar raised his head and looked about him. His myopic eyes discerned a house or two and the movement of men and animals on the road before him. He looked down again and, to cushion the shock of this abrupt return from one world to another, reverted to a discursive meditation on the Word made Flesh.

At the Milvian Bridge a group of soldiers had been posted to keep check on all incoming travellers from the North. The Capuchin answered their questions fluently, but with a foreign accent that automatically aroused suspicion. He was taken to the guard room to give an account of himself. The officer in charge touched his hat as the friar entered, but did not rise or remove his booted feet from the table on which