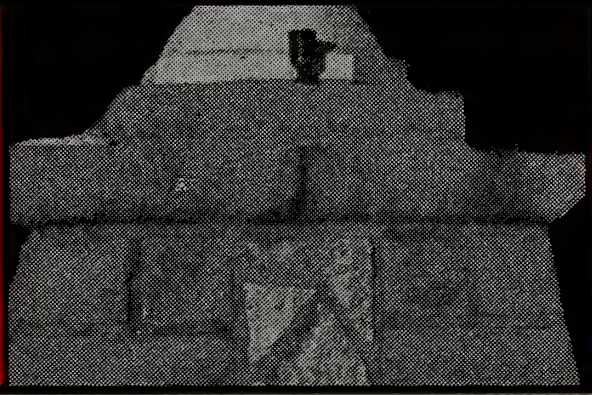




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ROVIDENCE



*by* Paul A. Stauder, S. J.



*A QUEEN'S WORK  
PAMPHLET*



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# PROVIDENCE

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**THE QUEEN'S WORK**

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

# PROVIDENCE

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**M**AYBE you've heard the story of Grandma Brown before, but even if you have, it's worth repeating. Besides, it has a new twist.

Grandma was pushing 70 when she acquired a little cottage near the seashore. It was a lovely place, just suited to her needs. But there was one draw-back; a little rise of ground completely cut off her view of the sea.

And this she didn't like at all, for she loved the sea. Just looking at it soothed her soul. When it was angry, she admired its majesty; when it was calm she wondered at its incredible blue and the soft breezes it wafted to her. But she had to walk to see it, and with her arthritis becoming daily more severe, even the short distance she had to go for her view was becoming increasingly difficult. Finally it became almost impossible.

Now Grandma had always had lively faith, and one day she recalled Our Lord's words, ". . . If you shall say to this mountain take

up and cast thyself into the sea, it shall be done" (Mat. 20:21).

## **NOVENA**

She debated with herself for a while. Our Lord had said mountain, and this was just a little hill. No harm in trying. So she decided to make a novena. Every day for nine days she sat by her window staring at the offending hill, and said her prayers.

On the night of the last day she couldn't sleep. She forced herself to stay in bed, praying and trying to relax. But as soon as it was light enough to see, she skittered out of bed and went to the window. The hill was still there! "Hmpf," said Grandma, "just as I thought!"

Now let's not condemn Grandma too quickly. Or say that her faith was not strong enough to move mountains. She knew very well and believed firmly that God could remove her hill if He wanted to. And that if it suited His purpose, He would. But she knew, too, that He is more interested in our spiritual than in our material welfare. That He is far more concerned with our souls than our real estate.

## **BULLDOZER**

But sometimes God works in strange ways. At 9 o'clock she

heard a strange noise outside. She hastened to the window as fast as her poor arthritic legs could carry her. And there she saw a strange sight. A huge bulldozer was attacking her hill with a vigor that promised the obnoxious obstruction to her view of the sea would be gone in a fortnight.

“Well! What do you know!” said Grandma, and humbly begging God to forgive her lack of confidence, fell to her aching knees and said a fervent prayer of thanksgiving. And added another for the enterprising person who engaged the man on the bulldozer.

This story deals with the theological virtue of faith by which we firmly believe all that God has revealed, on His authority, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. I propose to treat here of the virtue of trust or confidence in God’s Providence, which is a by-product of faith. Or it might be considered as a part of the virtue of faith, by which we believe that God is constantly guiding this world He made and our own lives in particular. The stronger our faith in this guidance, the easier it will be to keep our hearts at peace in the changing circumstances of our lives.

## HEADS ABOVE WATER

And this is important. This trust will not take away all the trials, sorrows, and difficulties that come to all of us at various times. But it will be a beacon light shining through the dark days and nights that will, if I may thoroughly mix my metaphor, help us keep our heads above water.

And we need this firm and complete confidence in God's Providence in our times. The world today is sitting on a powder keg, and there is grave fear in the hearts of many that the fatalistic dictator behind the iron curtain may, in a fit of reckless miscalculation, set off the fuse to that keg and start another world war which neither side could win, and which could literally change the face of the earth as we know it now. This is a very real threat, about which we don't like to think, but which nevertheless makes us all uneasy.

## IMAGINATION

Besides this world-wide fear of the horrible devastation of all-out war with modern weapons, which, if we let our imaginations dwell on it, would spin us into a perpetual nightmare, we all have our own private and personal fears and worries. It



may be that ill health, loss of employment, or some other misfortune is our lot. If it is not, there is always the possibility of something like that happening. Accident, loss of husband or wife, mother or father or child, sickness, poverty. When it happens to someone else, we are sympathetic, and sincerely so, but it is different when it strikes us.

When something of this sort hits us personally, our plans are upset, the future suddenly becomes black, we see no way out of our difficulty. We become despondent and discouraged. For we all like the skies of our future to be sunny. We like to see the path to our desires, ambitions, and goals wide open before us with no foreseeable road blocks.

But when an unpredictable illness comes to us we at once imagine the worst. When death takes a loved one, we feel the emptiness our loss leaves will last forever. When we take an important examination at school or in applying for a job, we go into a dither of anxiety and are on pins and needles until we get the results. And when, worst of all, we get a spell of the blues or fall into a fit of depression, we're convinced we'll never be happy again.

And all this in spite of the fact that experience teaches us that 99

percent of the time the things we anticipate fearfully turn out better than we expected. It's fear of that one percent that causes most of our troubles. We're like the man in the cartoon. He sat on the porch in his rocking chair, musing, and the caption read: "Well, I'm an old man now; I'm almost 90 years old, and I've had lots of things to worry about in my lifetime. But none of 'em ever happened!"

### **TRUST WHEN TRUST IS HARDEST**

It's at times like those mentioned above when we're feeling low and the future looks dark that we need the trust and confidence in God's guiding and loving Providence. And it's precisely at such times that it's hardest to maintain it. We like to see our own way out of our difficulties, and when we can't we get down. But, as someone has said, "We have to trust God when to simply trust Him seems the hardest thing of all!"

And, as a matter of fact, when we stop to think about it, why shouldn't we trust Him? God is a lot smarter than we are, and His way is better than ours. I'm not saying that all our difficulties will be removed. They are the things that toughen us and put steel and sturdy fibre into our characters.

They almost seem to be necessary too. When everything is rosy, we tend to forget God, to forget that we owe our success to Him because we achieved it only with the talents He gave us. We neglect to thank Him. We think we're pretty smart and clever, and are content to rely on our own resources, forgetting that Our Lord told us, "Without me you can do nothing." And He said *nothing*.

But let some trouble befall us, which He either sends or permits, and we come scurrying back to Him—but quick! We cry out with the Apostles, "Lord, save us, or we perish!" So difficulties, accepted with faith, are good for us. They bring us closer to God and make us realize our utter dependence on Him.

### **ST. THOMAS**

Furthermore, confident reliance on His loving care for us is most pleasing to God. Remember the incident in the Gospel about St. Thomas? He was absent when Our Lord appeared to the other Apostles on the night of the first Easter, and refused to believe unless he could put his finger into the wounds in Jesus' hands and feet, and lay his hand in the wound in His side. A week later, Our Lord met his condi-

tions, and Thomas cried out, "My Lord and My God!"

Then our risen Savior gave to all future believers the consoling proof of how pleasing to Him is our faith and confidence in Him: "Because thou has seen, Thomas," He said, "thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed."

And that means all of us in every aspect of our lives, in little things and big things, especially in circumstances that make us realize our own insufficiency and need for complete reliance on Him. God is always with us, and we must try to strengthen our faith in that promise—He has said the same thing in other words and circumstances too—as much as we can.

The surgeon needs, and acknowledges the need, of this reliance on God's help when he realizes that his professional skill and modern medical techniques are not sufficient to cure his patient. The patient himself must rely on God to make him well.

## **TALENTS**

The school boy (or girl) who finds himself in the difficult position of having an older brother who is part genius, while he by slaving at his books gets barely passing grades,

must accept his lesser talents and be confident that if he uses those talents as best he can, God will help him lead a good, useful, and happy life. And, incidentally, because this inequality happens so frequently, parents must accept the same fact with the same confidence.

The expectant mother who had a difficult time with a previous child must put her trust in God for a safe delivery, and, I might add, in the Church's blessing for pregnant women, which any priest will be glad to give her.

Susie, who has just graduated from secretarial school, and is in a dither before starting her first job, can and must rely on God's help to see her through.

The young married couple having their first serious difference of opinion must trust in God and the graces He gives them by virtue of their Sacrament of Matrimony to meet this crisis and the others that will inevitably arise.

When mother is elected president of the P.T.A., and must give her first speech, or when junior is chosen to give the valedictory at his high school graduation, they must trust in God's help, after they have done their best to prepare, to chase

the butterflies out of their stomachs when they face their audiences.

### **ANOTHER MOTIVE**

That brings up two points of importance in this matter of Providence. The first is that we must cooperate with God. St. Ignatius Loyola put it this way: "We have to act as if everything depended on ourselves, and at the same time pray as if it all depended on God." The second point is that when we anticipate with apprehension any of these things mentioned, or similar ones, we don't have the grace we need then; but it will be there to help us when the event comes. Another motive for trusting God.

Some of these examples mentioned are relatively minor. But God likes us to put our trust in Him in little things too, with a childlike—not childish—confidence.

One of the most difficult tests of our faith and trust arises when a loved one becomes ill, and we can do nothing to help him (or her). The doctors do everything they can, but still our dear one suffers. We stand by and watch powerless. We pray and recommend him to God, and then must acknowledge that His will is best. Our loved one may recover, or he may not. In either case we have to accept the outcome

with complete trust and confidence that God's wise, loving, and overall design is still working, and that "all things work together unto good for those who love the Lord."

### **MOST IMPORTANT POINT**

And now we come to the most important point of all in this discussion of divine Providence. In all the examples I have given in which we must rely on God's help, the result we desire may not be the one we get, or it may not come when we want it, or in the precise manner we want. We may have to bear with chronic illness or a handicap or the loss of one who is dear to us. Susie may be a flop on the first job; she may be fired after her first month, and have to try again. Junior may fall flat on his face as he climbs the stairs to the stage for his valedictory, forget his speech and be utterly humiliated.

For God's Providence has one prime object beside which all others fade into insignificance. Grandma Brown understood this when she prayed to have her hill removed, but realized that God is more interested in our souls than in our real estate. The one thing He wants is our soul's salvation. And all His care for us, His guidance of our

lives, and the graces He gives us are directed to that one end.

Unless we accept this fact we can never be at peace nor understand God's Providence. We have to realize and be utterly convinced that our life on earth is only a prelude to the life to come. That death is not the end of all, but only the beginning. That the day on which we die is our true birthday. That death in the state of grace is the ultimate and only lasting success. That if we succeed in this, no matter what the bitter failure or distress we suffer on earth, our life is a glorious success; if we fail in this, no matter what fame, fortune, or material achievement we attain on earth, all is lost, and we are miserable, tragic, hopeless failures.

This truth is the foundation, the corner stone of our faith. It is in the light of this truth that our trust in God's Providence's must operate. It was for this, namely, to ransom our immortal souls and lead us to heaven that our blessed Lord, was born, lived, suffered, died, and rose again. It is this truth that enables us to take up all the crazy, mixed-up pieces of the jig-saw puzzle that is our life on earth and fit them together into the beautiful pictorial biography that is at once



our true success and a glorious tribute to God's loving Providence in our regard.

## TRUTH

This truth is the only thing that can explain the injustices, the inequalities of opportunity and circumstances we see all about us. Life makes no sense without it. With it, everything becomes clear. Some people enjoy good health, others must bear illness all their lives. Some men go off to war and come back maimed, others go unscratched. Some people inherit wealth, some work hard and earn barely enough to subsist. Some of us are fortunate enough to have been born in a land where we can enjoy true freedom; others are born behind the iron or bamboo curtains in virtual slavery.

This good fortune of birth in a land of freedom is a precious gift of God's loving Providence in our regard, and how seldom we thank Him for it. We take it for granted and even feel a bit superior because of it, whereas we had nothing to do with that at all. This so-called "accident" of birth is a pure gift of God, and we should thank Him for it from the bottom of our hearts, especially for the freedom to worship Him, which is denied to so

many of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Of course, the fact that God's Providence is directed primarily to our soul's salvation doesn't mean that we may not pray for lesser things. We may pray for anything that is not evil. For grace we may pray absolutely—without any condition, especially for that all-important grace of final perseverance. And for strength to practice virtue and live good, courageous Christian lives; to accept our crosses as cheerfully as possible, with reliance on Him to see us through; to avoid sin; to recognize that the humdrum monotony of daily life is our way to sanctification.

For such things we may pray absolutely, for we know that such desires are God's desires. He wants the salvation of every soul and gives each one the grace necessary to achieve it. For other things we should pray with the proviso, if it be God's will. And if it is, He will grant our petition.

But God sees the whole picture; we see only our own immediate wishes. Sometimes we want something almost violently and storm heaven with our prayers. But God knows that if He granted our request, it would be the worst possible

thing for our spiritual welfare. Should God grant such a "favor"? Would mother give baby the butcher knife to play with even if he insisted on screaming his healthy young lungs out for it?

### **BUSY INTERSECTION**

From my office on the sixth floor I can see an intersection busy with heavy traffic. One day the cars were lined up three abreast waiting for the green light. It came, but the three motorists at the head of the line didn't budge. Horns honked angrily. What the honkers couldn't see was that somebody's old grandmother was creeping across the street leaning on her cane. The honking motorists couldn't see why the three in front didn't move at once, but from my vantage point I could. That's the way it often is with us. We ask for something and can't see why we don't get it. But God who sees the whole picture, knows it would be harmful, and so, of course, He doesn't grant it.

We get impatient, too, when our prayers aren't answered immediately. We must remember though that *no prayer* is ever unanswered. God hears and *answers* every prayer, if not when we want, then later; if not with what we want, then with something better. We have

God's word for that. He has promised that if we ask, we shall receive. But notice; He didn't say what or when we should receive, but that we would receive. And He is so loving and so anxious to help us that we can surely trust Him with complete confidence that what we shall receive is best for us. Didn't He die for us? And give us the Blessed Eucharist so that we could pour out our hearts to Him and tell Him our needs and worries and fears in the incredible intimacy of Holy Communion?

### HEAVEN

Another thing we have to remember when we are appalled and down-hearted by the injustices and inequalities mentioned before, is heaven. Heaven is so wonderful, our happiness there will be so complete, our reward there for all our suffering, trials, misfortunes, so great, that it will more than abundantly make up for all we have undergone on earth. St. Paul, after a vision of heaven, cried out in ecstasy that eye has not seen nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him. He didn't even try to describe what he had seen. He couldn't.

Heaven is important, and we should think of it often, for there

all the apparent injustices we see will be straightened out, the inequalities will all be balanced, and the more we have suffered for God, the greater will be our reward.

### MOTIVES

Now we must treat of the motives, or reasons, for putting all our trust and confidence in God. We must see clearly why we can trust Him implicitly and how this complete confidence is justified. I can think of no better way to present these motives than by borrowing from a homily of St. Robert Bellarmine which Jesuit priests read in their breviaries on November 28, the feast of St. Joseph Pignatelli, canonized by our reigning Holy Father, Pius XII.

This homily deals with the virtue of trust, and is very aptly chosen for Father Pignatelli's feast, for it was a virtue he practiced pre-eminently in very trying circumstances. He had scarcely been ordained a Jesuit priest when the members of the Society of Jesus were expelled from his native Spain. Shortly after, when in 1773, Clement XIV, succumbing to political pressure, suppressed the Society, Father Pignatelli was appointed by his provincial to look after his fellow Jesuits, especially the younger mem-

bers who were left homeless in a hostile political climate.

This he did for years with fatherly care and such complete reliance on God's Providence that it was believed by many that what little money he could find to support his charges multiplied in his hands like the loaves and the fishes in the Apostles'. After 41 years of hardship, Father Pignatelli was one of the first to rejoin his beloved Society when it was restored in 1814 by Pius VII. He became master of novices and superior of his whole province, playing a major role in reorganizing the struggling reborn Society. His last years were spent in a small house in Rome, where he died of infirmities of old age. When you think of his arduous life and the fact that he suffered from chronic ill-health, you can see how appropriate it is that his Office should have a sermon on trust in God's Providence.

### **ST. ROBERT BELLARMINE**

Here then is an adaptation of the homily by St. Robert Bellarmine in the priest's Office for the feast of St. Joseph Pignatelli:

“The most efficacious means of freeing ourselves from all worry is the realization of this fact: God

exercises over each one of us a providence so detailed and so careful that we can rest and relax in the absolute assurance of it. We have the proof of this in the fact that God knows everything that can harm or profit us. He is able to take away all the harmful things and wants to do so.

“That He knows is obvious, for He is infinite Wisdom. As St. Peter says ‘Lord, You know all things.’ And Our Lord Himself has said, ‘Your Father knows that you have need of all these things.’

“That He is able is also clear because He is omnipotent and all things pass through His hands. Therefore nothing happens unless He causes or permits it to happen.

“That He wants to help us is evident, because He tells us that we should not be solicitous about what we eat or what we shall wear, because our Father knows we have need of these things and because He feeds the birds and clothes the lilies of the field, and we are worth more to Him than the birds and the flowers.

“Now this promise of Christ refers to all things, even though He gives the specific example of food and clothing, about which we are all so concerned, for He says the

Father knows we have need of all these things. Our Lord has told us too that not a hair of our head shall perish.

“And St. Paul often says we should not worry about anything, and that he wishes us to be without solicitude. St. Peter tells us that we should entrust all our concerns to God, for He has care of us.— Notice the word again, *all* our concerns. Peter here is quoting the Psalm of David. And so, surely if we are Christians, if we believe Christ, if we believe David and Peter and Paul — indeed, if we believe the Holy Spirit, who inspired them, we not only can, but should cast aside all care, and, freed from nagging worries, enjoy a most perfect peace.

“If anyone had an earthly father who had the power, and knew how to defend him from every evil, he would without doubt trust him completely and implicitly. For he could not doubt his father’s willingness to do so. But God is so truly our Father, that in comparison to Him, our earthly fathers scarcely deserve the name. God made us in every way that anything can be said to be made. He created us soul and body; He regenerated us by restoring us to the supernatural life we had lost



by Adam's fall, so that we are again sons of God. He has given us His Holy Spirit who dwells in us, as St. John tells us.

“If anyone feels satisfaction in a thing he has made and takes good care of it, if a father loves his son, then surely God loves us, and takes care of us. For He made us, created us, and shares with us His own divine life. And this is what Moses meant when he said that He is your Father, because He made you, and created you, and owns you.”

There you have it straight from a man who became a priest, an archbishop, a cardinal, was canonized, and declared a doctor of the Universal Church.

## IN SUMMARY

To sum it up: We have seen how faith is often rewarded in strange ways, as in the case of Grandma Brown when God used a bulldozer to answer her prayers. We have seen that confidence in God's Providence is a part of the virtue of faith and is so necessary in our troubled world and in our private lives, that this trust in God is most pleasing to Him, that we should confide in Him in our little problems as well as in our big ones.

We have noted that the primary object of God's Providence in our regard is our soul's salvation, and that His loving guidance of our lives is directed to that all-important end. That He grants our requests or not according to their effect on the good of our souls. Finally, we have seen the motives or reasons why we can trust God implicitly in the homily by a great doctor of the Church, St. Robert Bellarmine.

I conclude with a prayer of confidence: Heavenly Father, you have been so good to me, and to those who are dear to me by special bonds of love, and to all men, that I now make my act of trust and complete submission to your loving care for us. For you, O Lord, are Wisdom, and you know what is best for us; you are Love, and you will only what is good for us; your power to do all things for us is without limit save only that imposed by our own free wills.

For my loved ones, for all men, for myself I pray, O God, that you bestow on us the abundance of your wonder-working grace, that with docile minds, eager hearts, and ready wills, we may know you, love you, and serve you. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.



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