

**SOLID VIRTUE.**



# SOLID VIRTUE

OR

A TREATISE ON THE OBSTACLES TO SOLID  
VIRTUE, THE MEANS OF ACQUIRING,  
AND MOTIVES FOR PRACTISING IT

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

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THURLES

WITH A PREFACE BY

HIS GRACE THE MOST REV. DR. CROKE  
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Œihil Obstat :

**DANIEL M. RYAN.**

*Censor Deput.*

# Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life,

MODEL OF EVERY VIRTUE, AND ITS REWARD,  
SWEET SAVIOUR OF MANKIND, MEEK MONARCH OF ALL HEARTS,  
RULING WITH PEERLESS RIGHT, YET GENTLEST SWAY ;

To Thee, dear Lord,

WITH HOMAGE DEEPEST, AND WITH TENDEREST LOVE,

THIS VERSION IS INSCRIBED,

IN HUMBLE HOPE, AND EARNEST PRAYER,

THAT BY THY MERCY, WHAT IS HEREIN WRIT,

MAY SERVE STILL MORE AND MORE AS TIME GOES ON

TO STAY THE ERRING, AND TO GUIDE THE GOOD,

BY

‘Solid Virtue,’

UNTO HEAVEN AND THEE.



## P R E F A C E.

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**I** HAVE been requested to write a few lines by way of preface to the admirable and well-known work of piety entitled 'Solid Virtue' which, originally composed in Latin by Father Bellécius of the Society of Jesus, and afterwards translated into French by the Abbé Berthon, honorary Canon of the Diocese of Poitiers, is now for the first time given to the public in English, by a member of the Ursuline Community at Thurles.

I feel very sincere pleasure in complying with that request. I do so for many reasons, but notably for this one, that it shall be always a source of legitimate pride, of infinite gratification, and possibly of some merit to me, to have my name associated, even in the humblest way, with a book of devotion destined, as I believe this book to be, to advance numerous souls steadily on the path of Christian perfection, and generally to produce wide-spread and abiding good in

the Cloister, within the Sanctuary, and amongst our lay Catholic people.

‘Solid Virtue’ may well, indeed, be called a golden treatise, for it gives us that which far outweighs silver and gold in value, and which the much-vaunted wealth of this world, supposed by some to be omnipotent, could never enable us to purchase. It tells us in simplest language, and exhaustive detail, of all that goes to constitute genuine devotion, or solid virtue, how it may be practically acquired, what prevents the multitude of believers from attaining it, and how fruitful of choicest grace and happiness it is when attained.

To have acquired solid virtue is simply to be devoted to God. There is, perhaps, no term in the English language that implies more of what is good, and rare, and estimable than the word devotion does, when properly understood. It expresses an ardent attachment, the most absolute dependence, the completest form of self-sacrifice, untiring zeal, the disposition of mind and heart that prompts, or rather impels one to submit unconditionally to the will of another, to study his interests and strive to advance them in everything, to submit to any inconvenience, incur any risk, fearlessly brave all perils, and be reconciled to every manner of privation, for his sake. Thus we say of a very dutiful child that he is devoted to his parents, or of a faithful servant that he is thoroughly devoted to



his master. We say, in like manner, that a person is devoted to ambition or to any other passion, when his chief, or only anxiety is to satisfy it; when he thinks of it often by day and dreams of it by night; and when the contemplation of it so utterly absorbs his attention, that he has little relish for anything else, and but little desire to address himself to any other pursuit.

True devotion, then, in a religious sense, may be said to be the love of God reduced to a settled everyday practice.

From this very simple statement it must be abundantly clear, that we are all bound to aim at the acquisition of what is understood as solid virtue; that we should highly prize every known aid or incentive to it; and that it is a pernicious mistake to think, as many unfortunately have been led to believe, that perfection, in so far as it is at all attainable here below, is the inheritance of but a chosen few, and a thing to be sought after and realised by Religious alone. This is a very common, and I fear, in some instances, a fatal delusion. There were no two Gospels given to the world. There is but one passport to Heaven, and but one high road to everlasting ruin. The Decalogue is the same for all. There is no one privileged to slay or to steal, to take God's holy Name in vain, to tell lies, to profane the Sabbath, to withhold from the

Almighty, or share with any creature whatsoever, the honour and the homage due to Him alone. If you would enter into life, no matter who you are, you must keep the commandments. There exists no special code for men or for women, for cloistered Nun or holy Friar, for priest or layman, for the farmer who tills and toils in the fields, or for the domestic servant who tidies up our household, for the statesman who legislates for a mighty empire, or for the soldier who fortifies and fights for it with his sword. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and thy whole soul, and all thy strength.' This is a universal law. Another universal law is: 'Be ye perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'

It is true, indeed, that professed Religious are bound to a higher degree of perfection than ordinary mortals: but this is because they have solemnly pledged themselves to it by vow, and are otherwise constrained to it by certain rules and constitutions which they voluntarily engaged to observe. But the general position remains unaltered, nevertheless, that we are all bound to aim at perfection, and that we expose ourselves to forfeit a place in Heaven altogether, if we do not strive to secure a high one. 'Solid Virtue' cannot fail to stimulate our ambition in this respect. The source of our lamentable indifference is twofold; blindness of the understanding, which causes

us not to see, or be practically affected by, the hideousness of vice, or the transcendent beauty of virtue; and languor of the will, because of which we neither estimate virtue as we ought, nor feel at all distressed at its absence, according to the well-known maxim that 'there is no longing for that which is unknown.'

I earnestly recommend this work, then, to all who take an interest in their spiritual advancement; and I pray God to bless and reward the pious and devoted Sister who has rendered so great a treasure accessible to the public.

✠ T. W. CROKE,

*Archbishop of Cashel.*

THE PALACE, THURLES.

Oct. 28th, 1879.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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**S**T. IGNATIUS, deeply impressed with these oracles of Scripture: 'Be perfect' (Matt. v. 48), 'be holy' (Levit. xi. 44), 'God wills your sanctification' (1 Thess. iv. 3), earnestly recommends all his Religious 'to neglect nothing for the acquisition of solid and perfect virtue' (Instit. of the Jesuits, 10th part, 2). This most important and salutary advice it is that has inspired us with the idea of this work.

Solid virtue is the state of a soul confirmed in virtue by a long practice of good works. The object of this work is to establish us in that happy state in which our will is, as it were, naturally inclined to elicit supernatural acts on all occasions with promptitude, fervour, purity of intention, and perseverance. In the First Part, we will endeavour to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of the practice of solid virtue; in the Second, we will point out the means of acquiring this virtue; and in the Third, we will explain the motives which urge us to perfect ourselves daily in it. The First Part relates to the Purgative Way, the Second to the Illuminative Way, and the Third to the Unitive

Way: we will explain and demonstrate the truth of these relations at the conclusion of each of the three Parts.

We may reckon six principal obstacles to solid virtue:—venial sin, tepidity, abuse of grace, the predominant passion, human respect, and sloth in rising in the morning. To these six obstacles we will oppose six means of fortifying ourselves in the ways of sanctity:—the perfection of our ordinary actions, meditation, interior recollection, Holy Communion, the particular examen, and a retreat of three days twice a year. Finally, we will also propose six important motives for tending to perfection:—what faith teaches of the excellence of solid virtue, the fear of the evils which befall those who do not practise it, the hope of the blessings of which it is the source, the love of God which demands and merits that we be solidly virtuous, the happiness enjoyed by the perfect, and finally the crown granted to perseverance.

These obstacles, means, and motives are not, it is true, the only ones that might be adduced for the practice of solid virtue; but as they are the most important we will devote ourselves solely to them in the following considerations. Besides, we may refer to them, as to its principle, all that regards ascetic theology, of which they are the most substantial part.

## DOUBLE TABLE,

IN WHICH THE SUBJECTS TREATED OF IN THIS WORK ARE  
ARRANGED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO BE ABLE TO SERVE  
FOR TWO RETREATS OF THREE DAYS.

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### FIRST RETREAT OF THREE DAYS.

#### ORDER OF THE EXERCISES.

##### *The Eve.*

- Consideration.—Of the necessity of Retreat, part 2, ch. 6, art. 1. p. 362.  
Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 20.
- Spiritual Lecture.—The manner of making Retreat, part 2, ch. 6, art. 3,  
numb. 2, p. 376.

#### FIRST DAY.

##### OBSTACLES TO SOLID VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.—Of the malice of venial sin considered in itself, part  
1, ch. 1, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 34. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 24.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Continuation of the same subject, numb.  
3 and 4, and art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 38.
- Examen.—Of the hatred we should entertain for venial sin and the care  
we should take to avoid it, part 1, ch. 1, art. 4, numb. 1 and 2, p. 57.
- Consideration.—Of the effects of tepidity, part 1, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 1,  
2, and 3, p. 69.
- Second Meditation.—Of the Chastisements with which God avenges the  
abuse of grace, part 1, ch. 3, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 85. Imitation,  
bk. 3, ch. 14.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—How prejudicial the Predominant Passion  
is to the soul, part 1, ch. 4, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 106; or  
if preferred, sloth in rising in the morning, part 1, ch. 6, art. 1, 2,  
and 3, p. 159.

## SECOND DAY.

## MEANS OF ACQUIRING SOLID VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.**—Of the advantages of which imperfection in our ordinary actions deprives us, part 2, ch. 1, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 178. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 15.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.**—Of the obstacles to prayer, and the means of making it with fruit, part 2, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 222.
- Examen.**—Of the means of performing our ordinary actions perfectly, part 2, ch. 1, art. 3, numb. 1, p. 192.
- Consideration.**—The happy state of a recollected soul, part 2, c. art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 245.
- Second Meditation.**—Of the injury which redounds to us from negligence in meditation, part 2, ch. 2, art. 1, numb. 1 and 3, p. 201. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 21.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.**—Of the means for acquiring interior recollection, part 2, ch. 3, art. 3, numb. 1, p. 269.

## THIRD DAY.

## MOTIVES WHICH TEND TO THE PERFECTION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.**—Of the rigorous account we shall have to render after death, part 3, ch. 2, art. 1, numb. 3 and 4, p. 423. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 14.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.**—Same subject, 1 and 2, p. 415; and art. 2, numb. 1, p. 427.
- Examen.**—Of the means of alleviating the rigour of the account we shall have to render, part 3, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 440.
- Consideration.**—Of the danger of our salvation if we do not attain to a high sanctity, part 3, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 2, p. 435.
- Second Meditation.**—Those alone die in peace who apply themselves to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 2, numb. 1, p. 464. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 47.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.**—Those alone live happy who apply themselves to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 449.

## THE DAY AFTER THE RETREAT.

- Meditation.**—The privileges granted to our constancy in good, part 3, ch. 6, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 604. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 33.
- Spiritual Lecture.**—Of the injury which our inconstancy in good causes us, part 3, ch. 6, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, 3, and 4, p. 609.



## SECOND RETREAT OF THREE DAYS.

## ORDER OF THE EXERCISES.

*The Eve.*

- Consideration.**—Of the utility of Retreat, part 2, ch. 6, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 366. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 25, numb. 1 and 7.
- Spiritual Lecture.**—Advice for making the exercises of the Retreat with fruit, part 2, ch. 6, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 373.

## FIRST DAY.

## OBSTACLES TO THE ACQUISITION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.**—Of the malice of tepidity, part 1, ch. 2, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 65. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 25, from numb. 7 to the end.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.**—Of human respect, part 1, ch. 5, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 132.
- Examen.**—Of the marks of tepidity and its remedies, part 1, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 76.
- Consideration.**—Of the effects and chastisements of venial sin, part 1, ch. 1, art. 2, numb. 4, p. 46; and art. 3, numb. 2, p. 54.
- Second Meditation.**—Of the abuse of grace, part 1, ch. 3, art. 1, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 85. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 55.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.**—Of the discernment of spirits, part 1, ch. 3, art. 3, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 98; or else of contempt for the judgments of men, part 1, ch. 5, art. 4, numb. 1, p. 145.

## SECOND DAY.

## MEANS OF ACQUIRING SOLID VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.**—Of the injury we do ourselves by the imperfection of our ordinary actions, part 2, ch. 1, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 185. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 19.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.**—Of the flight of dissipating occupations, of the frequent exercises of the presence of God, part 2, ch. 3, art. 3, numb. 2 and 3, p. 278.
- Examen.**—Of the means of performing our daily actions perfectly, part 2, ch. 1, art. 3, numb. 2, p. 197.
- Consideration.**—The unhappy state of a dissipated soul, part 2, ch. 3, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, 3, and 4, p. 259.

- Second Meditation.—Of the advantages of fervour in prayer, part 2, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 1 and 2, p. 211. Imitation, bk. 4, ch. 15.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—Practice of the particular examen, part 2, ch. 5, art. 2, numb. 1, 2, and 3, p. 350.

### THIRD DAY.

#### MOTIVES FOR TENDING TO THE PERFECTION OF VIRTUE.

- First Meditation.—Of the rigorous account we shall have to render after our death, part 3, ch. 2, art. 1, numb. 3 and 4, p. 423. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 14.
- Spiritual Lecture, before noon.—Same subject, numb. 1 and 2, p. 415, and art. 2, numb. 1, p. 427.
- Examen.—Of the means of softening the rigour of the account we shall have to render, part 3, ch. 2, art. 3, numb. 1 and 2, p. 440.
- Consideration.—Of the danger of losing our salvation if we do not attain to high sanctity, part 3, ch. 2, art. 2, numb. 2, p. 435.
- Second Meditation.—Those alone die in peace who apply to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 2, numb. 1, p. 464. Imitation, bk. 3, ch. 47.
- Spiritual Lecture, afternoon.—Those alone live happy who devote themselves to their perfection, part 3, ch. 3, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 449.

#### THE DAY AFTER THE RETREAT.

- Meditation.—Privileges granted to our constancy in good, part 3, ch. 6, art. 1, numb. 1 and 2, p. 604. Imitation, bk. 1, ch. 25, numb. 1 and 7.
- Spiritual Lecture.—Remedies for inconstancy, part 3, ch. 6, art. 3, numb. 1, 2 and 3, p. 618.

# CONTENTS.

---

## PART I.

### OF THE CHIEF OBSTACLES TO THE ACQUISITION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—OF VENIAL SIN	34

#### ARTICLE I.

##### *Of the malice of venial sin considered in itself.*

1. Mortal sin excepted, there is no evil so great as venial sin	34
2. God sovereignly detests venial sin	36
3. The creature cannot of himself make adequate satisfaction for venial sin	38
4. Venial sin combined with mortal is the cause of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ	39

#### ARTICLE II.

##### *Of the malice of venial sin considered in its effects.*

1. It vitiates virtuous actions	41
2. It cools charity	43
3. It in some manner separates the soul from God	45
4. It sullies the soul	46
5. It disposes to mortal sin	47

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the malice of venial sin considered with reference to the punishment it entails.*

	PAGE
1. Chastisements in this life ... ..	49
2. Chastisements in the other life ... ..	54

## ARTICLE IV.

*Of the hatred we should entertain for venial sin and the care with which we should avoid it.*

1. Of the efficacious hatred of venial sin ... ..	57
2. Of the care we should take to avoid venial sin ... ..	59

CHAPTER II.—OF TEPIDITY ... ..	64
--------------------------------	----

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the malice of tepidity.*

1. The tepid soul resembles the field of the slothful man ...	65
2. The life of the tepid man is but a succession of irreligious actions ... ..	66
3. God soon begins to vomit him out of His mouth ... ..	67

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the effects of tepidity.*

1. This spiritual malady is exceedingly difficult to cure ...	69
2. Tepidity exposes the soul to the danger of mortal sin ...	72
3. It exposes us to an irreligious death ... ..	73

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the marks and remedies of tepidity.*

1. Of the marks of tepidity ... ..	76
2. Of the remedies for tepidity ... ..	78

	PAGE
CHAPTER III.—OF THE ABUSE OF GRACE	85

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the abuse of grace.*

1. The need in which we stand of grace	85
2. On the excellence of grace	87
3. Superabundance and efficacy of grace	89

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the chastisements with which God avenges the abuse of grace.*

1. The subtraction of grace is the most terrible punishment of its abuse	91
2. The subtraction of grace is a just and merited chastisement	93
3. The subtraction of grace is the ordinary punishment of its abuse	95

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the discernment of spirits.*

1. Rules for recognising the divine inspiration	98
2. Docility in obeying the divine inspirations	101
3. Motives which should incite us to obey the divine inspirations	103

CHAPTER IV.—OF THE PREDOMINANT PASSION	105
--	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*How detrimental the predominant passion is to our soul.*

1. It is a universal enemy	106
2. It is an obstinate enemy	110
3. It is a dearly-loved enemy	117

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the knowledge of the predominant passion.*

	PAGE
1. Of the motions of the soul and how they are to be distinguished ... ..	115
2. Different means of discovering the predominant passion	116

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the obstacles which prevent us from combating our predominant passion.*

1. Obstinacy in ignoring our disease ... ..	123
2. Diffidence of its cure ... ..	125
3. Negligence in applying efficacious remedies ... ..	127

CHAPTER V.—OF HUMAN RESPECT ... ..	131
------------------------------------	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the folly of human respect.*

1. It causes us to prefer dross to gold ... ..	132
2. Of two evils, it causes us to choose the greater ... ..	133

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the tyranny of human respect.*

1. It keeps us in a degrading servitude ... ..	134
2. It deprives us of innumerable heavenly gifts ... ..	135

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the impiousness of human respect.*

1. It is a sacrilegious contempt of God ... ..	136
2. It is a species of idolatry ... ..	140
3. It is the cause of the destruction of the human race and of the death of Jesus Christ ... ..	141

ARTICLE IV.

*Of the remedies for human respect.*

	PAGE
1. Contempt for the judgments of men ... ..	145
2. Fear of the judgment of God ... ..	152

CHAPTER VI.—OF SLOTH IN RISING IN THE MORNING	159
---	-----

ARTICLE I.

*Sloth in rising is a sin.*

1st Proof	159
2nd Proof	162

ARTICLE II.

*Sloth is a shameful sin.*

1. Sloth renders us an object of derision to others	163
2. It makes us ashamed of ourselves	164

ARTICLE III.

*Sloth is a very pernicious sin.*

1. It injures the success of prayer	164
2. It is a source of tepidity	165
3. It arrests the stream of graces	165
4. Answers to the excuses of the slothful	167

ARTICLE IV.

*Of the means of combating sloth in rising.*

1. Precautions to be taken on the eve	171
2. How we must act at the time of rising	172
3. How we should repair our fault when we have been vanquished by sloth	174

CONCLUSION, IN WHICH IS SHOWN THE RELATION WHICH THIS FIRST PART BEARS TO THE PURGATIVE LIFE	175
---	-----

## PART II.

ON THE PRINCIPAL MEANS OF ATTAINING  
SOLID VIRTUE.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—OF THE PERFECTION OF OUR ORDINARY ACTIONS	178

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the advantages of which the imperfection of our ordinary actions deprives us.*

1. The loss of numberless degrees of grace and glory	...	178
2. The loss of countless other blessings with which the goodness of God is wont to recompense fidelity in performing our ordinary actions perfectly	...	181
3. The loss of the means which conduce to perfection	...	183

## ARTICLE II.

*On the injury we inflict on ourselves by the imperfection of our ordinary actions.*

1. We prepare for ourselves a more gloomy death	...	185
2. A more severe judgment	... ..	187
3. A longer and more rigorous punishment	... ..	190

## ARTICLE III.

*On the means of performing our actions perfectly.*

1. The conditions necessary for the perfection of our actions	...	192
2. Means of performing our actions well	... ..	197

CHAPTER II.—OF FERVOUR IN MEDITATION	... ..	200
--------------------------------------	--------	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the injury that redounds to us from negligence in meditation.*

1. It prevents our advancement in virtue	... ..	201
2. It prevents our producing fruit in souls	... ..	203
3. It exposes us to the proximate danger of losing the grace of God and our religious vocation	... ..	206



ARTICLE II.

*On the advantages of fervour in meditation.*

	PAGE
1. It heals all the maladies of our understanding and our will ... ..	211
2. It is an exhaustless source of spiritual lights and holy consolations ... ..	213
3. It perfects the soul by the abundance of virtues and the excellence of the graces which it obtains for it ...	217

ARTICLE III.

*Of the obstacles to meditation and the means of making it with fruit.*

1. The obstacles to meditation ... ..	222
2. Means of profiting by meditation ... ..	229
3. The method to be observed to produce affections in meditation ... ..	239

CHAPTER III.—OF INTERIOR RECOLLECTION ... ..	244
--	-----

ARTICLE I.

*The happy state of a recollected soul.*

1. It has found a powerful preservative against sin and weariness ... ..	245
2. A very efficacious means of attaining perfection ...	250
3. The source of the choicest graces ... ..	253
4. A paradise on earth ... ..	255

ARTICLE II.

*Unhappy state of a dissipated soul.*

1. Divine Providence in some measure rejects it ...	259
2. An interior aridity dries up its devotion ... ..	262
3. It is no longer useful for the salvation of our neighbour	265
4. God punishes it in various other ways ... ..	266

ARTICLE III.

*Of the means of acquiring interior recollection.*

1. Of the observance of silence and fidelity in remaining in our room ... ..	269
2. The flight of dissipating occupations ... ..	278
3. The frequent exercise of the presence of God ...	284

CHAPTER IV.—OF HOLY COMMUNION ...	...	...	PAGE 291
-----------------------------------	-----	-----	-------------

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the excellence of the Blessed Eucharist.*

1. The dignity of Him who is concealed in this Mystery ...	...	...	292
2. The manner in which Jesus Christ dwells in the Eucharist ...	...	...	292
3. The end for which He remains concealed ...	...	...	293

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the effects of the Eucharist.*

1. The Holy Eucharist is a throne of grace for pious souls	...	...	295
2. The Blessed Eucharist is the tribunal of justice for the tepid ...	...	...	299

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the love of Jesus Christ for us in the Blessed Eucharist.*

1. He gives Himself entire ...	...	...	303
2. He gives Himself to all ...	...	...	305
3. He gives Himself without any distinction of time or place ...	...	...	306

## ARTICLE IV.

*Of the excellence of the Holy Sacrifice and the dignity of Priests.*

1. The excellence of the Holy Sacrifice ...	...	...	311
2. On the dignity of Priests ...	...	...	313
3. Consequences of this doctrine ...	...	...	315

## ARTICLE V.

*On the dispositions and conditions requisite for communicating worthily.*

1. Attention ...	...	...	315
2. Fervour ...	...	...	317
3. Purity of heart and detachment from creatures ...	...	...	320
4. The time necessary ...	...	...	324
Inferanda indè conclusio ...	...	...	329
Quaedam puncta ...	...	...	337

		PAGE
CHAPTER V.—ON THE PARTICULAR EXAMEN ..	—	340

ARTICLE I.

*Of the utility of the particular examen.*

1. It aids us efficaciously to correct our vices ...	...	341
2. It enables us to acquire virtue ...	...	345

ARTICLE II.

*Of the practice of the particular examen.*

1. The matter ... ..	...	350
2. Important advice concerning the examen ...	...	351
3. The manner in which we should make the particular examen ... ..	...	355

CHAPTER VI.—OF THE SPIRITUAL RETREAT OF THREE DAYS ...	—	361
--	---	-----

ARTICLE I.

*Of the necessity of retreat.*

1st Proof ... ..	...	362
2nd Proof ... ..	...	363
3rd Proof ... ..	...	364

ARTICLE II.

*Of the utility of retreat.*

1st Proof ... ..	...	366
2nd Proof ... ..	...	368
3rd Proof ... ..	...	371

ARTICLE III.

*Advice concerning the manner of making the retreat with fruit.*

1. The time in which we should make the retreat ...	...	373
2. The method of making the retreat ...	...	376

CONCLUSION, IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THIS SECOND PART RELATES TO THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY ...	...	379
--	-----	-----

## PART III.

## MOTIVES FOR TENDING TO THE PERFECTION OF VIRTUE.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—WHAT FAITH TEACHES US CONCERNING THE EXCELLENCE OF SOLID VIRTUE	381

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the excellence of Solid Virtue.*

1st Proof	382
2nd Proof	389

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the opposition between our faith and our life.*

1. Proof of this truth by induction	393
2. The contradiction between our life and our faith is disgraceful to us	399

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the sources of the contradiction between our life and our faith, and the remedies for them.*

1. Causes of the diminution of our faith	403
2. Remedies	410

CHAPTER II.—OF THE FEAR OF THE EVILS WHICH WILL BEFALL US IF WE NEGLECT TO ACQUIRE SOLID VIRTUE	414
---	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the rigorous account we shall have to render after death.*

1. The anguish which precedes judgment at the hour of death	415
2. The rigorous examination which our Judge will make	417
3. The unimpeachable authority of the witnesses	423
4. The severity of the sentence	425

ARTICLE II.

*Of the danger of our being lost.*

	PAGE
1. There are some who will be lost if they do not attain to high sanctity ... ..	427
2. It is probable that we are of that number ... ..	435

ARTICLE III.

*Of the means of mitigating the severity of the account we shall have to render, and of avoiding the danger of being lost.*

1. Means of mitigating the severity of the sentence we shall have to undergo ... ..	439
2. Means of avoiding the loss of our salvation ... ..	444

CHAPTER III.—OF THE HOPE OF THE GOODS THAT ARE TO BE OBTAINED BY THE PRACTICE OF SOLID VIRTUE ... ..	447
--	-----

ARTICLE I.

*Those alone live happy who devote themselves to their perfection.*

1st Proof ... ..	449
2nd Proof ... ..	453
3rd Proof ... ..	457

ARTICLE II.

*Those alone die in peace who devote themselves to their perfection.*

1. The just man dies in peace, because death puts a term to his past labours ... ..	464
2. The death of the just man is peaceful, owing to the sweet joys by which it is accompanied ... ..	469
3. The just man dies in peace because he is not uneasy concerning his future ... ..	479

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the vice opposed to hope which causes us to despair of perfection.*

	PAGE
1. Our disposition ... ..	487
2. Our state of life ... ..	493
3. The difficulty of the labour ... ..	497

CHAPTER IV.—THE LOVE OF GOD DEMANDS AND MERITS THAT WE PRACTISE SOLID VIRTUE ... ..	502
---	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*God wishes that we should become holy.*

1st Proof ... ..	502
2nd Proof ... ..	510

## ARTICLE II.

*God merits that we should become holy.*

1. Because God gives Himself to us without reserve ...	518
2. Because Jesus Christ has also given Himself unreservedly to us ... ..	528
3. Because in giving everything to God we give Him but little ... ..	534

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the marks of divine love and of self-love.*

1. The marks of divine love ... ..	539
2. The characteristics of self-love ... ..	548

CHAPTER V.—OF THE HAPPINESS RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR THE VIRTUOUS ... ..	565
--	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the plenitude of the happiness of the saints.*

1. This happiness is inexpressible ... ..	566
2. It is communicated to the elect with a perfect plenitude	570

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the eternity of the happiness of the saints, and of the certainty which they possess of never losing it.*

	PAGE
1. The happiness of the saints shall be eternal ...	588
2. The saints shall possess their happiness without fear of losing it ... ..	583

## ARTICLE III.

*The consequences which we should draw from these truths.*

1. We should avoid all that could alienate us from heaven	588
2. We should do all that can lead to heaven .. ...	593
3. We should bear everything that can augment our glory in heaven ... ..	600

CHAPTER VI.—OF FINAL PERSEVERANCE ... ..	603
--	-----

## ARTICLE I.

*Privileges awarded to our constancy in good.*

1. It assimilates us to the saints and to God Himself ...	604
2. It gives us a firm hope of final perseverance and of our eternal predestination .. ...	605
3. It perfects and crowns the other virtues ... ..	607
4. It is itself a special virtue ... ..	607
5. We owe to it the consummation of our salvation ...	608

## ARTICLE II.

*How prejudicial inconstancy in good is to us.*

1. It renders all our past merits useless ... ..	609
2. It leads us to perdition ... ..	612
3. It augments the trials and difficulties of virtue ...	613
4. It renders us deserving of contempt ... ..	615

## ARTICLE III.

*Remedies for inconstancy.*

	PAGE
1. Consideration of the motives for perseverance ...	617
2. Frequent union with Jesus Christ present in the Blessed Eucharist ... ..	620
3. To foresee and despise the difficulties of virtue ...	621
CONCLUSION, IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT THIS THIRD PART REFERS TO THE UNITIVE LIFE ... ..	623



# SOLID VIRTUE.



## PART I.

OF THE CHIEF OBSTACLES TO THE ACQUISITION OF SOLID VIRTUE.

**T**HE fruit to be derived from the considerations presented in this work should be an earnest and persevering effort to acquire solid virtue. To compass this end, it is absolutely necessary to commence by removing the chief obstacles to its attainment. If this be not our first care, all will end in useless desires, and our exertions will be fruitless.

These obstacles are venial sin, tepidity, abuse of grace, the predominant passion, human respect, and sloth in rising in the morning. All these vices injure the life of grace, conspire to destroy the soul, impair its merits, and ruin the work of its perfection; so long as they exist there can be no hope of our acquiring solid virtue. In this first part of the work, therefore, which corresponds to the purgative way, we shall apply ourselves exclusively to the destruction of the smallest vestige of those things so detrimental to our spiritual progress.

## CHAPTER I.

## OF VENIAL SIN.

MORTAL sin extinguishes charity, banishes the Holy Ghost, withdraws us from our last end which is God, inflicts death on the soul, closes heaven against it, and leads straight to hell.

There can be no question, then, of reckoning this monstrous evil, the very mention of which fills the friends of God with horror and dismay, amongst the obstacles to our progress in virtue. We shall not allude to it here.

Venial sin, according to the Doctors of the Church, is the first obstacle to our perfection. To learn how to avoid it, and to stimulate ourselves to do so, let us reflect that it is a great evil—1st, in itself; 2nd, in its effects; and 3rd, in the chastisement it involves.

We will conclude this chapter by examining whether we entertain a genuine hatred of venial sin and a firm resolution to fly even the least faults.

## ARTICLE I.

1. *Of the malice of venial sin considered in itself.*

Mortal sin excepted, there is no evil so great as venial sin.

According to a revelation made to St. Catherine of Genoa, venial sin is a greater evil than all others combined, even including death and hell. St. John Chrysostom, St. Anselm, St. Dorotheus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and all the Fathers unanimously hold this doctrine; and Aristotle, guided by the light of reason alone, teaches

that 'we should prefer to die rather than commit an action contrary to virtue.'<sup>1</sup> To these testimonies a convincing argument is added by St. Thomas, who tells us that, 'the punishment inflicted on sin participates less than the guilt in the nature of evil.'<sup>2</sup> Now, all the pains of this life, nay, even those of hell itself, being but the just punishment of sinners, it follows that the most trivial fault is a greater evil than all those. Besides, God, the essential and infinite sanctity, cannot be the author of sin, though, according to the Theologians, He is the author and positive cause of the punishment of sin. It is true, therefore, 'that the punishment of sin is a lesser evil than the sin itself,'<sup>3</sup> and we should prefer to fall into hell rather than be guilty of it.

Children of men, I will cry out with the Prophet, 'Give ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.'<sup>4</sup> The least venial sin is a greater evil than all others, not excepting death or hell. The only inference to be drawn from this truth is, that if by the smallest venial sin we could avert the greatest evils and obtain the most substantial and desirable goods for the whole human race, we should not thereby be justified in committing it. Oh! thou who makest light of venial sin, 'drinking iniquity like water,'<sup>5</sup> would to Heaven that this 'were deeply graven on the stone'<sup>6</sup> of thy heart.

Yes, could we by a trivial lie avert all kinds of diseases, wars, famine, conflagrations; could we dispel all sorrows, re-establish our reputation, insure the union of families, preserve our country from imminent calamities; could we, by an impossibility, abridge or prevent the persecutions of Antichrist and extinguish all the

<sup>1</sup> Ethic.<sup>2</sup> 1, q. 48, a. 6.<sup>3</sup> Ibid.<sup>4</sup> Isai. xxviii. 23.<sup>5</sup> Job xv. : 6.<sup>6</sup> Job xix. 24.

fires enkindled by the Divine Justice in the other life, it would not be permitted us to tell that little lie. What do I say? If by a slight emotion of anger we could obtain the conversion of heretics, infidels, and idolators, release from hell and purgatory all the souls therein detained, could we insure the salvation of all mankind, we should not be justified in committing that venial sin. This is a certain truth attested by all the Fathers and Theologians of the Church. It is a dogma of the Christian Faith which cannot be controverted without impiety. The destruction of the world at the end of time, the consternation of nations, the eternal reprobation of the damned, are a less evil than the commission of a venial sin. All these evils only affect the creature, but sin, even such as is only venial, is an injury to God; it saddens and wounds His heart. In proportion, therefore, as the creature is inferior to the Creator, is sin an evil greater than all others.

Between God and the creature there is an infinitely greater disparity than between man and an insect; but since man sacrifices the life of an insect the moment he receives the least inconvenience from it, it must then be incomparably better to consent to the utter annihilation of the whole universe than to offend the Sovereign Majesty by even a light fault.

And yet, 'O ye heavens be very desolate;'<sup>1</sup> men, nay, religious, are to be found who presume to allege this culpable excuse, 'it is only a venial sin!' Oh! how differently we shall regard it at the hour of death

## 2. *God sovereignly detests venial sin.*

Such is the malice of this sin and such the hatred with which the sanctity of God pursues it, that even

<sup>1</sup> Jerem. ii. 12.

should a soul be enriched during its sojourn here with all the purity of virgins, the faith and constancy of the martyrs, the zeal of the apostles, and the perfection of St. John the Baptist, still should a single light fault remain unexpiated, God would keep that soul separated from Him till it should have been purified in the flames of purgatory.

Furthermore, if by an impossibility a saint in heaven were, by the least sin, to fall from the state of confirmed sanctity, which is the prerogative of the intuitive vision, that very instant, rejected from the bosom of God with the rapidity of lightning, it would be precipitated into purgatory, there to atone for a transient forgetfulness, a momentary weakness of the will. 'Nothing defiled can enter heaven,'<sup>1</sup> such is the oracle of the Holy Ghost. For the same reason nothing defiled could remain there one second.

Consider, you who are so indifferent about venial sin, who it is that shall be the avenger of it, and on whom and through what motives He shall exercise the severity of His wrath. It is the God of all goodness, He whose mercy is above all His works. Yes, He it is who for a single venial sin would so severely exercise the rights of His justice on the saints, His most beloved friends.

Nor does God punish beyond what is just; on the contrary, His Heart is a very furnace of love and mercy.

The saints themselves would willingly cast themselves from their thrones of glory into the fire of hell rather than be guilty of the least transgression. They would even esteem themselves happy could they, by enduring these devouring flames, prevent a light fault. And this

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. xxi 27.

heroic disposition is but simple justice, since, according to several learned Theologians, one venial sin does more injury to God than the united and eternal praises of the saints give Him glory.

Again reflect, you who contemn venial sin, and weigh its grievousness, not in the deceitful balance of human judgment, but in the unerring scales of the sanctuary.

Behold in what light God, Jesus Christ, and the saints regard such a fault, whilst you have the temerity to excuse it. The saints tremble at the idea of venial sin; the mere shadow of it makes the angels shudder and fills the heart of the Queen of Angels with anguish. And man, vile clay, has the audacity to commit it every moment in presence of the adorable Trinity, counting as nought the injury that results from it to God! Can it be possible that man alone regards as insignificant what the saints view as the greatest of evils, mortal sin excepted? Is it possible that a Christian, a religious especially, should make light of a fault for which he shall one day have to render a strict account? Nothing can be light by which the Sovereign Majesty is offended, nor can any fault be trivial which the sanctity of God condemns.

### *3. The creature cannot of himself make adequate satisfaction for venial sin.*

To realise more fully the inconceivable malice of this sin, let us suppose that all the saints, prostrate before the throne of the Most High, were to offer him their united merits to atone for one venial sin; the Seraphim to present Him their love; the Patriarchs their faith; the Prophets their courage; the Apostles their preachings; the Pontiffs their zeal; the Martyrs their blood; the

Confessors their penance; the Virgins their purity; the august Mother of God her incomparable sanctity. It would all be useless. These merits would bear no proportion to the offence offered to the Almighty by that venial sin. No one, not even the just man, with the merit of the habitual grace which enriches his soul, can, of himself, adequately satisfy for his own sin or that of his neighbour.

Let us maturely weigh the extent and bearings of our proposition. A lie told in jest, a slight emotion of anger, tepidity at prayer, include a transgression of so serious a nature that the burning love of the Seraphim, the eternal praise of the blessed, and the powerful prayers of the saints offered to the 'Lamb as sweet odours in golden vials,'<sup>1</sup> are not meet satisfaction for such a sin.

How deplorable is our blindness when we commit it so unconcernedly!

4. *Venial sin combined with mortal is the cause of the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ.*

*Come, Angels of peace,*<sup>2</sup> come in mourning and desolation to see your God expire. But thou, sinner, listen and tremble. Those light faults, which thou regardest as trifles, have caused the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and have robbed Him of life. 'He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins;'<sup>3</sup> 'He is dead for our sins,'<sup>4</sup> and even for our venial sins, for which also He has satisfied His Eternal Father by His passion. Yes, sinner! The Lamb without spot was covered with wounds on account of thy vain, idle, lying words; He was bruised on account of thy irreverences

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. v. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Isai. xxxiii. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Isai. liii. 5.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 3.

and distractions at prayer; 'He was accounted amongst the wicked'<sup>1</sup> to expiate thy jealousy, thy vanity, thy pride, and thy detractions. In fine, 'He has borne in His body'<sup>2</sup> the punishment due even to thy venial sins.

By each of thy venial sins thou hast added new torments to the passion and sufferings of Jesus Christ; thou hast committed a crime for which this loving Saviour was bound, laden with chains, scourged, crowned with thorns—a crime, in a word, which, combined with mortal sin, consummated on the cross a horrible deicide. What, unhappy soul! thou beholdest the consequences of thy sin, and yet thou abhorrest it not? Thy heart is not broken with sorrow. It is, then, harder than the rocks which split at the death of the Saviour.

But the malice of venial sin does not end here. Not content with having once shed the blood of a God, it daily renews the atrocious insults that accompanied the torment of Calvary—a torment which spread consternation through all nature 'when the sun was darkened, the graves opened, the veil of the Temple was rent.'<sup>3</sup> If mortal sin crucifies again the Son of God, venial sin, according to the Fathers, renews against our Divine Master the ignominy of the derisions, blows, and insults. And yet man has the temerity to style such a fault light! O heavens! to strike the Son of God, to tear His hair, to cover His venerable face with spittle! Is this, then but a light offence?—to load you with insults, O Divine Jesus! to overwhelm you with ignominy and outrages would, at most, be but a pardonable thoughtlessness in a Christian! Ah! who can restrain the thunderbolts of heaven from avenging such conduct!

<sup>1</sup> *Isai.* liii. 12.<sup>2</sup> *1 Peter* ii. 24.<sup>3</sup> *Luke* xxiii. 45.



‘Woe to you who drag these iniquities like a long chain.’<sup>1</sup> Woe to you, for the just avenger ‘is about to come, and He will not delay.’<sup>2</sup>

My God, ‘may my eyes shed torrents of tears,’<sup>3</sup> may they never cease to weep, because my offences ‘exceed in number the hairs of my head.’<sup>4</sup> ‘I have sinned, I have done evil in Thy sight,’<sup>5</sup> and a very great evil, when I committed even a venial sin; but for Thy love, my God, I am sorry for it with my whole heart. Terrified at its turpitude, I resolve never again, at least with full deliberation, to allow it to sully my soul.

I promise, ‘O living God, in whose sight I stand,’<sup>6</sup> ‘that as long as breath remaineth in me my lips shall not speak iniquity, neither shall my tongue contrive lying.’<sup>7</sup> I will willingly relinquish all I possess, and suffer all evils rather than ‘deliver my soul’<sup>8</sup> even to venial sin. But Thou knowest, O my God, that of myself I can but sin and lose my soul; deign, then, ‘to confirm what Thou hast wrought in us,’<sup>9</sup> ‘and assist us to accomplish the good resolutions Thy grace has inspired us to make.’

## ARTICLE II.

*Of the malice of venial sin considered in its effects*

### 1. *It vitiates virtuous actions.*

Venial sin is a very great evil in its effects. As ‘dying flies spoil the sweetness of the ointment,’<sup>11</sup> so venial sin corrupts virtuous actions; and when it affects the foundation or principal intention of them it diminishes their value to such a degree that, ceasing to be

<sup>1</sup> Isai. v. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. xxxix. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Job xxvii. 3.

<sup>10</sup> St. Aug.

<sup>2</sup> Habac. ii. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. l. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Eccles. xix. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. cxviii. 136.

<sup>4</sup> 4 Kings iii. 14.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. lxvii. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Eccles. 10. 1

acts of a supernatural order, they no longer merit eternal rewards. 'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, that you may be seen by them, otherwise you shall have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.'<sup>1</sup> What conclusion are we to come to from these words of Jesus Christ, unless it be that virtue itself, if it originate in vain glory, shall receive no recompense in eternity?

But a thought of vain glory which determines us to the performance of a good work, being only a venial sin,<sup>2</sup> it follows that the fact of being vitiated in its motive by this species of sin suffices to rob an action of all its value and merit. St. Jerome affirms that, 'martyrdom itself, if endured solely to win human applause, would be a fruitless sacrifice,'<sup>3</sup> destitute of all merit in the sight of God. St. Thomas, examining this question of venial sin, decides that, 'if an action be performed through vain glory it is no longer meritorious of eternal life, even though this bad disposition should not amount to mortal sin.'<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere he thus confirms this doctrine: 'though the action of him who gives alms through vanity be not bad under all its relations, still the act of the will is altogether wicked.'<sup>5</sup> It is true, therefore, that when venial sin so far influences the will as to be its directing principle, it is a poison which vitiates and completely destroys our good actions. Though our life were a continual prayer, though we should dispense treasures into the bosom of the poor, macerate our body by penance, exceed the angels in purity, excel the good

<sup>1</sup> Matt. vi. 1.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas expressly says that the vain glory against which Jesus Christ here warns us is only a venial sin.

<sup>3</sup> On 1st Chap. of Epist. to Gal.

<sup>4</sup> St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 132, a. 3.

<sup>5</sup> St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 19, a. 7.

Samaritan in charity, and at the same time practise patience, humility, and obedience in an heroic degree, still all these virtues would be devoid of merit should our heart unhappily imbibe the poison of pride, self-love, or sensuality, and those apparently laudable actions would degenerate into faults deserving of punishment.

Finally, though we should offer a pure intention to God on awaking, being careful to renew it frequently during the day, still the commission of a venial sin weakens its influence; it diminishes and sometimes even nullifies the value of our works till they be consecrated by a new oblation.

My soul! venial sin has mingled a base alloy with the gold of thy good works. With diabolical craft it has contrived to rob thee of the heavenly treasures thou mightest have each day amassed; it has robbed of its fairest ornaments the heavenly crown that it destined for thee.

Each time that it has so far insinuated itself as to exercise a directing influence on our actions, it has annihilated their merit and bereft us of so many degrees of eternal glory.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, we find it difficult to detest it; we even love and cherish it!

## 2. *It cools charity.*

Another lamentable effect of venial sin is, that it not merely vitiates virtuous actions and impedes our increase of merits, but it likewise 'diminishes' in us the 'fervour of charity'<sup>1</sup> by rendering us so slothful in the service of God and so callous to our eternal interests

<sup>1</sup> St. Thom. 3, q. 79, a. 4.

that the heart of our Divine Master cannot long tolerate our tepidity.

‘ A servant of God must avoid the least faults, if he would not soon see his love grow cool’<sup>1</sup> and a mortal languor take possession of his soul. Religious themselves, notwithstanding the powerful grace of their vocation, if they allow themselves to entertain ‘ a contempt for small faults, insensibly lose their fervour ’<sup>2</sup> and fall into tepidity, a state whose fatal effects should induce us to fly it as the empoisoned source of countless evils. Yes; sad experience teaches that even the slightest faults lead us unawares to tepidity. See a man who commits them almost every moment without scruple: his soul grows languishing; the exercises of piety disgust him; he practises no self-imposed mortifications; shrinks from everything that requires the least effort; commences slothfully and continues apathetically whatever he undertakes, so that no, or at least very little, fruit results from anything he does. Completely engrossed with earthly things, those of heaven are perfectly insipid to him: he has not courage to restrain his sensual appetites, he tires of meditation, and religious practices of all kinds are irksome to him; he is hurried on to vice as by a natural tendency; self-indulgence and the gratification of the senses seem to be the one object of his life. With virtue thus enfeebled, how can the fervour of charity be preserved, or rather, how can it fail to be extinguished altogether? What pen could depict in sufficiently vivid colouring a misfortune so great? So perfect and precious a gift is the charity of God, or, if you will, sanctifying grace which ‘ is poured forth in our hearts,’<sup>3</sup> that there is nothing which

<sup>1</sup> Life of St. Laur. Justinian.

<sup>2</sup> St. Anselm.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 5.

can bear the remotest comparison with it. When you renounce it, therefore, O soul created for heaven, what a loss do you not sustain? Now, 'venial sin' indirectly 'attacks the possession of this inestimable treasure' and 'paves the way to its utter loss.'<sup>1</sup> Not that venial sin immediately destroys or even gradually diminishes sanctifying grace, but it arrests its progress and leads the way to its ruin by causing the soul that commits it to fall into tepidity. Thus, St. Thomas teaches that, 'though charity, according to its nature, cannot be diminished directly, it can nevertheless be diminished indirectly by venial sin, which is a disposition to the corruption and loss of this virtue.'<sup>2</sup> Charity, it is true, 'is a devouring fire and a consuming flame'<sup>3</sup> but the ardours of this divine virtue are extinguished by a multitude of venial sins, as fire is extinguished by too great a quantity of super-incumbent ashes.

### 3. *It in some manner separates the soul from God.*

'Venial sin,' says St. Thomas, 'by attracting our will towards a created object, weakens its love for the Sovereign Good and thus establishes the commencement of a divorce between them.'<sup>4</sup> Oh! fearful thought! Could there be anything more calculated to inspire us with a horror of this sin?

Christian soul, weigh well this truth: a venial sin does not entirely separate you from God, but it begins to withdraw you from Him: it renders you less worthy the cares of His especial Providence and of that love of predilection with which He protects the just man from

<sup>1</sup>St. Thom. 2, 2, q. 24, a. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Cant. viii. 6.

<sup>3</sup>St. Thom. 2, 2, q. 24, a. 10

<sup>4</sup>St. Thom. 3, q. 87, a. 1.

evil, loads him with blessings, and makes all things 'work together unto good.'<sup>1</sup>

After your sin this infinitely loving Father no longer receives you as affectionately as He was wont to do; He no longer opens His arms to you with His accustomed tenderness.

But if grace suffer a diminution, what will become of you? Alas! assailed by a thousand temptations, exposed almost alone to the darts of the enemy, will you not experience disastrous defeats? At present you give yourself but little concern about the imminence of your danger and the withdrawal of the divine assistance of which you as little comprehend the value as you fear the consequences of your fall; but woe to you if your reflections on it be postponed till eternity dawns upon you!

#### 4. *It sullies the soul.*

Venial sin imprints a shameful stain on the soul which disfigures and dishonours it in the sight of God. 'It is a stain which tarnishes the lustre of innocence and obscures the natural beauty of the soul.'<sup>2</sup> 'A loathsome leprosy which does not, it is true, deprive it of life, but which covers it over with its horrible deformity.'<sup>3</sup> 'It is a hideous wound which makes us an object of loathing to our heavenly Spouse and deprives us of His chaste embraces.'<sup>4</sup> And yet, in spite of all this, we give it free access to our heart on every occasion that offers!

How different were the sentiments of the saints respecting this sin. St. Catherine of Genoa would have preferred to be cast into a fiery furnace, St. Anselm to

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> St. Basil on 4th chap. Isai.

<sup>3</sup> St. Cæsarius of Arles Homil.

<sup>4</sup> St. Aug.

be precipitated into hell, St. John Chrysostom to be possessed by the devil, rather than consent to the least fault, whilst we multiply them incessantly. Day after day we accumulate them, forgetting that the most ordinary and at the same time the most dreadful effect of a habit of venial sin is to plunge the soul into the abyss of mortal sin and thence into hell.

5. *It disposes to mortal sin.*

Oh, awful effect of venial sin! Hearken, O sinner, you who make a jest of light faults, hearken to this oracle of St. Thomas: 'Frequent falls into venial sin are a disposition to mortal.'<sup>1</sup> Five times in the same article he repeats this proposition, and he even returns to it elsewhere to develop it still more. This teaching is perfectly in accordance with that of all the Fathers of the Church, especially of St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. John Damascene, and St. Gregory. But it is not merely the Fathers who have taught us that venial sin disposes to mortal, the Holy Ghost Himself has done so in these words: 'He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.' He whom this menace fails to inspire with a horror of venial sin is very near his ruin. No one reaches an excess of crime at the first step; and probably there is not a soul in hell to-day who had not sinned venially before falling into mortal sin; so that very frequently eternal damnation is but the sad consequence of a single venial sin.

Not that of itself it deserves eternal punishment, but it gradually conducts to such a degree of prevarication as consummates the ruin of the soul. St. Teresa beheld in a vision the place prepared for her in hell if she per-

<sup>1</sup>St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 88, a. 3.

sisted in a habit she had contracted of idle, worldly conversation with a young relative of a light disposition. And mark, this was not a mortal sin, for she had always sedulously shunned grave faults. My God! if a fault apparently so excusable would have compassed the destruction of that great saint, how should not we tremble considering the many and far more reprehensible habits of which we are the slaves!

You say that possibly your salvation may not depend on these little things; but perhaps also it may depend on them. Will you then risk your soul, your eternity, the possession of God, on so chimerical an alternative?

Had St. Teresa reasoned thus, she would have been lamentably deceived and have perished for ever. Why should you not fear a similar fate? Unhappy you if you persevere in despising venial faults, as the forfeiture of your eternal happiness may possibly be the result of what now causes you so little uneasiness.

Oh, inexcusable folly! the fear of death has sufficient influence over us to induce us to avoid, with the utmost care, all that could impair our health; and yet we deliberately commit venial sin which may imperceptibly lead us to hell.

Ah! let us dread and vigilantly guard against the wily and perfidious serpent which, if cherished in our bosom, would compass the ruin of our immortal soul by the deadly venom of its bite.

Alas! 'my life hath drawn nigh to hell,'<sup>1</sup> 'and I knew not.'<sup>2</sup> Hurried on by my light faults to the brink of the precipice, I was already enveloped with 'the smoke of their torments,' 'which shall ascend for ever and ever,'<sup>3</sup> and I experienced no anxiety.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxxvii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxii. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Apoc. xiv. 11.



Ah! Lord, hadst Thou not hastened to my assistance I should have long since fallen from venial into mortal sin, 'I should dwell with devouring fire, and with everlasting burning.'<sup>1</sup> But, 'O Keeper of men,'<sup>2</sup> who 'hatest the least iniquity,'<sup>3</sup> to Thy creature, 'reach out Thy right hand,'<sup>4</sup> 'lift me up from the gates of death,'<sup>5</sup> 'and lead me on the paths of justice,'<sup>6</sup> in order that I may no longer stray away from Thee, and may shun even the least faults. 'Place Thy Angel with a flaming sword at the gate of my heart to guard the entrance of it.'<sup>7</sup>

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the malice of venial sin considered with reference to the punishment it entails.*

1. *Chastisements in this life.*

Moses is a striking example of the vengeance sometimes exercised by divine justice on venial sin, in this life. He was, says the Holy Scripture, 'beloved of God and men.'<sup>8</sup> 'The Lord spoke to him face to face as a man is wont to speak to his friend.'<sup>9</sup> 'He made him like the saints in glory, He glorified him in the sight of kings.'<sup>10</sup> 'After him no prophet was found like to him in Israel.'<sup>11</sup>

This great man, 'the chief of the princes of Israel, the consecrator of the Pontiffs of the Old Law,'<sup>12</sup> who was always 'superior to his passions, who disdained all the temporal joys of Egypt, who, in his chaste conversations with God, received a vivid impression of sanctity, and, as

<sup>1</sup> Isai. xxxiii. 14.<sup>2</sup> Job vii. 20.<sup>3</sup> Ps. xlv. 8.<sup>4</sup> Job. xiv. 15.<sup>5</sup> Ps. ix. 15.<sup>6</sup> Ps. xxii. 3.<sup>7</sup> Gen. iii. 24.<sup>8</sup> Eccles. xlv. 1.<sup>9</sup> Exod. xxxiii. 11.<sup>10</sup> Eccles. xlv. 2.<sup>11</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 10.<sup>12</sup> St. Greg. Naz. disc. 22.

it were, the plenitude of all virtues;’<sup>1</sup> this great man had the misfortune to fall into a slight sin of distrust, which, in the opinion of the most esteemed theologians, was but a venial fault: ‘he struck the rock twice with his rod.’<sup>2</sup> ‘He feared,’ says St. Augustine, ‘lest the sins of the people should prove an obstacle to the divine promise and render his word powerless to draw water from the rock.’ But, oh, terrible effect of the divine wrath on a fault seemingly so slight! God instantaneously issued forth this dreadful decree: ‘Go up to the mountain of Nebo.’<sup>3</sup> ‘Thou shalt see the land before thee, but thou shalt not enter it.’<sup>4</sup> ‘Thou shalt not lead these people into the land that I will give them.’<sup>5</sup> ‘Thou shalt be gathered to thy people.’<sup>6</sup> ‘Moses went up to the mountain and died there.’<sup>7</sup> So prompt and inevitable is the execution of divine justice. Oh, fearful warning! ‘Howl, thou fir-tree, for the cedar is fallen.’<sup>8</sup> He is fallen, this elect one, struck by the hand of God Himself. He is fallen just as he is about to enter the promised land, the land ‘flowing with milk and honey.’<sup>9</sup> He can behold it; for long years it has been the object of his most cherished aspirations, at length he is about to reach it after unheard-of toils and trials. Vain hope! for one light fault he is doomed never to enter it! He dies, and his death is accompanied by circumstances the most calculated to enhance the severity of his punishment. The Almighty, as though fearing to be moved by the prayers of Moses, forbids him to solicit pardon. ‘It is sufficient, speak no more to me of this matter;’<sup>10</sup> and to divest his servant of even the consolation of hope He confirms by an oath the sentence

<sup>1</sup> St. Ambr.<sup>2</sup> Numb. xx. 11.<sup>3</sup> Deut. xxxii. 49.<sup>4</sup> Deut. xxxii. 52.<sup>5</sup> Numb. xx. 12.<sup>6</sup> Deut. xxxii. 50.<sup>7</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 1, 5.<sup>8</sup> Zach. xi. 2.<sup>9</sup> Deut. vi. 3.<sup>10</sup> Deut. iii. 26.

of death He has pronounced. 'The Lord hath sworn that Moses should not pass over the Jordan.'<sup>1</sup> He even names to him his successor: 'Thou shalt not go in thither, but Josue, the son of thy minister, he shall go in for thee.'<sup>2</sup> But the severity of the sentence is about to reach its climax. 'Go up to the top of Phasga, and cast thy eyes round about, to the west, and to the north, and to the south, and to the east ;<sup>3</sup> ' behold the land for which I swore to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. Thou hast seen it and shalt not pass over to it.'<sup>4</sup> What a trial for Moses ! What an expiation for his sin ! 'Lord, be not angry, I beseech Thee, if I speak to Thee, whereas I am but dust and ashes ;'<sup>5</sup> 'consider that it is Moses Thy servant, from whom Thou exactest so severe a retribution for so slight a fault ; Moses, who denied himself to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter, rather choosing to be afflicted with the children of God, than to have the pleasure of sin for a time ;'<sup>6</sup> Moses, who, burning with a holy indignation, 'laying hold of the golden calf, the execrable object of Jewish idolatry, burnt it and beat it to powder ;'<sup>7</sup> 'who was the meekest of men ;'<sup>8</sup> who, during a period of forty years, bore the mutinies and revolts of a stiff-necked people with invincible patience ; who, instead of avenging their contempt of his authority, their outrages and violent assault with stones, offered for them the inimitable prayer : Lord, 'either forgive them this trespass or strike me out of the book that Thou hast written ;'<sup>9</sup> it is Moses, in fine, whom Thou hast Thyself declared to be 'the most faithful in all Thy house.'<sup>10</sup> What, O 'God of clemency !'<sup>11</sup> Thou whose

<sup>1</sup> Deut. iv. 21.<sup>2</sup> Deut. iii. 27.<sup>3</sup> Hebr. xi. 24.<sup>4</sup> Exod. xxxii. 31, 32.<sup>5</sup> Deut. xxxiv. 4.<sup>6</sup> Exod. xxxii. 20.<sup>7</sup> Exod. xxxii. 20.<sup>8</sup> Numb. xii. 7.<sup>9</sup> Deut. i. 37, 38.<sup>10</sup> Gen. xviii. 27, 30.<sup>11</sup> Numb. xii. 3.<sup>12</sup> Acts xxiv. 4.

mercy knoweth no bounds, whose Heart is an inexhaustible treasure of goodness, Thou refusest to pardon him! Thou dost not even postpone his punishment! Is he then who so often propitiated Thy anger in favour of others the only one towards whom Thou art unrelenting? Lord, Lord, remember thy former kindnesses. Vain prayer! 'The Lord hath sworn, and He will not repent.'<sup>1</sup> The fiat has gone forth. Moses must die. The splendour of his miracles, the greatness of his merits, the number and perfection of his virtues, will not obtain the revocation of his sentence. He must die for a fault which seems to us so slight, die on Mount Nebo, from which, to augment his grief, he will behold the fertile regions of the promised land.

What an awful lesson to future ages of the enormity of venial sin!

Unhappy we! 'If in the green wood they do these things, what shall be done in the dry?'<sup>2</sup> If Moses is punished unsparingly for *one* venial sin, what have not we to expect who daily and maliciously multiply our offences?

Traverse ancient Judea in spirit, and at every step you will meet with some memorial of misfortune and death. Here you will see 'seventy thousand men falling victims to a pestilence';<sup>3</sup> there 'fifty thousand Bethsames suddenly struck dead';<sup>4</sup> later on, 'all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, are carried away by the King of Babylon; he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the valiant men of the army, and he carried away the king's mother and his wives and his children into captivity.'<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cix. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxiii. 31.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings xxiv. 15. <sup>4</sup> 1 Kings vi. 19.

<sup>5</sup> 4 Kings xxiv. 13, 14, 15.

Would we not imagine that such dire misfortunes as these must have been provoked by some abominable crime on the part of the Jews, such as a relapse into idolatry, murmurs against God, or the obstinate violation of some important precept? But no. These tremendous chastisements have another source. A mere thought of pride in David, a passing feeling of ostentation in Ezechias, a slightly irreverent look at the ark by the Bethsamites, such are the causes of all this mourning and desolation. And yet all theologians agree they were only venial sins. 'The Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel,'<sup>1</sup> because David had commanded Joab 'to make a census of the people in order to know the number of his subjects.'<sup>2</sup> 'The Bethsamites were stricken because having seen the Ark of the Lord,'<sup>3</sup> they gazed on it with a curiosity somewhat wanting in respect. 'All that was in the house of the King of Juda was carried away'<sup>4</sup> to Babylon, 'because the heart of Ezechias had yielded to vanity.'<sup>5</sup> Such are the chastisements inflicted by God on these kings and peoples, and yet David was 'a man according to God's own heart.'<sup>6</sup> 'Ezechias was without an equal for religion amongst the kings of Juda.'<sup>7</sup> 'The Bethsamites' had shown their piety 'that very day by immolating victims and holocausts to the Lord.'<sup>8</sup> Oh! how truly awful are the judgments of God, how dreadful the malice of venial sin!

But, you will ask, does man, whose nature is so frail, in falling into venial sin commit so great a fault that God must launch forth the thunderbolts of His vengeance against him? The Almighty does not so promptly yield to anger; 'He knows that we are dust'<sup>9</sup> and 'we have

<sup>1</sup> 1 Parlip. xxi. 14.<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xxiv. 2.<sup>3</sup> 1 Kings vi. 19.<sup>4</sup> 4 Kings xx. 17.<sup>5</sup> 2 Parlip. xxxii. 26.<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings xiii. 14.<sup>7</sup> 4 Kings xviii. 5.<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings vi. 15.<sup>9</sup> Ps. cii. 14.

not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities.'<sup>1</sup> Great chastisements suppose great crimes, and light faults do not demand so exemplary an expiation. Rash words! The Divine Judge was then guilty of injustice when for a venial sin He inflicted such signal chastisements on Moses, David, Oza, the Bethsamites, and Ezechias? He did not proportion the punishments to the offence in the various chastisements recorded in Scripture and Ecclesiastical History? Ah! 'let us cease to accuse God of injustice.'<sup>2</sup> Let us rather measure the malice of venial sin by the rigour with which it is punished even in this life by Him who is 'a God merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion.'<sup>3</sup>

## 2. *Chastisements in the other life.*

The enormity of venial sin is rendered still more evident by the chastisements inflicted on it in the other life, as they are more numerous, intense, and lasting.

According to St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Venerable Bede, and many others, the pains of purgatory exceed all the torments of the martyrs, the various punishments to which malefactors are subjected, and the most excruciating agony of all kinds of diseases taken collectively. St. Cæsarius tells us, 'the fire of purgatory is a greater torture than all the evils that can be suffered or even imagined in this world;'<sup>4</sup> and St. Thomas adds that, 'the least pain endured in that place of expiation surpasses all the sufferings of this life.'<sup>5</sup> And yet who can number the multiplied calamities to which man is sometimes subjected during his life! Who can reckon all the miseries, all the afflictions that pursue him from the

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Job xxxiv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Exod. xxxiv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Homil

<sup>5</sup> Lombard, 4, d. 9, a. 4.

cradle to the grave! See the unfortunate wretches tortured on the rack, or condemned to the intolerable labours and privations of the galleys; approach these unhappy beings stretched on a bed of anguish, the victims of incurable and excruciating diseases. What a sad spectacle of human woes!

We are told by Galenus that a person may experience several thousands of different kinds of pain in the head alone. If to these we unite all the interior and exterior sufferings to which the human frame is liable, what a complication of miseries shall we not behold! And yet, they are not comparable to the pains of purgatory. This is an undisputable fact. There all conceivable torments unite in the soul as in their centre, without allowing one moment's respite or alleviation. It endures at one and the same time according to the number and nature of its faults, all the physical and mental sufferings by which the members and senses of the body and the faculties of the mind can be tormented; and this not for a few days or weeks, but it may be for long years!

But to continue: the tortures of these expiatory furnaces, inconceivable in their number, intolerable in their severity, overwhelming in their duration, are inflicted for venial faults. . . . Yes, for venial faults! . . . for a trivial lie, for a slight emotion of anger, for the voluntary distraction of a moment, for an idle word, for some moments ill spent; for those faults of such frequent recurrence that our lives are, as it were, a tissue of them, And on whom are these penalties inflicted? On predestined souls, spouses of Jesus Christ, children of God, heirs of heaven. They are inflicted, too, by an infinitely just God, who does not punish sin beyond what it deserves, and who entertains the tenderest love for these

souls. From this we must conclude either that God is an unjust and ruthless tyrant, the mere thought of which is blasphemy, or that venial sin is a dreadful evil. Yes, Religious! Yes, Christian soul! either God is a relentless tyrant, or thy vain glory, thy dissipation, thy impatience are worthy of all abhorrence.

My God! we believe those truths, we teach them to others, and still we continue to sin. We know that a slight infidelity deserves purgatory, and yet we pursue our reckless career.

Were we assured that we should be burned alive after the commission of two or three venial sins, how circumspect we should be to avoid the least faults! And yet, though we know the flames of purgatory must expiate those with which our souls are stained, we do not hesitate to multiply them, 'we drink iniquity like water!'<sup>1</sup>

O God! I, vile dust as I am, have presumed to offend Thee, the Sovereign Good, and this, notwithstanding all the favours Thou hast lavished on me. . . . I have offended Thee so repeatedly . . . for amusement . . . for a nothing . . . through pure caprice, without being even incited thereto by the hope of any gain or the apprehension of any loss. Were I to win an empire, or avert a torturing disease, nay, even death itself, by disobeying Thee slightly, I would not be justified in doing so. I am aware of this, and yet, day after day, hour after hour, and with a smile upon my lips, I have accumulated venial sin to an overwhelming amount! I have offended God with utter unconcern. . . . God, my infinitely tender Father; for a base interest, through vain glory, through jest. Led on by venial sin to the imminent danger of mortal, reckless of my salvation, I have laughed at and contemned the pains of purgatory, which I have deserved!

<sup>1</sup> Job xv. 16.



Oh! well may we weep tears of blood over such an infatuation.

But I repent, I bewail all, even my least faults. I desire to imprint indelibly on my heart the holy maxim: 'Rather die a thousand deaths than sully my soul with any sin, however light.' 'O my God, enlighten my darkness,'<sup>1</sup> that henceforth I may fully realise the grievousness of venial sin. 'Create a clean heart in me,'<sup>1</sup> that I may abhor and shun all that could in any way displease Thee.

#### ARTICLE IV.

*Of the hatred we should entertain for venial sin and the care with which we should avoid it.*

The fruits of the truths we have just been meditating should be not only a more perfect knowledge, but also an efficacious hatred of venial sin, and a zealous endeavour to avoid it.

These two points shall constitute the matter of this fourth article. We shall treat of them under the form of an examen, which method we will observe during the remainder of this work, in which, as a rule, the last article of each chapter shall be a particular examen on the subject of which it treats.

##### 1. *Of the efficacious hatred of venial sin.*

Knowing the malice of venial sin, considered in itself, in its effects, and in the dreadful chastisement it involves; let us examine ourselves, and see how far our detestation of all, but particularly of fully deliberate venial sin extends. 'Do we firmly believe that the least sin can do us more injury than all the powers of hell?'<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xvii. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. i. 12.

<sup>3</sup> St. Teresa 25.

‘Are we fully persuaded that death and the loss of all temporal goods are less to be dreaded than the smallest stain of venial sin?’<sup>1</sup> Let us candidly examine our sentiments on this subject. Do we believe these truths? Do we believe them with a firm and unwavering faith? Would we prefer, with St. Auselm, to descend with a pure and innocent heart into hell than to enter heaven stained with the least sin? Should we have the misfortune to fall into venial sin, do we experience as much remorse as a good Christian, zealous for his salvation, feels when he permits himself to be seduced into mortal sin? If by a trivial lie we could avert a dangerous illness, prevent the loss of our reputation, escape severe sufferings, obtain an honourable and lucrative employment, would we not tell that lie?

If at the expense of a venial sin we could preserve something very dear and precious to us, how would we act? Let us interrogate our conscience, and let such questions be the touchstones whereby we may learn how far our hatred of venial sin extends. Let us afterwards exclaim with the venerable Eleazar: Yes, ‘I would rather die’<sup>2</sup> than commit such a fault. Should we not have the courage to make this resolution, ‘we shall not escape the hand of the Almighty, alive or dead, for even venial sin shall not remain unpunished.’<sup>3</sup> Let us imprint deeply on our souls an abiding horror of venial sin, but particularly: 1st, of that which is most habitual, for it is the disease to which we are most liable that elicits the special attention of the physician; 2dly, that which is the source of all others, since if the root be destroyed the tree must inevitably perish; 3dly, that which leads directly to mortal sin, since, when we are

<sup>1</sup> St. Doroth. 20.<sup>2</sup> Machab. vi. 23.<sup>3</sup> St. Prosper.

really apprehensive of falling into an abyss, we sedulously shun the path which leads thereto. 'He,' says St. Jerome, 'who fears small faults is very far from committing great crimes.' St. Dorotheus says: 'Do not commit venial sin under the pretext of its being such, since it may become mortal, for we pass with the utmost facility from light to great faults.'<sup>1</sup> 'Light faults,' adds St. Gregory, 'always precede great ones, and it is only by degrees that we arrive at the commission of crime.'<sup>2</sup>

## 2. *Of the care we should take to avoid venial sin.*

It does not suffice that we hate it, we must always avoid it with the utmost care.

This care consists in a firm resolution, a constant vigilance and a prompt resistance joined to great fervour in prayer.

1. The firm resolution to avoid sin supposes in the soul a sincere regret for those which it has already committed. Had we been guilty of but one venial fault we should, after the example of Blessed Rodriguez, 'weep over it during our whole life.'<sup>3</sup> Is such our disposition? What regret do we feel for our sins? What uneasiness do they cause us? What contrition do we conceive for them at the evening examination of conscience, or at that made preparatory to our approaching the sacred Tribunal of Penance to obtain their pardon? Do we instantly deplore the infidelities into which we fall, crying out with David: 'I have sinned;'<sup>4</sup> or with the blind man of the Gospel: 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me;'<sup>5</sup> or else with the publican: 'O God! be merciful to me a sinner'?<sup>6</sup> Have we formed the firm

<sup>1</sup> Serm.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xii. 13.

<sup>3</sup> St. Greg. Moral.

<sup>4</sup> Mark x. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Life of B. Alp. Rodrig.

<sup>6</sup> Luke xviii. 13.

and generous resolution to avoid venial sin in future? Have we resolved to guard with special vigilance against some particular fault from one confession to another? Have we renewed this good resolution in our visits to the Blessed Sacrament? How many venial faults have we corrected up to the present time? Woe to us should we convert so salutary a remedy into a poison! An excellent means of cherishing a sincere sorrow for our transgressions, and insuring the fulfilment of our resolutions, is to allow our minds to be deeply penetrated with the heinousness of venial sin which we have just been considering, and to recall the cause of it at the close of our meditation, and also frequently during the day. 'All sin proceeds from some ignorance,'<sup>1</sup> which conceals from us its deformity and malice; therefore, there could be no better shield against relapses than a perfect knowledge and frequent reflections on the dreadful consequences which venial sin entails. We recoil from the aspect of a venomous reptile, because we know its bite is poisonous; but did we understand how subtle and pernicious is the venom with which the least sin infects our soul, we would 'flee from it as from the face of a serpent.'<sup>2</sup> It was his profound knowledge of sin that made St. Edmund of Canterbury say: 'he would cheerfully consent to be cast on a burning pile rather than voluntarily commit even a light fault.'<sup>3</sup> 'We, on the contrary,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'daily fall into venial sin, because we have no zeal to enlighten our souls'<sup>4</sup> with the torch of faith which would discover to us its malice.

2. The strongest resolutions will not guarantee us

<sup>1</sup> St. Thom. 1. 2, q. 77, a. 2

<sup>3</sup> Life of St. Edmund.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclus. xxi. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Hom.

against so great an evil unless we exercise a perpetual watchfulness not to displease God in any way. We learn from Fr. Maffée's 'Life of St. Ignatius,' that this illustrious servant of God 'observed a constant vigilance over himself, to guard against the illusion of the senses, and dissipation of mind;' and as a man in costly attire treads cautiously on a road saturated with mud and rain, so he took extraordinary precautions to preserve his soul from the smallest stain. St. John Chrysostom admonishes us that 'we have a restless and implacable enemy against whom we must exert exceeding watchfulness if we would elude his snares.'<sup>1</sup>

Let us now examine ourselves. What guard do we keep over our senses and the faculties of our soul? Do we, as St. Macarius advises, turn away our eyes from all that could be suggestive of evil? close our ears to all dangerous discourses? restrain our tongue from vain, idle, and reprehensible words? watch over our heart that it yield not to the instability of its thoughts and desires? If we give free scope to our desires and imaginations, allow full liberty to our senses, above all if we place no restraint on our eyes, no bridle on our tongue, it is not surprising that obstacles arise at every step to impede our spiritual progress. 'Our vices,' says Quintilian, 'derive their vivacity from our eyes;' and St. Gregory Nazianzen adds, 'unhappily our heart but too often obeys their concupiscence.' Our eyes are, as it were, the windows by which death most frequently enters our soul to rob it of the treasure of its virtue.

'The tongue,' says St. James, 'is a fire, a world of iniquity . . . which defileth the whole body . . . It is an evil which no man can tame; it is full of deadly

<sup>1</sup> Hom.

poison.’<sup>1</sup> If, therefore, we desire to admit only pure and holy thoughts into our soul, we must (following the advice of St. Jerome) repress the curiosity of our eyes which would drag us into sin; we must ‘set a watch before our mouth, and a door round about our lips that our heart incline not to evil words,’<sup>2</sup> foolish mirth, murmurings, detractions, disputes, false reports, lying, or any of the suggestions of Satan.

It is very useful at the close of our meditation, also after confession and communion, to renounce and detest all our faults in anticipation; to foresee the occasions of venial sin, to recall the persons, the places, and the occupations most likely to prove a source of danger to us. This is an infallible preventive to our faults, for it is by seeing the snares which are laid for us that we avoid sin;<sup>3</sup> ‘but the soul which neglects to watch constantly over its heart with fear and self-distrust inevitably succumbs before the arrows of temptation.’<sup>4</sup> ‘Therefore it imports us much to anticipate the dangers that we fear and not to engage in the battle till we are sure of conquering!’<sup>5</sup> Let us examine whether we are faithful to this practice.

Do we promptly resist sin the moment it suggests itself? Let us interrogate our conscience. ‘Let us search Jerusalem with lamp in hand.’<sup>6</sup> Do we not give a half consent to the temptation? Do we not hesitate before rejecting it? Do we not keep up a secret understanding with it in our heart? Ah, if we have any love left for our soul, if we would win heaven and secure our salvation, let us shun even the shadow of sin; let us fear the danger while it still seems remote; and should the

<sup>1</sup> St. James iii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Chrys. Homil.

<sup>3</sup> St. Theodore Stud.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. cxl. 3.

<sup>5</sup> St. Greg. Gt. Explan. Job.

<sup>6</sup> St. Sophia i. 12.

enemy present' himself, let him find us clothed in the arms of faith. Let us 'crush the head of the serpent and his body will infallibly perish.' He who courageously sustains the first shock of the battle is sure of victory. 'Our strength increases,' says St. Laurence Justinian, 'and God sends us more powerful aid when we resolutely resist temptation the moment we perceive it.' Let us not procrastinate, therefore; a spark neglected may enkindle a great burning, and a shameful fall may follow a slight infidelity. 'A dress,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'once it is torn, is speedily reduced to shreds, if not promptly mended; and a torrent that has broken its dykes swiftly causes a great inundation.'<sup>1</sup> Thus it is with the infernal dragon—let him but obtain by force or fraud an entrance for his head into our heart, and he will soon contrive to introduce his body and make himself master of our soul. This wily serpent enters insidiously and eludes our grasp when we fancy we have captured him. Suffer him but to seize the finger, and soon the whole hand will be swallowed up. Our sole chance of escape lies in a manful resistance to his first assaults. 'But we cannot successfully combat his diabolical suggestions,' says St. Isidore, 'except by a sincere love of God and by fervent and constant prayer.' Prayer is an arsenal provided with irresistible arms wherewith to oppose the enemy, whilst divine love is the furnace whence we draw them glowing to temper them anew.

If not animated by charity, we shall but feebly sustain the combat. 'Unless we attract grace by fervent prayer, in vain shall we endeavour to dissipate our errors and temptations; for our will alone, unaided by God, is

<sup>1</sup> Homil.

unable to gain the victory.’<sup>1</sup> Now this heavenly succour is only granted to prayer. Are we wont, like Judas Machabeus, ‘to conjure the Lord of heaven to send His good angel before us for the fear and dread of the greatness of His arm?’<sup>2</sup> Are we accustomed to make acts of charity at stated hours as a preservative against our most habitual and dangerous falls? saying, for instance, when the clock strikes: ‘My God, I love Thee above all things; I would rather die than displease Thee by the least venial sin, and by such a sin in particular;’ or, you may make the following protestation: ‘Yes, Lord, though by a momentary impatience, a little lie, a slight detraction, I could avoid pain, sickness, and death, or the loss of my reputation, though I could thus obtain the love and esteem of men, still I would not commit that sin.’ These holy affections are a powerful shield against our weakness.

‘Once we love God with our whole heart,’ says St. Prosper, ‘there shall no longer be anything in us which will obey the suggestions of sin.’

To conclude. Thrice happy shall we be, if our heart be deeply imbued with an abiding horror of venial sin, as it shall then be pure and spotless in the sight of God. Attachment to sin shall not predominate over us, neither shall we have any cause to fear its consequences, if we faithfully follow the four means just indicated for conquering it.

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## CHAPTER II.

### OF TEPIDITY.

TEPIDITY is the ordinary fruit of venial sin, next to which it is, without doubt, the greatest obstacle to solid virtue.

<sup>1</sup> St. Innoc. Pope.

<sup>2</sup> Machab. xv. 23.



Even as a lingering illness so far enervates the body as to incapacitate it for the least exertion, so tepidity weakens and arrests the soul in the way of perfection.

To stimulate ourselves to attack so dangerous a disease, and promptly rid our soul of it, let us consider its malice and its baneful effects. We shall next study the marks by which it may be recognised and the remedies by which it may be overcome.

## ARTICLE I.

*Of the malice of tepidity.*1. *The tepid soul resembles the field of the slothful man.*

The irregular affections and frequent faults which each moment inflict new wounds on the tepid soul, liken it to 'the field of the slothful man, all filled with nettles;'<sup>1</sup> and to 'the vineyard of the foolish man, the face of which was covered with thorns; the stone wall' that defended it—that is, interior recollection and the special protection of God—having been 'broken down.'<sup>2</sup> 'As the boar out of the wood, and the wild beast lays waste'<sup>3</sup> and devastates the deserted vineyard, so tepidity effects the most dreadful havoc in the soul of which it has taken possession. It so impairs the germs of virtue that, far from improving with years, it finds itself less virtuous in an advanced age than it was in the days of its youth. Tepid, languishing, sterile soul, well mayest thou be compared to the 'barren fig-tree of the Gospel;' tree, accursed by Jesus Christ Himself, and which 'immediately withered away.'<sup>4</sup> Thou art that ungrateful 'earth that often drinketh in the waters of grace,' but

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxiv. 30, 31.<sup>2</sup> Ps. lxxix. 14.<sup>3</sup> Prov. xxiv. 31.<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxi. 19.

because it bringeth forth only 'the thorns and briars' of vices, 'it is very near unto a curse.'<sup>1</sup>

Ah! could we but raise the veil which conceals the conscience of the tepid man, we would probably be terrified to see there the 'wicked abominations,' figured by the 'creeping things and living creatures with which Ezechias beheld the Temple filled.'<sup>2</sup> In reality, is not this but too faithful a picture of the false principles by which we seek to stifle the remorse necessarily awakened by our detractions, quarrels, hatred, jealousy, rivalry, pride, murmurings, acrimony, and that self-love which artfully insinuates itself into all our actions?

*2. The life of the tepid man is but a succession of irreligious actions.*

Let us represent to ourselves the wretched state of the tepid Christian in the discharge of the holiest duties of religion. In approaching the Holy Table he presents us with the spectacle of the 'abomination of desolation in the holy place.'<sup>3</sup> His countenance, look, gait, in fine, his whole demeanour, indicate the languor which oppresses his soul. The Cherubim burn with love, the Seraphim tremble with awe, and he meantime assumes an irreverent and careless posture. Devoid of every particle of piety, he amuses himself with vain, puerile, frivolous thoughts at the very moment that the most tremendous mysteries are being wrought, at the moment that he is receiving into his heart the Bread of Angels: Does he approach the Sacrament of Penance, his preparation is so careless and negligent that this same act of reconciliation must be atoned for by a new confession. Faithless soul! ere the lapse of an hour he shall have

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vi. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ezech. viii. 9, 10.

<sup>3</sup> Mark xiii. 14.

fallen back into those faults he had promised to amend. His vocal prayers are recited with such precipitation, irreverence, and dissipation, that his only object seems to be to get rid of them, and to attract on himself this malediction of the Royal Prophet: 'May his prayer be turned to sin.'<sup>1</sup> Truly culpable is his conduct in thus provoking the anger of God by the means most adapted to conciliate him. If deterred by the fear of scandal from omitting his pious exercises, he performs them only through custom, human respect, necessity, to save appearances and to deceive others; his soul, meantime, being weary of them.

Thus he acquires a habit of confessing without amendment, communicating without devotion, meditating without fruit, acting without purity of intention, rule, or order, through the whim of the moment, or some equally unchristian motive. Seated at the very source of grace, but as inert as the 'sick man who lay thirty-eight years at the well of Bethsaida,' never is he cured of his spiritual 'infirmity.'<sup>2</sup> The thought of God is irksome to him, he alienates himself from the guidance of Divine Providence. A stranger to himself, he shrinks from investigating the depths of his conscience. Dissipated exteriorly, oblivious of God's presence without being more present to himself, dreading labour, thinking only of self-gratification, repose, and pleasure, he laughs at the idea of venial sin, committing it without anxiety or regret for the most trifling cause, 'for a piece of bread.'<sup>3</sup>

### 3. *God soon begins to vomit him out of His mouth.*

Leading, as he does, a life full of defects, what wonder is it that the tepid soul exposes itself to an approaching

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cviii. 7.

<sup>2</sup> John v. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ezech. xiii. 19.

curse? What wonder that it so disgusts the heart of God that He must soon reject it as something insupportably loathsome? 'Because thou art lukewarm I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth.'<sup>1</sup> A fearful anathema confirmed by the lips of God Himself.

Dastardly slave of tepidity, hearken to this threat. Listen and tremble. God is about to reject thee! God! He who so tenderly seeks out and receives sinners, who seats Himself as a friend at their table, entertains such a disgust for thee that, despite His burning love, He can no longer tolerate thee; He is about to vomit thee out of His mouth! Can we image to ourselves a more frightful picture of the consequences of relaxation in piety? Vomiting fatigues us; it sickens and disgusts us in future with the food which has provoked it. Tepid soul, behold thy portrait! This, according to the striking similitude of Scripture, is a vivid illustration of thy state. Hapless being! thou disgustest the heart of thy God, thou exasperatest His paternal charity against thee, and thou art not terrified! Thy God is about to cast thee off, thou art about to become an object of loathing to Him and the whole celestial court, and thou tremblest not! Thou readest these awful warnings which the mercy of God still vouchsafest to thee, without being impressed or animated to fervour! Thou believest that His words shall be verified, and thou sheddest no tears of repentance; thou abidest in thy tepidity! This very meditation itself thou makest without fruit. Slothful soul! If threats like these fail to arouse thee, what shall be able to do so? Alas! absolute coldness, that is mortal sin itself, though the climax of misfortune, is, in some respects, less to be dreaded than tepidity.

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. iii. 16.

True, mortal sin is, in itself, a greater evil, but very often the effects of tepidity are more pernicious. For this reason it is that God seems to be less apprehensive of the former for us, and exclaims, in the anguish of His heart: 'I would thou wert cold.'<sup>1</sup> Such is the aversion with which a soul enslaved by spiritual languor inspires Him that He consents to see it the victim of mortal sin rather than endure its lukewarmness.

O my soul! renounce thy tepidity even now, recognising as thou dost its danger and its malice. Redeem lost time, renew thy fervour; 'be mindful from whence thou art fallen and do penance, and do the first works. Or else God, to avenge Himself, will come to thee, will move thy candlestick out of its place'<sup>2</sup> and will expel thee for ever from His presence. 'Oh! God of mercy,'<sup>3</sup> 'cast me not away from Thy face.'<sup>4</sup> 'I am the barren fig-tree,'<sup>5</sup> 'the unfruitful vine.'<sup>6</sup> Long since have I deserved to be cut down, to be deprived of the care of the husbandman. But filled with fear at the sight of my ingratitude for all Thy bounty, I firmly purpose to atone for my past tepidity by a uniform and persevering fervour. Thou, my God, 'art a consuming fire;'<sup>7</sup> melt, then, I implore Thee, the ice of my heart, and grant that I may serve Thee with a fervour commensurate with my tardiness in doing so.

## ARTICLE II.

### 1. *Of the effects of tepidity.*

1. This spiritual malady is exceedingly difficult of cure. So constant and unvarying is the care required for the extirpation of this baneful vice, that St. Paul gives us but

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. iii. 15.      <sup>2</sup> Apoc. ii. 5.      <sup>3</sup> 2 Esdras ix. 31.      <sup>4</sup> Ps. l. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Luke xiii. 7.

<sup>6</sup> John xv. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Heb. xii. 29.

little hope of its accomplishment. 'It is impossible,' that is, extremely difficult, 'for those who were once illuminated and are fallen away to be renewed again to penance.'<sup>1</sup>

Tepidity is the principle of an almost incurable spiritual disease; because, to cure a malady, it is essential to understand its nature and gravity. Now, the tepid man does not believe himself such; or, at least, he does not fully realise the extent of the evil from which he suffers, since blindness of mind necessarily accompanies tepidity, and a knowledge of his state would be the beginning of fervour. He is in imminent peril and he fancies himself in security; sinful, and he imagines himself innocent; infirm, and he believes himself robust. He has no idea of recurring to remedies. He still each day performs his exercises of piety, but he does so mechanically; he occasionally executes some good, but it is done imperfectly, and, deceived by this illusive appearance of virtue, he perceives not the depth of his misery. A thought of the necessity of extricating himself from it never even dawns upon him, and hence the difficulty of his cure.

2. But even though the tepid man should desire to regain his fervour, his disease is such that it renders the most wholesome food prejudicial. Meditations, examens, confessions, retreats, all spiritual exercises, are performed so slothfully by him that these powerful helps of grace, instead of producing fruit, prove detrimental to him. He incites others to the practice of those virtues which are wanting to himself, preserving them by his admonitions from the vices which dishonour his own soul, and prescribing spiritual remedies for them from which, however, personally he derives no benefit. Immovable as a fingerpost on the roadside, he points out the way but

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vi. 4. 5.

does not follow it; being all the more culpable in that he knows the paths of fervour but will not walk on them.

St. Bernard felt convinced that the conversion of a sinner, however steeped in guilt, presented less obstacles than did that of a tepid religious. The sight of a crucifix, the thought of death, judgment, or the eternal pains of hell, have often moved obdurate sinners to repentance; whilst the tepid man, on the contrary, accustomed to meditate lightly and superficially on these great truths, is as little affected by them as the constant spectators of death are touched by the convulsive struggles of the dying.

3. A last and efficacious remedy for this evil would be a special grace capable of enabling him to shake off his spiritual torpor; but the sloth of which he is the slave renders even this abortive.

Intoxicated by his passions, rarely recollected, he disobeys the movements of the Holy Ghost, turns a deaf ear to the inspirations of grace, and voluntarily continues in his tepidity. Is it then to be wondered at that God ceases His importunities and delivers him up to his unhappy blindness!

More than this: the good effected by the tepid man is badly done. Sinning almost incessantly, he deprives himself of the special favours and visits of the Almighty. Now and then a ray of heavenly light illumines the obscurity of his mind and thaws his frozen heart, but these favours are evanescent, and frequently tepidity lasts for life.

My God! who would not dread this fearful vice? However, I will not despair, for 'all things are possible to him that believeth.'<sup>1</sup> O Jesus! Thou who didst restore

<sup>1</sup> Mark ix. 22.

Lazarus to life, when his body had already become a prey to the corruption of the tomb, I recur to Thee with unbounded confidence. 'Thou camest to send fire on earth, and what wouldst Thou but that it be kindled?'<sup>1</sup> In flame my heart with its vivifying warmth, and grant that it may never be extinguished.

*2. Tepidity exposes the soul to the danger of mortal sin.*

The second effect of tepidity is to expose us to the proximate danger of mortal sin. The tepid man, accustomed to his defects, commits venial sin without scruple; he reflects but rarely, and then apathetically, on the grievousness of mortal sin and the motives for avoiding it; the horror which he should have of this sin insensibly diminishes till his conscience no longer fears it. He permits his imagination to amuse itself with unchaste thoughts, allows a dangerous liberty to his senses, dallies with temptation, rashly hesitating between resistance and consent till he has even cause to doubt whether he has not taken pleasure in it. He forms for himself lax principles, or rather he 'makes vain excuses for his sins.'<sup>2</sup> At length, assailed by some more than ordinarily violent temptation, he falls into the gulf of mortal sin. Oh! could we but catch a glimpse of those souls confined within the prisons of purgatory and hell; could the voice of their wailings reach us, how many should we not hear cursing their tepidity and verifying amid groans of anguish the threats of Holy Writ. 'He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little.'<sup>3</sup> But who so reckless of little things as the tepid soul? If, as St. Jerome remarks, sooner or later we must perish in the danger we have long courted, what must be the

<sup>1</sup> Luke xii. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxl. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Eccli. xix. 1.



fate of the tepid man, walking as he habitually does along the edge of the precipice? who, if not he, incurs the risk of being lost for ever? Here let us recall the awful apostasy of the Prince of the Apostles. Having accompanied the Redeemer to the Garden of Olives, Peter yielded to tepidity. Neglecting prayer, he slept. When the soldier led away the Saviour, the Apostle followed Him, it is true, but it was 'afar off,'<sup>1</sup> and mingling with the servants of the High Priest, he approached the fire, for 'it was cold;'<sup>2</sup> but far more to be dreaded was the mortal chill which had fallen on Peter's heart. Before the cock crowed twice he had thrice denied his Master. Thus it was that the odious vice of tepidity overthrew the strongest pillar of the Church.

Christian soul, beware! your lethargy indulged in may lead you on to mortal sin, and in this state you possibly may die!

Lord, my God! Look on me in Thy great mercy, withdraw me from this wretched state, 'that I may never sleep in death.'<sup>3</sup>

### 3. *It exposes us to an irreligious death.*

Death is the echo of life. A holy death after a tepid life would be a kind of miracle.

At the approach of death the tepid man has no desire of heaven; his heart is altogether earthly, he fears death which is about to tear him away from all that he loves; he is filled with dismay, should they venture to broach to him the subject of his approaching dissolution. He feels his strength decaying, the sands of life are ebbing fast, his agony is close at hand, and yet he deludes himself into the belief that he has still a long career before

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 58.

<sup>2</sup> John xviii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. xii. 4.

him. Thus, at the supreme moment, with life eluding his grasp and his soul hovering on the confines of eternity, instead of trying to merit a holy death, he is wholly occupied in seeking means for his restoration. The pains incidental to his disease are borne with an impatience which might be looked for in a heathen, to whom the name and sufferings of Jesus Christ were utter strangers, because self-love, personal comfort, and sensual gratification have been the constant subjects of his thoughts. The depraved inclinations of his heart which he has never sought to curb now tyrannise over him more violently than ever. Everything displeases, annoys, is insupportable to him. The priest suggests holy affections; but devoid, as he long has been, of all religious sentiments, he cannot, suffering as he is in mind and body, follow or even understand his admonitions.

He has habituated himself to indifference in the discharge of all his religious duties: can it be hoped that any he may now perform will be supernatural or meritorious?

It is appalling to witness the listlessness and ind devotion with which he prepares himself for the last sacraments, if, indeed, in punishment of his tepidity, a sudden death do not deprive him of them. He makes his confession languidly. With the apathy of a heretic he receives into his heart the Lamb of God, who is so soon to be his judge and most formidable adversary. He is anointed with the holy oil, but he is abstracted or asleep. He is supinely indifferent to what is taking place around him. And yet, these are the last, the most powerful helps that shall be granted to him: with what fervour, therefore, should he not receive them, particularly at this all-decisive moment!

And now behold him in his agony. Callous to the things of heaven and yet agitated by remorse of conscience, terrified for the past, he trembles for the future. Finally he expires, leaving the lookers-on but too just grounds for uneasiness. He appears before the judgment-seat of God, to be precipitated, if not into hell, at least into the fires of purgatory, there to suffer multiform and excruciating tortures, it may be, for long years.

O my God ! I shudder with horror at the contemplation of the fate to which tepidity has been hurrying me on. Alas ! I have served Thee, O King of kings, with a negligence and sloth which the last of men would not tolerate in one of his servants. I have been guilty of an inattention at prayer, which I would not dream of indulging in conversing with my friends. I have repaid by coldness the ardent love which attracts Thee to me in the Blessed Eucharist, and Thy promise of granting most precious graces in this adorable Sacrament to all who love Thee. Thou art the Lord of lords, who standest in need of no one, and yet Thou loadest me with benefits. Like a tender mother Thou claspest me to Thy bosom. Thou co-operatest in all my actions, not one of which I could perform without Thine aid ; and all these gifts are the effects of Thy pure, gratuitous, unmerited love ! But, oh, base ingratitude ! I remain cold and languishing in Thy service, whilst I cheerfully consume my strength in useless labours, in a foolish love of creatures. But I deeply lament my obduracy, O my God, and am firmly resolved that henceforth every moment of my life, every pulsation of my heart, shall be consecrated to Thee alone.

## ARTICLE III.

*Of the marks and remedies of tepidity.*

Tepidity is an offspring and, as it were, a branch of sloth. 'Sloth,' says St. Thomas, 'is a species of disgust for virtue; it is a languor of soul which causes it to neglect its spiritual welfare; a sadness which oppresses and dejects the heart of man, deprives him, so to speak, of the power of doing good,'<sup>1</sup> and renders pious exercises and acts of virtue fatiguing and insipid to him.

'Tepidity,' say the holy Fathers, 'is a profound lethargy which arrests its victims on the road to perfection; a fever which gradually undermines the soul and incapacitates it for devotion.'

1. *Of the marks of tepidity.*

They are all delineated by St. Bernard in the following description of a tepid soul. 'There are,' says he, 'in religion, certain slothful and pusillanimous souls, who succumb under the burden of their duty, submit only to the rod of correction, and show occasional and uncertain signs of recollection and compunction. The flesh and the senses engross all their thoughts; their obedience is not the result of faith, their conversations are indiscreet, they pray without attention; they are undeterred by the fear of hell and the scandal of their bad example, they cast off the yoke of discipline and in a great degree the empire of reason; their conduct, in a word, is a guilty license and a perpetual scandal.' Cassian had already given the chief characteristics of this vice. 'Tepid religious,' says he, 'hate and fear retreat, tire of their cell, despise their brethren, labour slothfully,

<sup>1</sup> St. Thom. 2. 2, q. 35, a. 1.

frequently quit their monastery, are the slaves of sensuality, frequent society, engage in secular business, love idle conversations, are displeased at the charitable admonitions given them, and avail themselves of every pretext for evading them; finally, they bear the yoke of discipline reluctantly, entertain an inordinate attachment for their country and relatives, and indulge in dangerous familiarities.<sup>1</sup> Examine yourself seriously and impartially, and see whether you recognise in yourself any of these marks.

1. What is your devotion at prayer and at the Holy Sacrifice, whether as assistant or celebrant thereat? In what manner do you make your general and particular examen? Are you faithful in calling yourself to an account for all your thoughts, words, and actions? With what faith and attention do you recite your vocal prayers, particularly the Divine Office? With what fervour do you approach the holy sacraments of Penance and Communion? If you perform these duties negligently and through routine, you are undoubtedly of the number of those tepid souls whom God threatens to reject.

2. Have you habitually regulated your conduct by certain lax principles, by the aid of which you endeavour to stifle your remorse? For example, have you not said, I am no longer a novice? Why should not so-and-so be permitted to me as well as to others? Must not some allowance be made for youth? Why ruin one's health by voluntary mortifications? It is better to be wrong with the many than right alone. Religious perfection is only a pious chimera. It is well to court the favour of the great who, should I succeed in pleasing them, may prefer me to my equals. Each one should

<sup>1</sup> Conf. 22.

look after his own interests and not confide them to others. For my part, I will accept of no employments which are likely to be prejudicial to my amusement or aggrandisement; these I will willingly cede to others. There can be no surer proof than this of your being thoroughly tepid.

3. Are you wont to yield to sloth? Do you indulge in too much sleep? Do you study your ease and self-gratification? Are you not too fastidious with regard to food, seeking the gratification of your palate and senses on all occasions? Once more, should such immortification be the rule of your conduct, it is another proof that you are tepid, you are the victim of a most dangerous disease, and will require a most skilful and enlightened physician to prescribe efficacious remedies for you.

Amongst those remedies the principal are an undeviating fidelity to daily meditation, spiritual reading, and the habit of devoting one day of each month to retreat.

I name these the *principal* remedies because there are also others which are very beneficial, as, for example, to frequent the society of the most fervent, and avoid that of the tepid, edifying conversations, seclusion from the world, the practice of mortifications, great zeal in daily visiting the Blessed Sacrament, and, lastly, the pious custom of making aspirations, particularly when the clock strikes. I merely glance at these last, in order more fully to develop the three first, which I regard as the most efficacious and important.

## 2. *Of the remedies for tepidity.*

If the total abandonment of prayer, or even a mere inconsistency in this holy exercise, is one of the chief

sources of tepidity, so a generous and persevering performance of it is the most excellent and certain means of extirpating this vice. Prayer is as indispensable for the preservation of fervour as food is for the life of the body. This simile is beautifully expressed by St. Augustine, who says: 'As material food constitutes the sustenance of the body, so a spirit of prayer and union with God is the food and life of the interior man.'<sup>1</sup> And, to remove all doubt of the efficacy and importance of meditation, he adds: 'A reasonable soul cannot live any other life than that which it draws from its communion with God in prayer.'<sup>2</sup>

Here, then, we have an irrefragable authority for the absolute necessity for this holy exercise. It is clear that as the soul derives its life from its communings with God in prayer, it must expose itself to inevitable shipwreck the moment it deprives itself of this spiritual nutriment. The Royal Prophet assures us of his personal experience of this truth. 'My heart,' says he, 'is withered because I forgot to eat my bread.'<sup>3</sup> Mark well the words—as soon as he ceased to take his food his heart withered! What the sinews are to the limbs, what an invigorating beverage is to the fainting heart, what blood is to the body, such is meditation to the soul, and without it there is 'no means left of advancing in the spiritual life.'<sup>4</sup>

Besides, reason renders the same testimony, for it is impossible to preserve the fervour of our soul in all its vigour unless our mind meditates frequently on the eternal truths, and our will excites itself to the constant practice of them. Now, we accomplish this twofold exercise of the mind and will by mental prayer, which

<sup>1</sup> Serm.<sup>2</sup> Serm.<sup>3</sup> Ps. ci. 5.<sup>4</sup> St. Aug. Treat. on St. John.

St. Ambrose styles on this account 'the substantial food of our soul.' Let us acknowledge, therefore, that meditation is an equally essential and potent remedy against tepidity. Let us now examine whether we have devoted to meditation the full time prescribed for it. Have we made it in a respectful posture, with attention and fervour? Devoted sufficient time and care to its preparation? Made a short review at its close of the way in which we have performed it, and the fruit we have derived from it? Recalled frequently during the day the thought selected by us for the spiritual bouquet? We should lose no time in correcting whatever defects we may observe in any of these points. For the rest, this matter is so important that we shall resume and treat of it at greater length in the second part of this work. We have said that spiritual reading is another powerful antidote against tepidity. Let us see with what assiduity we apply ourselves to it. Have we not, by a neglect of it, exposed ourselves to the danger of falling into or continuing in tepidity? Have we devoted at least a quarter of an hour to it daily? The Holy Scriptures, say the Fathers, are faithful mirrors in which the soul may, without fear of illusion, discover the stains it has contracted, and from which it should purify itself. They are letters from our heavenly country, written by the finger of God, containing the true principles and solid maxims of sanctity; friendly monitors which freely reprehend our vices; skilful physicians which teach us the most effectual remedies for our spiritual maladies. In a word, the reading of good books provides us with excellent weapons against temptation, renews the fervour of the tepid, augments the charity of the just, confirms the constancy of the perfect, and renders the practice of



meditation easy and profitable to us. St. Paul makes it strictly obligatory on Timothy : ‘Attend unto reading ;’<sup>1</sup> and St. Jerome exhorts Celantia to it : ‘I advise and recommend above all things, I even earnestly entreat you, to nourish your soul assiduously with spiritual reading : it is the surest means of conducting you to the perfection of justice.’<sup>2</sup> But that this exercise may be profitable to us, we should understand how to make a suitable selection of books and to pursue a good method of reading. The same book does not suit all persons, nor is it even adapted to the same individual under all circumstances. A choice, therefore, is absolutely essential. We should prefer those which abound more in unction than in erudition ; those which are more calculated to inflame the heart and determine the will than to gratify curiosity ; those most in accordance with our actual wants, and which most forcibly inculcate the mortification of the senses, hatred of vice, and love of virtue. ‘The object of a spiritual lecture is not to make us more learned, but to make us live better ; not to enable us to speak more eloquently, but to help us to advance more rapidly in perfection. In effect, what avails it to learn one’s duty and not to do it ?’<sup>3</sup> For this reason I do not approve of spending the time destined for spiritual reading in making extracts or taking notes, as this would degrade it to a study ; it would be preferring the letter to the spirit. We should, on the contrary, read in order to become holy rather than learned, for as Hugh of St. Victor remarks : ‘A pious lecture should not be an object of study for the Christian philosopher, but an exhortation to virtue.’

This exercise cannot fail to be profitable to us if we

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Letter.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Celantia.

make it with attention, a religious spirit, and perseverance. St. Augustine demands attention to reading, and shows its importance in his letter to Demetrius: 'You shall have made a good use of spiritual reading,' says he, 'if it is a sincere mirror in which your soul, beholding itself, endeavours to efface the stains which it discovers, and to enhance the beauty of the virtues with which grace has adorned it.' We should read spiritual books carefully and attentively, not hastily or superficially. We should pause occasionally on those truths which make most impression on us, the better to remember the holy lessons they convey. Above all, we should take care to make practical resolutions during the lecture, in accordance with the good thoughts it suggests, such as to perform such and such an act of virtue, to correct such or such a defect, and to acquit ourselves more faithfully of the obligations of our state or employment.

What testimony does our conscience give on this matter? Has our lecture, penetrating our soul like a soft-refreshing dew, fructified our good desires? or has it, like an impetuous torrent, dashed rapidly through our minds without leaving any trace of it behind? Do we reflect from time to time on the lessons it imparts, for the purpose of reducing them to practice? Do we not resemble 'a man who, beholding his own countenance in a glass, goes away, and presently forgets what sort of man he is?'<sup>1</sup> Let us, at least, who read these lines, avoid such culpable carelessness. The religious spirit which ought to pervade our spiritual reading should be manifested exteriorly by the recollection and gravity of our deportment. 'Read the Holy Scripture,'

<sup>1</sup> James i. 23. 24.

says St. Augustine, 'remembering that it is the Word of God ;'<sup>1</sup> 'it is a letter from our country,'<sup>2</sup> adds St. Bernard ; 'and in the divine pages of the Sacred Book,' subjoins St. Ambrose, 'it is Jesus Christ who speaks to us.' Is it not evident that so holy a lecture should be made in a respectful posture, with the heart elevated to God, and the soul permeated with holy affections and desires ?

Our lecture must be characterised by perseverance both as to time and method.

Let us not emulate the inconstancy of the butterfly, flitting lightly from page to page, and from book to book, without gathering fruit from any. Never lay a book aside till you have read it through, otherwise your lecture will only be a source of distraction to you. We should regulate the hour at which we are to make and the length of time we are to spend at it every day without exception. We should, at least, devote a quarter of an hour to it, and, if possible, make it immediately after meditation. Such is the assiduity required by St. Jerome to this exercise, that, writing to St. Paula, he says : 'Do not lay down the Holy Book till overcome by sleep, and then let your head rest on the sacred pages.'<sup>3</sup> However, this advice must not be followed literally, for the same doctor teaches that, 'an excessive love of reading may prove a source of danger by inducing satiety and disgust.' Writing to Eustochium, he says : 'Read with moderation, and let it not be weariness, but the rule you have imposed upon yourself, which shall cause you to lay down the Book.'

With what attention, devotion, and perseverance do we purpose making our spiritual lecture in future ? For

<sup>1</sup> Letter.<sup>2</sup> Sermon.<sup>3</sup> Letter.