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Engl. Coll. Bruges, feast of St. Angela,¹ A. D. 1864

Dear Margaret,

I do remember father Fabers treatise on kindness² and the deal of good it did to me.³ I have but too often made the same complaint as you and met with answers which I could not think were kind at all, still, I suppose these that gave them thought they were kind and very kind, and condescending and so forth; my conclusion and my complaint then is that the world, not even excepting the religious or devout world, does not exactly know how to be kind. I have no doubt the world was made to be otherwise than it is and there are souls that have an ideal of a very different but unfortunately forfeited state and who therefore feel it very keenly when, stepping out into the world, as it is, they come into contact with its unkindness ; indeed indeed when

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“you are young and unaccustomed to it it cuts you to the heart” and I should be very sorry if you regretted to be actually still in posession⁴ of that ideal or hoped by loosing it to become more or less indifferent: you remember I dare say that man

est un Dieu tombé qui se souvient des cieux⁵

the longer then he remembers the better for him and for all who are near him!

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- 1 De feestdag van de heilige Angela werd tussen 1861 en 1955 gevierd op 31 mei.
- 2 Gepubliceerd in diens ‘Spiritual Conferences’.
- 3 Hiermee verwijst Gezelle naar de [brief van Margaret Steinmetz aan hem](#).
- 4 Foutief voor ‘possession’.
- 5 Deze regel komt uit het gedicht ‘L’Homme (à Lord Byron)’ van Alphonse de Lamartine.

Do you know that this indifference would be itself the very unkindness you complain of, because one cannot be indifferent to unkindness without growing at the same time indifferent to kindness also, it would be allowing to be extinguished within you, by the contagion of this unkind world, the last vestige of that happier state which the sin of the first parent has not altogether succeeded⁶ in destroying by

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our hereditary degradation. As soon then as the world can succeed in making you unkind in return for its own unkindness, you will never complain again, there will be harmony then and unison; now there is discord! and how I do rejoice to think and to know there is, how I do hope there may ever be through Jesus christ our Lord! I wish any words of mine, whether spoken or written, might be sufficiently strong to put you into the full light of these few significant words, that end and should conclude all the churches' and all our prayers. He who is there alluded to was not a fallen God "qui se souvient des cieux ..." this was not an ideal preserved, in Him, by parental care and watchfulness; His infinite incomprehensible kindness was to be and is the prop and the preservation of the little and scanty remnants of original beauty that were left alive in the souls

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of men and women after the tremendous catastrophe; He put himself up as a defiance against the world, defying it to make Him unkind, if it could, and to this day no kindness will last, no unkindness will be tollerable⁷ enduring unless through Jesus christ our Lord! And why then are so many christians so excessively unkind? simply because their christianity is like the liability of certain companies: "limited" to a excessively small portion of their daily and yearly activity, perhaps to some exaggerated⁸ or misunderstood devotions, while there are whole regions left in them still in their original unredeemed and unsanctified Paganism; the work of Augustine and Eligius is only half done yet Their notions about art may be christian, perhaps too much so, they may be christian penitents, alms givers they are not christian men, they have a loathsome hump of christianity somewhere that makes bear as it were their christianity collected in a burthensome hump disfiguring one part of their person whereas other parts are without any at all it makes them ridiculously peevish irascible unkind and full of the vices of Paganism which they defend as as their christian virtues [consequently] the virtues of christianity a stumbling block to young beginners and a scandal scandalous to those even that profess

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6 Foutief voor 'succeeded'.

7 Foutief voor 'tolerable'.

8 Foutief voor 'exaggerated'.

..... [p5].....

not to be christians. How is it possible that the sweetness of christ should actually be turned into bitterness

You may perhaps have noticed some times that people who are utter infidels are quite as kind as christians, even kinder, to all appearances. They could not see christ in those that called themselves His followers, so, they gave Him up, and looked else where for something to fill the vacancy and they have found a kind of morality and polite intercourse of one man with another, which is the result of what monks and missionaries have done for society in forgotten ages, and which the world now claims as its own property, whereas it is altogether christ's; and the amiable respectability⁹ of men, who do not deny themselves any pleasure, as long as it does not interfere with the

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superficial "doré sur tranche" morality of the world looks it seems to me far better than ours; if they are not christians, they dress exactly like and in the very garments of christ; the bloodthirsty Pagan saxons of either Flanders or England were not men of this sort at all; if they became converted how little external change would it take? how publicly modest they are, how very sorry if even they should offend any one, how very kind indeed they call one another, and, O! if we could be in reality what they appear and if their appearances could become realities with them through Jesus christ our Lord! otherwise who is to reward them or rather to take the side of christ who will compensate the loss christ suffers in losing¹⁰ so many of

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them?

I have been so often disappointed when first starting out into the world as a priest; I remember very well having been told to try and gain all hearts not to keep them to myself but to direct them higher, to forward them as it were to Jesus; how often have I found that what I took for love of Jesus as at the very least affection for His minister was nothing else but selfadoration and that instead of being, as I thought, the happy introducer of souls into the tent of the Poor Pilgrim who came among His own and was not received,¹¹ I had been mistaken for and

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9 Foutief voor 'respectability'.

10 Foutief voor 'losing'.

11 "The happy introducer of souls (...) and was not received" is vermoedelijk een allusie op het evangelie van Johannes, 1, 11 en 14 (Willibrord-vertaling): "In zijn eigen huis is Hij gekomen, en zijn eigen mensen hebben Hem niet opgenomen" en "Ja, het Woord is vlees geworden! Hij is onder ons zijn tent komen opslaan en we hebben zijn heerlijkheid gezien (...)". De bijbelse symboliek

all the while used as a kind of slave and rejected when caught at last cunningly working out some mysterious design of his own. This is only disappointment, whereas, if we attentively read our books we find we are to be looking for

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persecution of some kind or other you as well as I unless you should object to be classified among those “who will lead a pious life in Jesus christ and consequently who shall suffer persecution” what shall we do when it suddenly bursts upon us, perhaps from the very quarter from which we had a right least to expect it? No kindness of men can help us then except of such who are able to and will kindly bring us within reach of Him who alone walks upon the sea of this world and who alone can save us when we begin to sink “And Peter walked upon the water to come to Jesus but seeing the wind strong he was afraid and when he began to sink he cried out: Lord save me! And immediately Jesus stretching forth His hand took hold of him and said to him: o thou of little faith why didst thou doubt?¹²

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van de 'tent' verwijst naar de plaats waar Gods heerlijkheid op aarde kwam. Jezus is daarvan als het ware het culminatiepunt: het mensgeworden Woord van God. De verwijzing naar de pelgrim is anderzijds een weinig voorkomende benaming voor Jezus in de bijbel.

12 Matteüs, 14, 30-31.

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