

**THE RETREAT MANUAL: A
HANDBOOK FOR THE
ANNUAL RETREAT AND
MONTHLY RECOLLECTION**

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The retreat manual: a handbook for the annual retreat and monthly recollection by Madame Cecilia

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MADAME CECILIA

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Dedication.

TO OUR BELOVED REVEREND MOTHER-
GENERAL, MADAME MARIE PEETERS, THIS LITTLE
BOOK IS DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR AS A
MARK OF ESTEEM, AFFECTION AND
GRATITUDE.

COVENTRY HALL, STREATHAM,
May, 1901.

Preface.

THIS little volume will be a welcome addition to our Retreat literature. When the points of a Retreat are given by an experienced director, book explanations are less necessary, though even then they are a useful supplement to the oral instructions. But, for the many who have to make their retreats or monthly recollections alone, or with only occasional help from a director, some such book as the author has now provided is indispensable. It does not give a series of meditations, but treats of the more fundamental principles of the spiritual life, which it expounds clearly and simply. But the special feature of the book, for which it will be prized, is to be found in the lists of "Practical Hints," which terminate the several chapters. These, unlike the dry bones which satisfied former generations, as points for self-examination, take some account of the complexities of human character and motive, and are the more practical because they are so fresh and life-like. That they should be marked also by soundness of judgment was what one might have expected from the author of "HOME TRUTHS FOR MARY'S CHILDREN."

SYDNEY F. SMITH, S.J.

Feast of the Precious Blood, 1901.

CHAPTER I.

I. WHAT IS A RETREAT?

AFTER a long and severe campaign a good general gives his wearied soldiers a rest. Repairs are needed in the army equipments, provisions must be stored up and above all, the future campaign must be planned. Perhaps the last has been disastrous, then the general examines the causes and endeavours to remedy them. Often his own blunders may be a salutary though bitter lesson and the foes' tactics sometimes give him useful hints. He sees how he allowed himself to be drawn too far from his base, or the lines of defence were too long. Here he gave the enemy a chance of cutting off his supplies, there he left a weak point undefended. Suppose the campaign has been glorious, then he examines the causes of his success and

proposes to adopt the same strategy in future. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." * Shall we not learn a useful lesson from their example?

You are on the eve of your retreat, reader, and is there not a strong resemblance between the general, retiring into winter quarters, and what you propose doing? You are or *should be* the general of your senses and faculties, your foes are the world, the flesh, and the devil, with whom you have to wage an incessant warfare. They are your implacable enemies with whom you can make neither truce nor treaty. Let us suppose that you have been striving "to fight the good fight," that you are in earnest about saving your soul. As you look back over the months or years since your last retreat, you will probably see that there have been losses, indecisive battles and some victories. In retreat you examine what led to these different results, in order to gain that knowledge which

* St. Luke xvi.

comes only from experience, for it has been aptly said "One thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of learning." We reflect on past defects and "knowledge comes" while "wisdom lingers" to enable us to fight more warily in the future.

It is wise to go into retreat that we may review and repair the past. We have also to prepare our plan and spiritual weapons for the future. As we glance back, how many defeats we notice, how often we have committed sins, what numerous imperfections have marred even our best actions, how frequently we have fallen through imprudence and negligence. Can the most earnest Christian dare to say "My heart is clean I am pure from sin?"* Must he not on the contrary confess, "My sin is ever before me?"

Perhaps, reader, you are forced to admit that you have basely deserted your colours and served in the ranks of the enemy. If you are conscious that you are in a state

* Prov. xx.