

THE PATHS OF GOODNESS

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Some Helpful Thoughts
on Spiritual Progress

BY

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TO THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
MYSTICAL ROSE

PREFACE

THERE is a well-known law of economics that the demand creates the supply. This maxim has been notably verified in the present little series of talks on spiritual themes. When "Your Neighbor and You" was written, a good many years ago, it was put forth without the notion that this was to be the first of a succession of similar volumes. Yet as each successive book appeared, "Your Soul's Salvation," "Your Interests Eternal," "The Most Beloved Woman," "Children of Mary," "The Things Immortal," and "Your Own Heart," every one gave rise to the kind demand for yet another, and this will explain the appearance of this latest book, for which we have chosen the title, "The Paths of Goodness."

We take great pleasure in thanking again all those friends known and unknown, whose own goodness has made this series a success. We greet them all in the charity of Christ, and we ask earnestly a prayer from all who read these books for the writer thereof. May

many be stirred by the old and blessed truths here put in a somewhat new dress of words, to take heart and go on courageously, step by step, in the paths of goodness.

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THE PATHS OF GOODNESS

LITTLE BY LITTLE

DISCOURAGEMENT, as we have often said, is one of the greatest obstacles and dangers in our struggle toward goodness, and it is a great source of discouragement to perceive that one has been trying a long time to become better and has gotten forward only a little. One looks back over the examinations of conscience, the good resolves, the prayers and exercises and devotions, and thinks, "What a vast deal of effort and struggle for such a very little apparent accomplishment! Surely it is an extremely disheartening thing to have tried for years and not to have completely corrected even a single defect!" Frankly, such a realization *is* discouraging. Unless we can fortify ourselves by some true and apt reflections of a cheerful hue we shall be hard hit by that dull sense of defeat which comes from realizing our little progress. To have gone on year after year honestly trying to be better, praying to be better and working to improve our life and character, and then to have

gotten so little ahead after all, is in itself a highly disheartening affair. But is this common experience in the spiritual life really a reason for discouragement? To answer properly we must understand some often overlooked, but very actual, laws of the spiritual life.

To begin with, our spiritual life has got its laws and its ordinary course of progress just as has our physical existence. We must feed our soul as we must feed our body, in order that it may remain strong and vigorous. We must exercise our soul as we exercise our body to keep it fit and firm. Our soul has its times of distress just as our body has, when it needs particular care and solicitude, and sometimes the care of a physician; and there are spiritual remedies for the soul just as there are cures for the body's ailments. The comparison is, of course, not complete; few comparisons are. Our soul is a spirit, and the life of which we speak is a supernatural life. Therefore the nourishment of the soul is a supernatural nourishment, its exercises supernatural exercises, and the remedies that it needs are remedies not of this earth. But still there

is a great deal of truth and light in the comparison, and we can infer many things concerning the life of our soul from the physical life of our body.

To begin with, the laws of growth of the soul, so far as concerns its faculties and powers, are a good deal like those of the body and its faculties. Our body grows strong or grows weak little by little in the ordinary course of events. If we wish to exercise our arm, let us say, and make it vigorous and strong as men do when they wish to play some game of strength and skill, we have to begin by very small increases and become more vigorous little by little.

Children who are growing rapidly show the swiftest change of all human development. How fast they gain weight and height! Yet who could possibly notice their growth from day to day? Even they develop little by little.

It is so in all human growth. The law of our nature is that we can grow better, stronger, swifter, surer, only little by little. The student who has a trained and keen capacity for acquiring knowledge, who has

accuracy, retentiveness, insight, imagination, skill in expression—has gained all these things only little by little. Did anyone ever come to great knowledge in a short time? Learning gotten in a brief space is superficial. If it is quickly gained, it will not be profound, comprehensive, and mature. One may acquire a smattering of a subject in a short time, but to penetrate into its depths, possess its limits, and thoroughly assimilate its full contents one must grow wiser little by little. Studious nights and laborious days must all true scholars give as the bloody price of learning.

So it is in every plane of human effort. The scientist must rise to eminence little by little. The professional man acquires his practical skill not even during the slow years of his professional studies, but afterward in the long effort of active life, and so he, too, develops and gains knowledge little by little. The writer who seems to have fluency, aptness of phrase, swiftness of comprehension and expression, has got these things not soon nor easily, but by a weary and painstaking apprenticeship. His first efforts were crude,

ridiculous perhaps, at least immature. They meant the spoiling of much good ink and white paper. But what skill and sureness he possesses he got little by little.

So one might go tediously on and find in every sphere of human activity this same inexorable law that progress is step by step and little by little.

Remember too that most human progress is only made at the expense of a great many partial failures. Even one's most large and definite steps forward are accompanied with a vast deal of slipping back. There was a curious and painful method of pilgrimage in old times which consisted in taking three steps forward and two backward until one reached the goal. It is a parable of human progress. In education our course is one of learning and partial forgetting; in science our advance lies by the way of discovering part truth and part falsehood, and then slowly and painstakingly separating the dross from the gold. In professional life how many failures precede that plenitude of skill which marks the expert practitioner. In any art how many canvases and how much clay are

spoiled before one achieves the perfect masterpiece?

Keeping this in mind, it is no wonder that our spiritual life should proceed in the same human and usual fashion, little by little, and with many slippings backward. Being human, we partake both of the benefits and the disadvantages of our human nature. Just as it is our nature to walk step by step and not to fly, to creep where we cannot run, and to go forward little by little where we cannot advance more swiftly, so in the spiritual life it is the lot of most people to go forward slowly, step by step, gaining ground with difficulty, always tending to slip backward and achieving a height of goodness only after long, breathless effort and weary times of discouragement. We are to be mountain climbers; we are not to go dully forward on the even level of mediocrity. We are to seek perfection, to try to imitate the Son of God Himself, always climbing upward toward His height, out of the common air of our human nature into the sweet freedom of the sunshine and the open places. What wonder that we grow weary, that we sometimes doubt

if we are making progress; what marvel that the climbing is slow and the progress difficult, for we are aiming at lofty heights.

Apply these reflections to your personal experience, and you should get a great deal of consolation. It is much, after all, not to have gone backward. It is much, indeed, to have gone a little forward. If we find ourselves still struggling, still clinging to the hard rocks and urging ourselves forward from point to point and ever struggling upward, then all is well. God, who made our human nature, intends us not to fly from the low level to the topmost peaks, for this is a glory which He gives only to a few and the more favored of His servants. He intends most of us to gain our merit and our glory by trying and not always succeeding, but by still urging manfully on, with our eyes toward the heights. So long as we still are heaving upward, breathless and weary maybe, but still setting one brave footstep after another up the rocky sides of the peaks, He smiles on us with approval and is satisfied. For the merit of our state does not consist entirely in achieving, but greatly in continuing to climb.

It should be encouragement and consolation to know that we may get merit and please God very much by going forward little by little. He considers not the gift of the lover but the love of the giver. It is the intention, the inward devotion with which we perform our actions that pleases our Father's heart. If He wished to have us leap up the height, He could give us the strength to do so; if He wished us to fly, He could provide us with wings.

Indeed, in the case of defects which are not sins—and there are very many in our human nature—it may be better for us, in God's providence, not to get forward too fast, but rather to have to keep on struggling. We read in the lives of the saints that God left to many of them certain defects in their character and disposition to be a spur and an occasion to exercise humility and trust in God. That fiery warrior of Christ, St. Paul, the great Apostle, tells us that he cried out to God to be delivered from a grievous infirmity that was as a thorn in his flesh. But God, instead of hearing his prayer to be rid of this defect said to him, "My grace is sufficient for

thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity." This answer of God will apply to a whole host of our own deficiencies.

Again, there is a deal of salutary mortification in patiently bearing these defects. It is easy to sail on over tranquil seas, wafted by a favoring wind, where we find our way pleasant and our passage swift. We are inclined to believe that it is our own good strength and happy fervor which is sending us forward swiftly, and we forget to thank God for the favorable wind and the quiet sea. But let us find ourselves utterly impotent, struggling with prevailing winds and caught on the crests and in the hollows of a wicked sea. Then we shall appreciate our utter dependence on the divine Majesty, when we find ourselves entirely obliged to trust to God for help and aid and to acknowledge our own complete dependence on Him.

The great danger of human nature is pride. It was pride which in the beginning ruined our first parents, who, desiring to be as gods, disobeyed the command of the Most High and ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree. Ridiculous as it may seem, it is pride which is our own great peril. We who are fallen,

stripped of the glory of our original innocence and reduced to such a pitiful pass—that we can still be proud is one of the mysteries of human nature. Yet so it is, and this pride is a danger even to those who are going forward in the spiritual life and who are making an earnest effort to get on in God's favor. The advances made, the consolations received, the knowledge that we are overcoming our defects, leave us sadly open to temptations to self-complacency. So that God our Father, knowing our weakness, puts us beyond the danger of pride by letting us experience at times our own nothingness and impotence. We know that we are nothing and the shadow of nothing, and that our whole being is as dust before God, but we feel this best and realize it most completely when after long efforts we find how little we have got forward and are compelled to acknowledge how weak we are even with the strong aid of the arm of God.

These reflections may cheer us a bit when we grow sad at making such scant progress in the way of goodness. Our going forward little by little should not be a discouragement, but a consolation. We may well put

our entire trust in the mercy of God, and we should know that by going forward little by little we are in a human way getting toward heaven. Step by step must the journey be made. With straining limbs and streaming eyes we must go on climbing a little higher and higher. While we seem to be going forward so slowly, God is counting each effort and each struggle, and awards the prize, not to him who leaps up most swiftly, but to him who struggles onward with the most determined love.

In spite of our imperfections and weakness, in spite of the dark shadows that close our path and the perilous moments of anguish when we are clinging to a rude rock and cannot get forward, let us persevere until of a sudden our Father's hand takes us from the struggle and turmoil and lifts us up mightily through the mist of death to the heights toward which we are struggling. There for all ages to come we shall be glad of the struggling and the sighing, and shall be consoled by the knowledge that we have got on, somehow and with God's aid, even though we could only go forward little by little.

OUR TROUBLESOME SELVES

WE remember reading long ago a bit of lively verse which told a very human story. It was the tale of a knight of old who sallied forth from his ancestral castle armed cap-a-pie with glistening mail and fired with youthful chivalry. Bright was the morn and fair the sun when the castle gates swung open to usher out this young adventurer, and brave his young heart beat as he vowed to do doughty deeds in distant lands and send his fame to history. But alas, so the story ran, just at the castle gate, crouched under a shady stone, the good young knight met his first adversary. It was a wicked dragon, small and ugly and mean, and it gave him battle without pause for breath from the sunrise to the sunset of all that long summer day. The dragon snarled and breathed black flame; the young knight thrust and thrust again. It was a weary and stubborn fight, and when the sunset came and they could fight no more, it was a weary and bedraggled knight that wandered back through the castle gate to wash his wounds

and make him ready for another fray, for the dragon was still unslain. The good knight's armor was dented with many a mark of tooth and claw. His noble plume was scorched and shorn, his flesh was dark with dragon's breath and his sword with dragon's blood.

Came the next morn and out he went again, with armor brightened and plume renewed, and dreaming again of distant lands. But there by the shady stone was the small, mean dragon still in wait. Again and again the whole day long the goodly knight fought and thrust and hewed and hacked, but he could not beat the dragon down. Thus it went on for days on days, the dull, inglorious combat every day renewed. Forever the weary knight would dream on the conquest of distant lands, forever the small and ugly dragon at the door would waste his youthful strength and send him back bedraggled and outworn. Until at length the golden hair grew gray, the bright young eyes dimmed over with age and care, the ruddy limbs grew wrinkled and weak with eld, and, turning at last from the weary fight, the aged knight went back into his gate never to come forth

again, leaving the wide world unconquered still, save in his dreams, and the dragon, small and ugly and mean, unconquered by his door. And the name of the dragon, concluded this touching tale, was—Self!

It is a proper allegory. So do we all, when we sally forth with noble dreams, meet a dragon by the door. Day by day our strife with ourselves is renewed, and at the end of many days we give over fighting at last, with that selfsame dragon of self, weakened and wounded perhaps, but not quite slain, still lurking at our door.

Many a one of fine hopes and noble aspirations has been scared and worried into discouragement and despair by the daily fear and weariness of this dragon Self. Day by day, in the course of the wearisome combat, many a one has slowly given up hope of great and distant achievement because of the weariness and horror which the vision of self and its sickening shortcomings has bred. It is literally true in this strange world that a man's enemies are of his own household. True too that men and women courageous and good, who could not be frightened from

their high resolves by any common fear, have by degrees abandoned their noble purposes and given up hope of achievement because, in simple truth, they were afraid of their own selves.

Truth to say, it is a not unreasonable fear. We have more cause to be afraid of ourselves than of anything else in the world. No one else, not all the devils in hell, can do us any lasting harm. All of our woe and all of our loss at the last is due to our troublesome self. The reason of this is clear. We shall be judged and shall stand or fall not by what others do to us but by what we do ourselves. It is our own free acts that must ruin us or save. When our life is added up and the great sum total of merit or guilt cast and declared, every item for or against us in the long account will be a free and deliberate action of ourselves.

And a troublesome self it is, to be sure! For all the brave front they put on before the world, it is only the fools among men who in their hearts are not out of conceit with their troublesome selves. There is a popular phrase, often heard about certain types of

men, that they are their own worst enemies. Alas, the saying might be applied to us all. We all of us do ourselves more harm than anyone else in the world could do us. Indeed, all our true misfortunes come not from without but from within us. For the one true misfortune is sin, and it is we ourselves and we alone who can inflict this harm on our souls.

Again, we all know to our cost, and even the greatest of saints have groaned with dismay at the thought, how weak and fickle we are and how many our faults and defects. Original sin has left its wound in our body and soul, and we feel our hearts tugged and pulled with impulses and desires which, as St. Paul has so eloquently said, are a law in our members which fights with the law of our mind. All literature, sacred and profane, is a constant witness to the truth of this memorable saying. Ovid voiced it when he said: *Video meliora proboque deteriora sequor*—“I see the better deed and I approve it, and then I do the worse.” Many a saint and many a poet and many a one of lesser worth or fame has joined in the lament of all human-

ity against their troublesome selves. So the whole of mankind who are intent on higher things and seek the vision and the dream are forever in sordid conflict with the dragon at their very door.

What then? Shall we grow weary and despair? Is it an unhappy thing, a pure misfortune, for us always to meet the dragon at the door? It might seem so indeed to those of little faith. Yet to us who have the Christian teaching there is great merit and consolation in the perpetual conflict we must wage with our troublesome selves. For notice well that our merit here and glory hereafter does not depend on victory, but on fighting. We shall not be asked whether or not we quite utterly slew the troublesome dragon Self, but how nobly and how patiently we withstood him. There are indeed some happy mortals who do seem nearly to have scotched the poisonous serpent. They are so good, unselfish, and gentle, have so overcome whatever is harsh, mean, and unworthy in their nature, that the victory over self seems almost perfect in them, and one is fain to think that they have gained the life-long

struggle with their adversary. Yet ask these favorite souls, and even they will tell of vigilance unrelaxed and struggles always renewed. The snake is stunned maybe and dormant, but it is not slain. "Our self-love," says St. Francis de Sales, "will die just about a quarter of an hour after ourselves."

So that it is God's design in giving us this enemy at our door to prove our courage and endurance not in swift victory but in patient fighting. It would have been a thrilling and inspiring thing for that young knight of the story to have galloped forth in his glistening mail and done great deeds in distant lands. But daily to sally out to struggle with the ugly dragon at the door required a finer courage and more sterling mettle. It was courage that did not need the stimulus of glory and of victory. So also the obscure battles we carry on with self, in those dark inward realms where there is no eye to see but God's and no tongues to praise but those which sound in heaven, are more glorious and more full of merit than if we waged them in the eyes of men and for the praise of the admiring world. Indeed, in proportion as

self is troublesome and difficult to subdue, our merit and the glory of our conflict grows. It needs a finer courage and a more Christian hope to fight without sparing against a harsh and difficult disposition than it does to resist the prompting of a self less troublesome and perverse.

We have reason, then, not to grieve but to be glad over our perpetual and daily conflict. Even though we take wounds and suffer scars, this will not destroy our merit and glory at the last. Even though we seem to make no great headway with our foe, we still are gaining the solid glory of fighting on. Every onslaught is a summons to merit, and every advance of our plaguing enemy is an opportunity. It is told of St. Gertrude that once on a time she saw the heavens opened and the angels looking with envy on the children of men. "Why do ye envy us," she cried out, "ye celestial intelligences?" "Because," replied the angels, "you have still a chance of merit, and you can suffer and toil and strive and gain a yet higher place in heaven." Doubtless the blessed in heaven, whom God Himself enlightens as to the true

value of all things, must look with wonder on us, marveling that we make so little use of our vast opportunities, that we miss so many happy chances of gaining victories over our troublesome selves.

We must, therefore, not lose courage nor grow weary of the daily struggle. Indeed, our one misfortune would be to allow ourselves to lose heart and give up the battle. Discouragement is the fatal end of meritorious striving. It is our part to keep up the fight, and if we yield, the dragon has the field. A goodly company is watching us from heaven. None of our obscurest efforts or the most hidden blows we deal our adversary escape the eyes of those celestial witnesses. When we overcome the thought of vanity, the stirring of pride, the pang of envy, the torpor of sloth, the sting of covetousness, the flare of anger, the craving of gluttony, or any other of those base impulses which are the fangs and claws of the dragon Self or the reek of his bitter breath blowing hot on our soul, then bright applause and smiling satisfaction run round the fair circle of our friends in heaven. The sleepless gaze of the Most Holy Trinity is on us. Christ and His

Blessed Mother watch from their height. The goodly company of our patron saints with all their peers are the beholders of our victories. The angels, who have never experienced the dark rebellions of the flesh, wonder that clay can strive so well, and cheer us with their watchful company. Who would not fight courageously forever, with such lookers-on to grace and crown the victory!

So let us go forth like the good knight of old, with morning face and gallant looks, each day to do good battle with our ancient adversary. When we feel the claws and the withering breath of our troublesome selves, and groan under the onslaught of our enemy, let us remember the merit of the battle and who are looking on to see us bear ourselves like fit warriors of the Cross in this daily controversy. For the merit of the fight is not in winning, but in striving. Great help from heaven must come to those who only struggle on. Our glory and the credit of our courage is not to come from quite conquering our adversary, but from bravely struggling on, without ever losing heart or giving over, against the perpetual and daily onslaught of our own troublesome selves.

THE MUCH REQUIRED

IN THE mysterious ways of God's providence it is quite clear that some persons receive vastly more of the gifts of grace and opportunity than others. In extreme instances one sees this very clearly. Consider yourself, for instance, yourself with all your knowledge of the Faith, the immense, unmerited favor you have received of Christian baptism, your opportunities for the sacraments, your many dealings with fervent Catholic people, your Catholic training at home and at school, the ministrations of priests, the good example of pious friends, the worthy books that are always ready to your hand to tell you more of Catholic truths and stir you to greater fervor, in a word, all the crowded mercies with which the special providence of God fills your days. You are one of the spoiled children of God. He has distinguished you—no matter how simple or obscure you may seem to yourself, provided only you are a member of the Catholic Church—He has distinguished you by incomparable

mercies. Compare yourself as you now are with, let us say, one of the swarming millions in the populous cities of Asia, or with one of those blacks who lurk in the forests of Africa. Such a one is as human as yourself, as deserving in himself, antecedently to God's choice, of the grace of baptism, of the opportunity to be a Catholic. But not to him has come the immense blessing of the saving sacrament. God in His undiscoverable ways has other designs to save his soul, providing he on his part does all in his power to fulfil natural justice. But in point of fact he has received very little in comparison with you, who have received extremely much. You have obtained the abundance of the household of God, while he has barely the crumbs that fall from the table of the children. How unequally have spiritual blessings been measured out to you and to him!

Nor need you go so far away for a comparison. In your own city, among your own circle of friends, you will find many who are indefinitely poorer than yourself in the good gifts of God. Consider the state of those who have never received instruction in the

Catholic Faith, who have never even got a glimpse of the beauty and the majesty of the Spouse of Christ, who do not even vaguely dream that the Catholic Church is the authentic voice of God on earth, the depository of salvation, the mother of men, the comforter of hearts, and the door to heaven. You leave your house in the morning and from another house across the street comes one of your neighbors. You greet him, for you know him well. He has grown up in the same city as you. You both have many of the same acquaintances and friends. Yet this man's heart is as starved of the truth of Christ almost as though he had been born in some jungle town of Africa or cradled by some broad yellow river in Asia. What are his chances compared to yours? He may spring from one of those families, too common in our land, where there is no religious tradition whatsoever, where neither the father nor the mother nor any of the children ever darken the doors of a church. Or he may have been cradled in one of those creeds outworn which, though they call themselves Christian, have so diluted the doctrines of Christ and so com-

promised with His teaching that for them Christianity is a respectable ethical system, sacraments are empty symbols, one church is quite like another, and one religion as good, or as little good (which often means the same thing) as any other religion.

Compare yourself with such a man. You have knowledge, he is in ignorance; you have guidance, he is quite at sea without a rudder or a sail; you are sure of your ground in religious things, he is walking on quicksands; you have the sacraments, the Mass, the sacramentals, all the consoling aids which the Church gives to her children, he has the barren ministry of preaching or the unintelligible word of the Bible, without true guide or right instructor to help him separate the false from the real. How much has been given you! To him in comparison has been given how very little!

Nay, perhaps even in the household of the Church you may find many a one who in comparison with yourself has been given extremely little. There are some fifteen hundred thousand children at this moment in our land, Catholic children every one by inherit-

ance and most of them by baptism, who are not in a Catholic school. They are not receiving, in school at least, a Catholic education. Many of them, of course, are being taught at home or in catechism classes something of the doctrines of their holy religion. But they miss that constant influence, that priceless training which comes from the influence of religion in the very atmosphere of the schoolroom. They are not getting an education which is saturated with and ennobled by the Catholic Faith. If you have had an education in a Catholic school, how much more fortunate you are than they!

The inequalities, then, in the distribution of God's gifts are very evident. To some much, to others less, to still others little has been given. It is not for us to conjecture the hidden reasons of God's gifts and refusals. He is infinite and essential Wisdom, Mercy, and Love. To us is revealed, to use again an old but beautiful figure, but one side of the great tapestry which the eternal Weaver is forever making through the ages. We see the knots and the loose ends of the threads which He is using to weave the glorious de-

sign that shall be shown to us in heaven and shall bewitch our eyes with its consummate workmanship. We see too dimly and too feebly to conjecture, much less to criticise, the great designs of God. But we can discern this plain truth which is written evidently on the whole scheme of things—that some of us have received much, and others little; some have been blessed with many graces, others have received far less.

But there is one saying of our Blessed Lord which cuts through our tepid ingratitude for so many blessings, our supine indifference to the great multitude of God's favors, like a terrible sharp sword. It is a brief and simple sentence, most obvious in its truth, most tremendous in its significance. It brings us suddenly face to face with a realization that our worser self had rather not have brought home to us. It tears away with one sudden gesture the heavy cloak that hides our ingratitude from our own heart. The saying is this: "From those who have received much, much will be required; from those who have received less, less will be required."

I confess that it needs a great deal of moral

courage to look this saying full in the face and let its true significance sink down into our hearts. But it is equally certain that few things can be more good for our souls than to realize the meaning of this word. We take God's gifts so much as a matter of course. While our hearts overflow with His graces and our souls are fat with the marrow of His gifts, we allow so much of His bounty to be wasted with so little compunction, even with such scanty thought. Having been brought up in the household of God, which is the Catholic Church, and been fed so constantly at His royal table, we think so little of the account we have to render for the very abundance of His good gifts. Gratitude is dull in us. We do not give thanks enough even for what we waste of the good gifts of God. Being in truth paupers who have been led in to the table of a king, we are more insolent than if we were princes of the blood. We take and waste and forget, and do not give thanks as we should.

Upon this dull ingratitude and slumbering sense of responsibility the words of Our Lord break like a clap of threatening thunder.

His saying is most reasonable, and for that very cause it is all the more impressive. God will require of us in proportion as we have received. We who have received so much, how much will be demanded of us! What great things God has a right to expect from those to whom He has so greatly given! This is no academic speculation, no glittering generality without practical import which we can toss off and forget. Our accounting is to be in proportion to what we have received. If you have received much, you must prepare to give the much that is required.

Because of the great importance of this truth and our great danger of forgetting it, Our Lord has not mentioned it only once, but He has driven it home with more than one vivid parable. There is the parable of the talents, which gives us to understand that when the great Householder shall exact an accounting, He will require of those who have received five talents a greater return than He will expect from those who have received but two. It is only another way that Our Lord has taken to show us that we who have received much must make a great re-

turn. From those who have received little He will demand a less strict accounting and be satisfied with a less bountiful return.

We shall do well to realize while there is yet time how much will be required of us for the great things that we have received and are receiving from Almighty God, because life slips away so fast and we are so likely to forget, and our days run so swiftly to an end. We must seize, hold to, and use betimes what He offers us, making good profit from what He gives, because we shall have to render an accounting. Time drives on so relentlessly. The moments fall behind us so ceaselessly. The gifts of God pass so swiftly. We must seize hold on the instants and make them yield to us all that God has entrusted to them, else they slip by and elude us and do not give up the merit here and the glory hereafter that we should have got from them. Yet for each one we shall have to make an accounting.

These thoughts must not make us discouraged nor sad, but rather they should stir us up to an intense interest and a weariless activity in good works to redeem the lost oppor-

tunities of the past and to make the present yield what God means it to give us. In a short space we can fulfil a great time. By loving God extremely much and doing all things very rightly and purely for His love, we can atone in great measure for our remissness in the past and make ready to render Him worthily the much required of us who have received so much. This thought should stir us up from that spiritual sloth which is a great and hidden temptation of these times, even among good people, and set us working like laborers that sweat for a wage and must earn their livelihood day by day, getting each day's food by each day's toil.

The reflection that we have received so much should likewise arouse us to a great compunction and grieving for our past sloth and wasting of the good gifts of God. By repentance for the little profit we have gotten from the great opportunities given us we can make amends in some degree for our sorry waste of God's gifts. We who are the spoiled children of God, upon whom He showers down all the blessings of those of His household, we have acted in a manner that will be

put to shame by the good conduct of many outside the Church with not a tithe of our opportunities and graces. Our Lord directs us to say, even when we have done all that we should, that we are unprofitable servants. How much more should we beat our breast in sorrow and confess that we are unprofitable servants of God when we have received so much more than others, and yet have fallen so short even of our common duty. If we can weep in our hearts for our shortcomings, that will at least be some atonement. A heartfelt and abiding sorrow for the great measure in which we have wasted God's good gifts is the least amends we can make to the heavenly bounty.

To think of the much we have received and the much required of us will likewise be a great incentive to charity. We know by intimate and actual experience how very much God has given to ourselves. We know little or nothing of what He has given to others. We experience in our own souls the help and light of His grace. We are quite ignorant of what graces He gives or refuses to our neighbors. Ourselves we can judge severely.

Others we dare not venture to judge at all. This was the piercing thought which stirred the humility of the saints so that they truly said that in their own eyes they were the most unworthy of mankind.

For they knew how great were God's mercies and graces to their own souls, and they felt intensely their faults in corresponding to them. But they were quite ignorant what graces might have been refused to others. Therefore, they thought well of all others besides themselves, but themselves they judged most severely. We shall do well to imitate the example of the saints, to accuse ourselves lest God should accuse us, to make atonement by penance and effort for our shortcomings in the past, but to excuse others and treat them as our betters because they may not have wasted so many of the gifts of God as we. We shall do well, then, to write deep in our minds Our Lord's warning and admonition. Life passes and we go swiftly to our accounting. Let us prepare to render to God the much that is required of us. For surely we are of those of whom it may be said that they have much received.

THE FOOL OF THE HOUSE

IF MAN were a being solely of memory, intelligence, and will, without either imagination or feeling to sway and influence his actions, life would be a much simpler if much less interesting affair, and being good (so it seems to us poor mortals) would be a far easier matter all around. Our memory, after all, is a most benevolent and agreeable faculty—it preserves so conveniently the things we have need to recall. We can manage our memory very well indeed, and when it does become troublesome to us by bringing up thoughts that are perverse and vexatious, the annoyance they give us is usually not from the memory itself, but from the storms they stir up in the imagination and feeling.

The intellect, too, gives us very little trouble, except by reason of its limitations. There is no pain in thinking, and if sometimes to think deeply and intently does weary or torture us, it is not the intellect that is the seat of the annoyance and fatigue, but our

bodily powers, the feelings, the imagination and the nerves, which are exercised along with our thought. The will also, that most lordly power of choosing, that rules over all the others, is likewise a pleasant and altogether profitable faculty in itself. Whatever trouble, annoyance, or pain we feel in its exercise is due not so much to the will itself as to the pulling and tugging of our imagination and feelings, which will never be quiet, but, like a leash of dogs, are constantly pulling their master, the will, now this way, now that, throwing the will off its balance and making it difficult for it to choose as it should, according to the calm dictates of the intelligence and in the clear and quiet light that is furnished it by the memory.

The imagination and the feelings! What a nuisance they are, to put the thing mildly! As a quaint but very apt French proverb puts it, they are the fools of the household. The will is like the man of the family—strong, serious, grave—ruling, when it is let alone, with firmness and decision. The intellect is like the woman of the household, ruled by the will, yet influencing it most profoundly; di-

rected in its actions by the will, yet gently and wisely swaying it by swift intuitions and delicate perceptions; guiding, yet following; the queen of the soul's house, as the old schoolmen used to say, who leads and ministers to the blind king, the will.

But the imagination and the feelings! They are the freakish children of the household, wild, whimsical, and inconstant; rushing now to this extreme, now to that; changeable from day to day; now pulling down the shades of the windows and plunging the whole house into darkness and sadness, now opening doors and windows to the wild winds of passion; now singing songs of hope and desire that set the air thrilling with unquiet longing, now playing sad tunes of fear and apprehension that freeze the will and trouble the intellect with future sorrows that may never come to be. If you will reflect on your life thus far, what a huge part you will find that feeling and imagination have played in all your cares, sorrows, misdeeds, and errors! If you had lived according to the dictates of reason alone and listened only to the calm, quiet promptings that memory and intelli-

gence gave you, you might have kept the law of God inviolate, for reason constantly assures us, enlightened as it is by faith, that to serve God is alone the purpose of our being, and that to love, reverence, and praise Him is the sole and lasting happiness of man on earth.

Therefore, when opportunities came to you of serving God in a singularly perfect way, of giving up, let us say, some worldly advantage for His love, you would have seized upon the chance for self-sacrifice, if you acted from reason alone, with as much joy as a miser feels in his gold. If you had listened to your reason alone you never would have sinned so often and so carelessly. For again, reason enlightened by faith tells us that sin is the one great evil in the universe, and that nothing in life can compensate for the shame and the wrong of a single sin. The most unreasonable of human actions is that by which one offends the infinite God, whom it is impossible to deceive, whose vigilance it is hopeless to avoid, whose justice is as infinite as His power, and who is worthy in Himself of

all the gratitude, obedience, and ardent love of our hearts.

Our holy Faith gives us such a clear, simple and secure view of the universe, a view that only God's own wisdom could impart! The world is a place of pilgrimage; we are wayfarers to the heavenly kingdom. Our whole business on earth is to go forward in the love, praise, and service of God. All things on earth, our own body and soul, the friends, the wealth, the opportunities that God gives us, are all to be used to help us forward in His service, and to be given up, without a murmur, nay, with actual joy, however good or pleasant they may seem in themselves, if they interfere or fail to help us toward the great goal to which we all are journeying. This is the notion of life that our intelligence, instructed and enlightened by the teachings of faith, presents to us. Why, then, do we turn aside after the things of the world, neglect our clear duty to ourselves and to God, ruin our lives, and spoil, so far as we can, the harmony of the universe by sin?

A chief cause of our follies and the source of most of the disorders in our lives are pre-

cisely these two fools of the household—our imagination and our feelings. They are forever disturbing the soul with illusive fancies, sudden impulses, ill-ordered desires. When you sin, it is because the feeling of the moment has obscured your sense of duty, because some imaginary good is being dangled before you by your imagination, because some vivid image of a present good is being so alluringly presented to your mind by that picture-faculty, the imagination. Thus your sober judgment is disturbed, the eternal truths are obscured, your will is misled into seizing the apparent benefit which the imagination represents as present and easy to obtain, and it turns away from the true but distant joys which have been sometime its aim and its aspiration when the intelligence has presented to it the love and service of God and the hope of heaven.

So, too, the feelings are constantly luring us into sin unless we can keep them in check by careful ward and watchful discipline. Feelings of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth—how easily can these betray us into the deadly sins of which they

bear the names! Analyze the mistakes you have made in your life, the faults you have committed, the follies you have been guilty of, and see how many of them were due to the sad victory of your feelings over what your intelligence told you in regard to the will of God and His law.

All this is a rather melancholy indictment of the imagination and the feelings. If they are so harmful and deceiving, why have we been given them at all? Is it the part of wisdom to crush the imagination and to stifle the feelings? Should we be better off without any feelings or imagination at all? The very questions suggest their answer. It is not the imagination, but its misuse that harms us; not the feelings, but their excess that leads us astray. It is the bad training of these faculties which we have to regret in our past life and to remedy in the future. There is a very ancient and hackneyed, but very just and true, comparison which likens the feelings and the imagination to spirited horses which to be useful have to be tamed and trained. The more spirited and lively they are, the more useful they may be made, if only they

learn to carry and pull instead of running wild. The more vivid and strong our imagination and feelings are, the more they may be made to carry us forward on the road to heaven, if only we train them well, drive them carefully, and keep an eye upon them, as a good driver does on a spirited horse, lest they kick over the traces or get the bit between their teeth.

The greatest of the saints have been men of strong imagination and feelings. So have the greatest sinners. In the one case the powers of the imagination and feelings have been controlled and used in the wars of God; in the other they have run wild and carried their masters strongly and swiftly to destruction. They are as powerful for justice as for perdition, as strong for heaven as for hell. Indeed, the careers of some of the saints show very vividly both the good and the evil of the feelings and imagination. St. Augustine's carried him far in wickedness before he learned to rule and drive them by God's grace until they bore him even more swiftly on the ways of sanctity. St. Ignatius had many a doleful hour before he learned the art of spir-

itual exercise to control the fancy and the feelings, and he has systematized the art, until anyone with good will can follow in his way and "conquer self" so as to order all his life not by vain imaginations nor selfish feelings, but by the law of God.

Indeed, to recur to our former comparison, the task of ordering the household of our soul is not so unlike that of the careful father and mother of a household in ruling their little, but sometimes turbulent, domain. The will, like a prudent father, must listen to the quiet promptings of the intelligence and be firm and strong in keeping steady sway and following conscience, which is reason interpreting the law of God. The intellect must be the mistress of the soul, guided by the will, and supreme over both feelings and imagination, her warnings heeded and her behests obeyed. The imagination and feelings are to be treated like headlong and impulsive children, fed on strong and nourishing food, restrained from excesses, disciplined to good and orderly habits, trained and encouraged, wisely taught and guided, until the waywardness and lawlessness, that are in them

since the sad fall of Adam made the sense and the imagination of man prone to evil from his youth, are trained and purged away. Then we shall act, not from the wild rushes of feeling nor the empty allurements of the imagination, but with a disciplined will and a calm and temperate mind, guided by reason, which in turn is enlightened by faith.

SOME LENTEN SUBSTITUTES

TO DO penance in one form or another is a necessity to us poor fallen children of Adam. Our Lord quite pointedly informed us so when He said to us through His apostles, "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish." We have sinned. Upon sin must follow either punishment or penance. If we wish, therefore, to escape the punishment due our sins, we must atone for them. This is the simple summary of the law of penance. We must afflict ourselves by voluntary self-chastisement for our sins or God's justice will afflict us and cause us to make a much keener, though involuntary, satisfaction for what we have done amiss. It is, then, not from severity but rather out of pity that the Church imposes on us penitential fasts and abstinences. Lest we should forget or omit to make satisfaction for our sins she reminds us and assists us by making it obligatory upon us under pain of grievous sin to abstain or to fast on certain definite days. She bids us in this way avert before-

hand God's severe chastisements which will fall on us for our unatoned sins, in this life and most of all in the fiery ordeal of purgatory.

These official penances of the Church are therefore not a hardship on us, but a singular privilege. They remind us betimes to make atonement, while at the same time they sanctify and consecrate in a particular way our penance. What one does in a private capacity and of his own free will to mortify himself and atone for his sins is meritorious and has efficacy. Yet it is not to be compared with that penance performed out of obedience to the law of the Church and in accordance with her holy regulations. The abstinence on Fridays, therefore, the fasts of Lent, have a particular efficacy to atone for our sins, because they are performed in obedience to the explicit law of the Church and are sanctified beyond the ordinary. It is much better, all other things being equal, to observe the regular fasts of the Church and her prescribed abstinences than, disregarding these, to mortify one's self in private ways of one's own choosing. Obedience gives a special holiness

to the Church's fasts—that obedience which is better than sacrifice and which adds to sacrifice a particular merit and efficacy.

We are fortunate, then, if we find ourselves able to fast during Lent. It is a real misfortune on the other hand to have to ask a dispensation. Since we must, in one way or the other, do penance for our sins; and since voluntary penance and in particular penance commanded by the Church is so much more efficacious for the remission of the punishment due them, we are fortunate if we can perform just what is prescribed by our good and holy Mother; unfortunate if we find ourselves obliged to seek exemption. Such special merit and such singular effectiveness for the remission of sin's punishment reside in the prescribed fasts and abstinences of the Church that we suffer a serious loss when we have to be dispensed from them. True, when we are dispensed, our obligation ceases. Still we are encouraged, though we are not bound, to substitute other penances for the fasting which we cannot practice.

To put the thing in other words, the general obligation to do penance presses on

all of us. We must all do penance or we shall all likewise perish. The Church, with great kindness and thoughtfulness, says to us: "Fast during Lent and on the days appointed. In this way you shall appease the anger of God and heed the warning of Our Lord to do penance." Our frail health says to us: "This manner of penance by fasting you cannot do." Then must we say to ourselves: "Penance I must do; to fast I am not able—what substitute, then, shall I offer to God by way of penance for my sins?"

Foremost in the ranks of salutary works of penance comes the pious practice of almsgiving. The concupiscence of the eyes, the incessant itching and desire to have more of the goods of this world and to hold on to what we have, is one of the strongest inclinations of our poor human nature. Almsgiving mortifies this harsh and strong concupiscence. When we give, whether out of our abundance or our need, to those more wretched and more needy than ourselves, we lend to the Lord, and at the same time we exercise a salutary act of mortification. It hurts us, to a greater or less degree, according to the size of the

gift and the measure of our generosity, to part with what we have. Therefore, almsgiving is a true penance, and many a passage in Holy Writ tells us how pleasing it is in the sight of God. Those who give to the poor lend to the Lord. Those who sacrifice their attachment to possessions and hand them over for the benefit of the missions or for the spread of the Faith propitiate God's justice in a most effective manner. The charity which gives alms to the missions or to the poor is of that charity which covers a multitude of sins. If we have good excuse from the penance of fasting, which one of us can reasonably seek exemption from the penance of giving alms?

Almsgiving has also this excellent quality among others, that the efficacy of the penance grows greater in proportion as we have less of this world's goods. Those who are well-to-do may indeed perform efficacious penance by giving large sums to charity or the missions. But those who have less can do as great penance by giving less, because the penance of their almsgiving is greater in proportion as they have less to give. The poor

widow of the Gospel who dropped into the box of offerings her whole living, even all she had, did more penance and merited more praise from Our Lord than the rich men who cast in great offerings from their abundance. So that if we have much to give we must give much to make our almsgiving a penance, but if we have less to offer we may do great penance by offering our little. Take serious thought, then, and see what you can do by way of penance through almsgiving. The poor and the missions will gratefully receive what you offer, and the prayers of the poor and of the missionaries will also help to obtain the remission of God's punishments for your sins.

Besides almsgiving there are many other good works which have about them the savor of sacrifice and therefore form efficacious substitutes for the Lenten fasting which our weak health may forbid. There is, for example, the teaching of catechism. We shall never forget the scene which met our eyes on a memorable occasion when we were going through a Catholic settlement deep in the slums of one of our great cities. In a huge

dingy room a half-dozen Catholic teachers of catechism, each surrounded by a noisy class, were trying to keep order and at the same time to put into the minds and the hearts of their young charges the knowledge and love of our holy Faith. We went from one group to the other, and finally paused at the most ragged, noisy, and boisterous of them all, a crowd of boys from the slums, unwashed, ill-dressed, and most vociferous, who were thronging about a patient, sweet-faced girl who, with consummate equanimity, was reading them their lesson in such pauses of the noise as gave her a chance to make herself heard at all. "How did you get into this work?" we asked, when the turmoil had a little subsided. The young teacher smiled. "Why, Father," said she, "it happened in this way. Last Lent I said to my confessor, 'Father, I cannot fast, and so I must ask a dispensation. Will you suggest to me some good works that I may do in place of fasting? But, please, oh, please, do not ask me to teach catechism! That is the very thing of things that I cannot bear to do.' I imagined that the Father smiled to himself, for there

was a queer note in his voice when he answered: 'My child, to teach catechism is the very thing that I shall suggest to you for your penance, since you dislike it so much. Let us make a bargain. Do you go to the settlement and offer to teach catechism there just for the time of Lent to the worst and most unruly class that they can give you. Only persevere until Easter time, and I guarantee that you will like it so well by then that you will keep it up of your own accord.' So I came down here," she continued, "and took this class, and I have been at it ever since." "Did the Father's prediction come true, and do you like it?" we inquired. "I have gotten to love it," she said, "and I would not give it up for anything in the world. These are such lovely boys, so affectionate and responsive." We looked about on that unruly throng and marveled at the power of Christian charity. Yet she was wise enough, this young teacher of catechism, to be able to know the warm hearts under these tattered coats. She loved the work in spite of its difficulties and unpleasantness. And so might you, dear reader, if you did

penance by teaching catechism, grow to love the work so much that you would continue in it and become one of those who will shine like stars for all eternity because they have instructed many unto justice.

The giving of one's leisure time during Lent to good works instead of to amusements is likewise a very efficacious means of penance. To those who love entertainment—and their number is many in this age of multiplied amusements—merely to refrain from their usual recreations is a true and salutary penance. When the time so saved is given to good works, to sewing for the poor or for the missions, to visiting the sick, to helping to the spread of Catholic literature, even to reading and the study of serious and worthy things, the result is not an unworthy substitute for fasting. Any violence that we do to our less noble inclinations, any effort we make in behalf of our better selves and to subdue what is less gracious and worthy in us is fit to be offered up to God in union with the sufferings of Christ to take the place of the fasting which we find ourselves unable to endure.

So it should not be difficult for us, even though we are unhappily not able to keep the strict fast of Lent, to find efficacious substitutes in the penance of multiplied good works. Besides their efficacy for obtaining the remission of our sins and averting God's judgments and just anger, these substitutes for fasting will bring many positive graces and holy satisfactions into our lives. Sin is the cause of all unhappiness and selfishness, the source of most misery. In proportion as we mortify the less noble elements of our nature our better selves expand and develop, and the lineaments of Christ show themselves in the countenance of our souls. If, subduing what is evil in us and mortifying our baser part, we keep Christ faithful company through the sad days of Lent, we shall go with Him to a glorious Easter. No one drinks so deep of the joy of the Resurrection or has so large a part in the spiritual consolations of Christ risen as he who has faithfully and with great love kept company with Christ in His penances and sorrows.

MISINTERPRETATIONS

ONE sometimes sees men and women of zealous and fervent dispositions who are profoundly discouraged with things and have pretty well given up all expectations of personal achievement for God. They started out with sanguine enthusiasm and promised themselves that somehow or other they would manage to do something worth while for their neighbor and the Church. They made plans with some prudence and forethought and started out to accomplish them. But something happened. A chill was cast upon their vigorous enthusiasm; a cold discouragement was put over their zeal.

If one could look into the causes of their disillusionment and despair, one would find that these were due to misinterpretations. While they were vigorously pushing forward the work they were engaged in, and feeling some security of success, a whisper arose from a thoughtless or malicious tongue. It was hinted and insinuated, or it was openly said

and brought to their hearing, that they were working for personal ambition; that they were trying to make themselves prominent; that they were aiming at office, or endeavoring to be influential in the parish, or to stand well with the pastor, or were working for a place in some city-wide society, league, or association. The whisper declared that they were seeking their own interests, hoping to get some personal profit, or working from the desire of reputation. There are few things more trying to sensitive souls than this, that well-meant efforts should be misinterpreted. Such an insinuation falls upon them like a shower of stinging sleet and chills their fervor like a biting wind. It seems such cold malice and mean uncharitableness that any of those whom they know are cruel enough thus to impute their efforts entirely to selfishness or to suspect them of doing their good works merely from pride.

Again, these accusations are the more dangerous and discouraging for such sanguine and energetic folk because they beget in them a fear and self-doubt and an uneasy feeling that the accusations may in part be true. The

competent official in a society, the active leader of the laity, must naturally depend for some part of his or her energy on natural gifts. To have an ambitious, energetic disposition is a necessary requisite for getting along in such work. Side by side with the supernatural intention and the honest good will to serve God there goes, in most cases, a natural ambition and activity which is not only not wrong nor sinful, but which, well-directed, gives force and motive power to good work. What is required is not to crush but to govern and make supernatural this natural energy and ambition. But when one of these active, pushing, capable persons is accused of working merely out of interest and selfishness, then a chilling doubt comes over them whether after all it is worth while to go on. If they are merely working for self, if their motives are questionable, what is the use of so much effort? So one finds energetic, capable men and women, after such bitter experience, fearful and distrustful of themselves and of their own motives, and all because of the whispering of an uncharitable tongue.

It is very wise, then, for those who are occupied with any sort of active work for the neighbor or the Church to fortify themselves betimes against the evils of misinterpretation and to see, besides, what real and lasting good they can get from this seeming evil. For, taken rightly and properly improved on, these misinterpretations, which seem so bitter to the taste of the soul and so utterly unkind and useless, are in fact excellent occasions for merit and help immensely to purify the heart and soul and direct the intention straight to God.

To begin with, then, one has no occasion at all to be either surprised or vexed when such misinterpretations come upon one. As long as human nature is what it is, jealousy, suspicions, rash judgment, will from time to time be visited upon the good and the well-meaning. The devout and those who are engaged in charitable endeavor are sometimes singularly tempted to entertain an unconscious but none the less sharp and bitter feeling of jealousy. So if they say a cutting word or make an unkind insinuation, there is no need to trouble about it at all. The

wise will take it as part of the ordinary course of events to be sometimes criticized and misunderstood. The truth is that when such things are said they are often an indication that honest, fruitful work is going on. For no one would trouble himself to cast suspicions or make misinterpretations if nothing were being done which might seem worthy of approval and praise.

The occurrence of such misinterpretations is not a reason for leaving even a particle of good work undone. It is a very shrewd device of the devil to discourage good people by making them think they are doing their good works entirely out of personal interest. Those who fall a victim to misinterpretations, whether from their friends or enemies, should reflect a little that words are only words, as *The Imitation* says, and fly through the air, but hurt not a stone. Humility and prudence and common sense require us to pay only so much attention to them as they deserve, and mean and unjust accusations can harm us only if we listen to them and allow one particle of work go undone for fear of our motive being misunderstood.

Courage, too, and fidelity to God's work require that we should go manfully through these little difficulties, and there should be no small consolation for those who are thus misunderstood in the reflection that idle and listless folk are never envied, and that those who do nothing are quite safe from misinterpretation because they are unworthy of any notice at all. But the most precious part of these misinterpretations is, of course, the aid they give to perfection. To become gradually perfect, gradually to make our intentions entirely pure and as free as can be from selfish motives, entirely right and directed straight toward God, is no matter of a moment. It requires long and patient effort and struggle. It is to be accomplished only by the grace of God, and we are urged on toward it sometimes by the roughest circumstances. If, day after day, we see everything we do taken in good part by everyone and receive a great deal of coöperation and approval, then we may come in time to think that all is perfectly well with us and that our motives are entirely right and pure. But let someone misinterpret our actions and call

our motives in question, and see what a fine searching of our conscience results and how much we are helped to discover just how far our intention is supernatural and independent of human praise and approval. These little joltings of criticism and misinterpretation wake up our souls and shake us into considering and testing the purity of our intentions.

Such an occasion is, besides, a very excellent spur to greater effort in God's service. Those who have the proper spirit and possess that fine and strong fibre of perseverance which alone will achieve perfection find their metal tested and their endurance tried in a very precious way by misinterpretation. Not without extraordinary reason does the Holy Scripture so often compare the life of man on earth to a warfare. It is a continual fight, a hand-to-hand tussle with enemies within and without us, and valor and perseverance, soldierly courage, and persistence are required to win to success. It is entirely hopeless for us to get quite creditably and honorably through this struggle called life unless we have that spiritual stamina, that toughness of the muscles of the will, that dogged deter-

mination to keep on. St. Ignatius has beautifully expressed all the high resolve of Christ's soldiers in his simple prayer: "Grant me, O Lord, to give and not count the cost; to fight and forget the wounds; to work and not seek for rest."

It is the heavy blows of life which best test and toughen the metal of our resolution. That is why God in His Providence allows that the world should be so hard a place to live in. We are not at the end of our journey, but in its weary middle of the way. We are not at the victory, but in the thick of the fight. We are not ready to rest until we have learned how to keep on in war and labor. We need severe exercise, hard blows, and difficult going to exercise our souls. Now, among the heaviest blows, the most trying thrusts which explore the joints of our spiritual armor and try our dogged perseverance are precisely these digs of misinterpretation. To be told that one is ambitious when one really wishes to do good work for the neighbor and the Church is an excruciating thrust which jogs us to the teeth. To be accused of selfish intentions when we are fighting a

battle for God's interests digs into the tenderest nerves of our spirit. Thus, again and again until death, the onslaught of rash judgment will follow us, always bitter and hard, but, well endured, always salutary and purifying. Each wound is bitter even to the most valiant soldier, but if we have perseverance and strength to stand this trial, it is very likely that we shall have courage to go through all other difficulties and gain a victory at last.

AN OLD-FASHIONED VICE

THE names of the seven deadly sins are most familiar to all of us who have learned our catechism, and at one time or another we have seriously considered how far the faults that lead up to them or accompany them are to be found in our own character. Pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. Here are the roots and sources of those transgressions that from the beginning have dishonored and ruined our human nature and spoiled the image of God in us. And we know full well, if we know ourselves at all, that the evil inclinations, the sudden temptations and perverse longings of our hearts will betray us into one or into all of those deadly sins unless we watch over and check the lower part of our nature.

“I am a man, and nothing that is human is altogether foreign to me,” sings the old Latin poet, and the groaning multitudes of men re-echo his words throughout the ages, struggling under the burden of their common temptations. The roots of sin, the tinder of

temptation, are in every human heart, and it has been well said that the difference between a rogue and an honest man is not that the one has temptations, the other none, but that the one has temptations and yields, the other has temptations and resists them. In one form or another temptation and the inclination to sin is present in every human experience. There is no one who may not from time to time profitably go over the list of the seven deadly sins and consider how far the ugly tendencies of which they are the last evil flower and the final and horrible fruit are present in his soul, so as to take precautions and scotch the wicked shoots before they grow rank and bear their fruit of woe.

It is a maxim in the spiritual life that no one becomes very wicked all of a sudden. By slow degrees, sometimes almost imperceptibly, bad inclinations grow and ripen in the soul, and the sudden occasion, the temptation that breaks down the last barrier to sin and shows the wickedness that has been slowly ripening, is no more the whole cause of the sin, than is the last hot day that heats the festering swamp and brings the poisonous

flower to bloom, the whole cause of its poison, which has been slowly ripening for many days.

Therefore, if we are careful to discipline ourselves in little things and repress and gain control of the bad inclinations of our nature and our character, we shall be safe, in God's merciful providence, from the gross and horrible deeds which we associate with the names of the seven deadly sins. On the other hand, if we are careless about watching over the wicked tendencies in our human nature which show themselves in their grossest form in these deadly sins, we shall inevitably fall into many venial offenses, which soil the soul and weaken its power of resisting temptation. So that it is a practice approved by the old masters of the spiritual life, and recommended in the great book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, sometimes to examine ourselves on the seven deadly sins—not so much to discover whether we have committed any gross offenses, but to see how far the vices from which they spring are gaining root in our soul.

But there is a queer difference in the atti-

tude which even good persons have toward the several deadly sins. De la Rochefoucauld says somewhere among his brilliant epigrams against human nature: "One finds a great many people who bewail their bad memory, but very few who complain about their poor intellect." So also one finds many good people who admit quite freely, to themselves at least, that they are somewhat inclined to pride, for example, for that seems rather a lofty vice—though it is the head of them all and overthrew Lucifer—but who would not for the world suspect, even in their own most private consideration, that they are somewhat victims of gluttony, envy or sloth. In the old-fashioned spiritual works these vices came in for a round share of warning and blame, and the saints have been deeply troubled about the—to us—very slight and insignificant traces of these bad things which they found in their white and blameless hearts.

But modern Christians, even the devout, are inclined to take it for granted that these, and especially sloth, need give them no great trouble. For sloth is, in their half-conscious

if not in their deliberate judgment, rather an old-fashioned vice and one that does not need much self-searching to root out in these stirring times. In fact, nowadays, surprisingly little is said about the vice of sloth. Some time since, in glancing over some printed outlines of discourses issued for modern preachers, we were suddenly aware that the suggested subjects for sermons proceeded quite orderly down the list of the deadly sins until they came to gluttony and sloth. Then these subjects of consideration were entirely omitted, as though for modern hearers their discussion might just as well be left out altogether.

One might think that there is less danger of sloth nowadays than at other times in the world's history because there are so many calls to action and because activity is so much the spirit of the age. Yet if one considers the nature of the vice of sloth this comfortable assurance of its rarity in our age receives a rather wicked jolt. A huge activity along some lines is unhappily quite compatible with sinful sloth in other spheres of effort. A man may be wearing himself out with effort

in the things of this life and of the present, and yet be rusting away with sloth in the things of eternity.

The dictionary informs us that sloth is disinclination to exertion, laziness, habitual indolence. The word was derived, so students tell us, from "slow," and slow-th or sloth is a slowness and disinclination to bestir oneself when there is question of some duty to be done or some task to be accomplished. This slowness, indulged and humored when there is question of a duty binding under serious obligation, becomes a deadly sin; yielded to in the case of lesser duties it has a lesser guilt and punishment. Only a very little knowledge of the world and of human nature is required to see that one may be exceedingly active and energetic in some sphere of exertion which appeals to his nature and inclination, and at the same time may yield to deplorable and sinful sloth so far as regards his religious duties and the work that is incumbent on him, but to which he does not feel naturally inclined.

It is of course in the spiritual life and in regard to our religious duties that sloth is

most dangerous, and just here too it is most insidious in its approaches. Nature itself provides us with a set of impulses, appetites, desires, that ensure our reasonable exertions when there is question of the welfare of our body. The need to make a living, to secure food, clothing, shelter, is the most universal and powerful natural stimulus to industry in life, and it is supplemented by the other cravings of human nature, by ambition, the wish for pleasure, the desire of possessions, which overcome the natural laziness of men and set them working for the good things that they cannot otherwise come at. But, unhappily, in the spiritual life, though the incentives to exertion are incomparably greater—for we are working not for our livelihood in time but for our happiness in eternity—still the motives for exertion do not appeal so strongly to human nature, and so there is far greater danger of sloth and of neglect in spiritual matters.

And, in their various degrees, a very great number of Catholics suffer from this vice of sloth in spiritual things. Though it has gone out of fashion to speak of the deadly sin of

sloth, the thing itself is much among us. Look into your own life and you will doubtless see some traces of that spiritual laziness, that disinclination to exert your mind and your body in the service of God, which is the consequence of some yielding to the vice of sloth. For the whole age, as we find it, is sunk in a vast indifference toward the concerns of eternity, and we who live in the age are likely to be tainted with its sickness. Indifferentism, the neglect of all religious practice, have grown upon our people with the growth of material prosperity and of pleasure. It needs a vivid and realizing faith, a living charity and the special help of God, which comes with prayer, to go against this current of religious lethargy and to keep up one's energetic longing and striving for the kingdom of heaven.

THE CYNOSURE OF HISTORY

EVERY day, somewhere within an easy distance of your home, occurs the most stupendous event, the most precious happening, in the history of the world. To this great occurrence all the nations of the earth looked forward either with blind longing or with ardent faith from the very beginning. To this all future generations shall look back, so long as the world lasts, deriving from its efficacy whatever they have of holiness or of salvation. For the Sacrifice of the Mass offered every morning in your parish church, as in so many Catholic churches throughout the world, is the true though unbloody repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary. When you assist at that holy sacrifice it is as though you stood beneath the cross with the Blessed Mother and with St. John, the beloved disciple, and offered, in union with the Sacred Heart, that oblation of the life and blood of God made man which is made for the salvation of the entire world.

There are certain points in secular history to which all after ages look back with breathless interest and immense attention. They are the turning-points of human affairs, the places where the great stream of human events swerves aside from its course and makes a new bed in its way down the ages. Sometimes it is the birth of a great nation that so changes the current of events for all time, as when Athens came out into the sunlight of history, or the mythical twins began to raise the walls of Rome. Sometimes it is the victory of one people over another which decides the lordship of the world and alters the flow of customs and thought, as when Rome conquered Carthage or the free Greek people beat back the invading hosts of Asia. Sometimes it is the rise of a great leader or the writing of an epoch-making book, as when Augustus came to rule or Homer or Dante began to sing. Such events shine forever in the history of the world and become known to all men who have any claim to culture or to learning. Precious moments, they acquire an immor-

tality of memory, and their fame is handed down from generation to generation.

What a privilege it is, by common consent of men, to be present at one of these cardinal points of history! Men write records of their participation in such stirring scenes. They hand down in their family as an heirloom of memory that at such and such a time an ancestor of that stock was present at the battle of Agincourt, or fought with Washington, or carried a rifle or a sword at Lexington or Bunker Hill. One such moment of glory as to have been present and have assisted at an event like this is thought enough for an entire lifetime, and it gives distinction, by common consent, not only to the fortunate individual himself but to his successors and descendants.

Yet how few of mankind ever have the good fortune even to be witnesses of such stirring crises in history! They happen only very seldom, from the very nature of things. Those only witness them who chance to be at hand, and it is impossible to foresee just when their time will come. Indeed, it is for this reason that the witnessing of great events

brings distinction with it. What only the few can boast of is all the more prized and envied by the many. We have societies of an exclusive kind whose membership is limited to those whose ancestors fought in the American Revolution. Were this not an unusual distinction, what sense would one see in making it a condition of membership or in beginning a new society to celebrate its possession?

But these great crises in history, important as they are in the esteem of men, dwindle into insignificance when they are compared with that stupendous and unique event which is repeated by the exercise of God's almighty power, at your very doors and every day. For the holy sacrifice of the cross, which is truly and literally repeated day by day in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, makes pale and insignificant by comparison all events in secular history. It is incomparably more important, more sublime, more fruitful in consequences, of more influence on the history of the world, than all the acts of princes or the victories of nations from the beginning of days.

From the moment when the sin of Adam ruined our human kind, deprived us of sanctifying grace, of the sonship of God and of our title to heaven, and so deplorably injured our nature by depriving it of the friendship of God—from that dire moment all the human race looked forward, knowingly or with blind desire, to the coming of a Saviour who would undo what Adam had done, win back for us the friendship of God, atone for all our transgressions, and redeem us from the power of the evil one. This immense yearning of the whole human race for a Saviour finds its most touching expression in the writings of the prophets of Israel, who both foretold and prayed for, with unspeakable longing, the advent of the Redeemer of mankind. They even described, with a vividness that is amazing, the precise manner of that redemption by which the Christ was to restore mankind to the friendship of God. It was to be by the bloody death of the cross, by the offering and sacrifice of His blood and His life.

All human history, therefore, led up to and culminated in that solemn and awful mo-

ment when, on the bloody altar of Calvary, the eternal Son of God, made man, gave up His life for the salvation of His fellow-men. Before the cross of Christ were gathered all the ages of history, all the generations of the past, all the holy desires of humanity, all the aspirations of the human heart after justice. When the Son of Man bowed His head upon His bosom and breathed forth His soul into the hands of His eternal Father, then the handwriting against us was blotted out forever, and the human race was saved from the power of the devil and brought back into the friendship of God. This redemption was indeed to be applied to the individual soul through the sacraments of Christ's Church. But the great deed was accomplished. Redemption was secured. In the most awful and momentous event of history a God had given His life that God's anger might be appeased.

What a privilege, then, to have been able to assist, as did Mary and the Beloved Apostle and the little group of women who stood about the cross, at the adorable sacrifice which Christ made to His eternal Father

on Calvary. All the great turning-points of history are, in comparison with this, mere trivial episodes, inconsiderable and slight events. To have been able to be with Jesus on Calvary, to offer up oneself to God in union with His supreme oblation, is a privilege and favor not to be compared even with the participation in all the other great events of history together. Yet this sublime event was witnessed by only a small part of one obscure nation in the despised country of Judea and at a single moment in history. The vast spiritual riches, the eternal gain of being near and sharing with Christ in His sacrifice of Calvary was, so it appeared to uninitiated eyes, reserved only to those who with loving hearts stood about Him as He died.

But God's goodness would not have it so. He, who is omnipotent, has exerted His omnipotence in an astounding way so to reproduce and multiply and continue that most momentous of all happenings that it is possible for every Catholic, in every age of the world, in a thousand places, day by day and morning after morning, not merely to remember or to commemorate the august sacri-

fice of Calvary, but truly to assist at its unbloody repetition and to come and stand with Christ and participate in the literal renewal of His sacrifice, being present there as really as were Mary and John and the holy women who assisted at the sacrifice of the cross. This is an astounding truth, an achievement possible only to omnipotence. To be able to recall and renew such a moment of history required a divine power which can accomplish anything that does not involve a contradiction. God alone can renew, in the sacrifice of the Mass, the sacrifice of Calvary. Our faith in God is alone powerful enough to assure us of the truth of this mystery. In assisting at any Mass we become once more sharers in the sacrifice of Calvary. We partake in the true though unbloody repetition of the sacrifice of the cross.

Of only one event in history is it possible to say with truth that all generations can be bodily and really present at its true and real repetition. All other actions of mankind are past forever. They endure indeed in their consequences, in the traces they have left, in the memory of their occurrence. We

may be present at them in imagination, in memory, through the written record or the remembered account. But of one event alone is it literally true that it is repeated over and over, really renewed, re-enacted for each succeeding generation. Whoever would assist again at this stupendous sacrifice need only to enter a Catholic church at the hour of the Mass and kneel before the altar while the priest, minister of Christ, offers up again that unbloody sacrifice which is the true and real repetition of the bloody sacrifice of the cross. At the words of the consecration, when the sacrifice of the Mass is consummated, there occurs once more in a mystic manner and without the shedding of blood the offering of that redeeming oblation of the life and blood of Christ which wrought our ransoming on Calvary.

What a motive and what a reason for unwearying effort and continual endeavor to be present as often as we can at the sacrifice of the Mass! Need one point this moral or urge this conclusion? If Christ's sacrifice is of all events in history the most blessed, the most momentous, the most important to par-

take in, and if God has thought it worth His while to renew that stupendous sacrifice by a continuous and repeated exercise of His omnipotence, should not we do all possible to apply to ourselves His exceeding bounty and to be present at what He has wrought such marvels to prepare?

With this stupendous wonder of God's omnipotence in preserving for us the age-long repetition of the greatest moment of history goes also that other marvel of continuing for us the companionship of Christ's presence and the nourishing of our souls with His precious body and blood. At the moment of the consummation of the sacrifice of the Mass there becomes present on the altar under the forms of bread and wine the body of Christ and His true blood.

He, the incarnate Son of God, is really Emmanuel, God with us, to be our Guest, our Comrade, and our Food. Here again, in His infinite mercy and compassion, Almighty God has brushed away with a gesture of His omnipotence the common boundaries of space, matter, and time. He has secured for us and for all ages participation in that astounding

privilege of being intimate companions and bosom friends of the Incarnate Word, which one would have said in all human probability was reserved for the small and favored group of apostles and disciples who conversed with Him familiarly and partook with Him of the Last Supper before His passion. What would, in the order of nature, have been the astounding privilege of the few is become, in the order of God's extraordinary providence, the common blessing of the many.

History moves on with a relentless flow. Each happening as it comes and goes slips irrevocably into the past. Try as we may we never could recover one moment that is gone. But by God's great mercy and almighty power the two most precious events in the history of the world have been renewed and are perpetuated in so marvelous a manner that in every epoch, every day in every place in the world where the Mass is said and the Blessed Sacrament preserved, it is possible for the poorest and the lowliest of mankind to stand with Mary and the Beloved Disciple and partake in Christ's inestimable sacrifice, to kneel with the apostles in

the supper chamber and be fed like them on the true body of the Lord.

Stirred by thoughts like these, who is there who cannot resolve to go more often to communion, to be present daily at Holy Mass. When the great judgment of God shall make vain the wisdom of men it will no longer be an honor to have assisted at the great moments of secular history, the winning of victories or the crowning of kings. At that hour those will be honored and blessed who have stood oftenest with Christ on Calvary and partaken oftenest of His sacred body. At that time this chapter of the earth's history will be closed and ended. It will be no longer possible for us then to heap up the constant merit of attendance at Mass and the receiving of Christ's body. Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. Let us seize betimes, while He still holds it out to us, the great gift of God.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

IT is difficult to picture, in mere cold words, the spirit of Christmas. Many a one of novelists and essayists and poets has made the attempt right gallantly and striven hard to conjure up with warm, bright phrases and holly-woven sentences and paragraphs full of cheer the authentic spirit of that glorious time. Yet in all these efforts there is something flat and stale and unprofitable. They cannot convey, even these shrewd artificers in words, all the glow of cheer, the warmth of love, the blaze of kindness and good feeling that light the Christmas air and make eyes sparkle and cheeks grow ruddy on Christmas morning.

Of all these seasons of the year this is, by common vote, the dearest and the cheeriest. A certain infantile delight, a delicious childishness, a rejuvenescence of old hearts and weary minds possesses the world at Christmas. All the outward harmless folly and mirth and merriment are but the expression of this inward glow that catches the heart of the

world. Men and women forget their years and lay off the load of care with which they have burdened themselves during all the other months, to grow glad in December, feeling the approaching warmth of the child-like feast. The selfish grow light-hearted in these rare moments when they think and plan entirely for others. The cold of heart are kindled despite themselves with a sympathy and tenderness they feel at no other season.

The sight of a man laden with bundles of various shapes and sizes tied with red ribbon and edged with holly, hurrying along and smiling to himself on a winter's evening, evokes a feeling quite irresistible and shared by all humanity. No one can quite withstand the influence of Christmas. It works insensibly upon one by means of the smiling faces of children, the worried joy in the looks of fathers and mothers, the delighted frolics of Christmas decorations, even in the staid store windows, the shouts of boys, the ringing of bells. Above all, it appeals to one through the churches, blazing with light and heavy with smells of cedar and holly and winter flowers, and crowded with throngs of wor-

shippers who cluster about the crib and look with shining eyes upon the Babe and the Mother, the Wise Men, the shepherds and the sheep.

It casts its spell on young and old, this most merry and warm of seasons, astonishingly glowing at the very heart of rimy mid-winter. How the children are impressed by it! It is especially the feast of children. See how they cluster around the crib, their bright young eyes round with wonder, and look at the little Child and all the group that surrounds Him, pointing with chubby fingers and whispering with eager voices who each one may be, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, the shepherds and the kings. Here they drink in without words the lesson of God's love, seeing Him become a little baby for their sake and thinking how cold He must be on the wintry straw for which for their love He has left the warmth and light of His Father's house in heaven. The wonder of the time, its warm delight and brooding joy enter their hearts through their eyes and then come back to glow on their cheeks and shine in their Christmas smiles.

What a season of unforgettable joy and delight is Christmas to children! To Catholic children who see Jesus in the crib of Bethlehem and receive Him into their hearts at the Mass of Christmas morning it is a time that molds their very lives and leaves an inextinguishable fire in their hearts and an undying imprint on their souls, so that to their life's last end they never will forget the spiritual and bodily glow of Christmas morning.

The old folk, too, grow young again at heart on Christmas. Memories of past Christmases struggle with the Christmas of today to make their cheeks tingle and their eyes grow bright on the merry morning. The little ones' glee, the laugh of the children and the flicker of the Christmas candle light in their mind the fires of past Christmases. They grow young again perforce, and make merry with the zest of youth. Christmas is for them the feast not only of the Christ Child, but of their own past childhoods, when they gathered about the crib and looked, as these little ones look to-day, with staring eyes

and shining faces, to see where the little Infant lay in the manger upon the straw.

But all this outward joy and merry-making is in truth not yet the heart and soul of Christmas. Many a poet has thought so, and many a writer of tales has made it his only aim to put into words the outward cheer and stir and glow of the holiday season. The very steam of rich plum puddings curls and glows in spicy fragrance through the ripple of their verse or the lilt of their prose. Holly and mistletoe and the crackle and spurting of yuletide logs and the drip of roasting beef and the hiss of savory chimes are sweet in their prose and their song. The circle of crowing youngsters about the Christmas tree and the ring of smiling elders around the fire are painted to the life. One may read their glowing pages and drink warm and spicy draughts of the mirth and merriment of the Christmas season. Yet, for all that, these masters of sugary speech have not contrived to mingle in their fine confections the real and inner savor of the spirit of Christmas.

For Christmas is the feast of heavenly love. All the warm rejoicing, all the con-

tented cheer, the boards groaning with generous food, the trees hung with lights and gifts and dainties, the wreaths of holly and of fir, sprigs of mistletoe and Christmas candles—all these are but the outward expression, the traditional symbols handed down from merry Christmases long ago, of a world's rejoicing in the Incarnation, of the jubilation of a Christian people over the birth of their leader, their Saviour and their King.

It is this joy at the great gift of God that gives the sense to Christmas gifts. Men spread their own gifts with wholesale generosity among their fellows in memory and in imitation of that celestial and most jubilant gift whereby God gives His own Son, true God of true God, Light of Light, begotten not made, one of essence with His Father in all eternity, to be our Companion and our Food, our Victim and our Reward. All the feasting and the cheer of Christmas are but the eager effort of human nature to show forth in bodily delight the dignity and honor of those human bodies whereof the eternal Son of God has deigned this day to choose one and to come forth clad in our own very flesh, having taken

a human nature, a body and a soul like our own in all things, sin only excepted, in the most pure womb of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. Besides, it is of our nature, since we are compounded of flesh and spirit, to express our spiritual joy in terms of corporal feasting. The body must share with the soul in a partnership of delight. The meats and viands, the presents and good cheer, the lights and wreaths, the songs and melodies of Christmas are but the outward symbols of an inner joy that craves expression.

Then, too, at no other feast of all the year does bodily cheer and the feasting of the flesh so well accord with the mystery of the season as at Christmas time. Then the Word, having become our flesh, comes to dwell amongst us, a man as we, eating our food, sharing our drink, living our life of the body and the soul, like unto us in all things save only for our sins. On Christmas we feast with Christ, sitting at His table of the bounteous earth which He has spread with viands and which He comes to share with us, lending a supernal glory and a heavenly cheer to our earthly merriment. We

have given Him to eat who feeds all flesh. We have welcomed him to our table who makes the fruitful fields and the teeming waters and air minister our food. We have sat with Him at the banquet who has formed our flesh and keeps it, and have welcomed Him in the flesh whom the far ages vaguely dreamed of with longing and whom the prophets yearned for, worshipping Him as their God whom we know also as our Companion, our Saviour and our soul's dear Food. What wonder, then, that we feast and make merry with all our hearts, carried away by innocent joy and Christmas cheer, at the thought of God's great love and in memory of His all-including gift to us?

But we must keep ever vividly in memory, we Christians who rejoice, even corporally, in the feast of the God's infinite love, that Christmas is not alone the feast of God's love for man, but also of man's love for God. Christ has not only come to dwell with us, clad in our flesh, but He has also lifted up our flesh by the unction of His Spirit so that we may feast with him in soul, become sharers of the banquet table of God as

He is sharer of the tables of men. Therefore through all our merriment must run the golden strand of heavenly love. Our Christmas feasting must be lit through with un-earthly charity. For that spiritual feasting to which He bids us is as much above the feast of the body as heaven is higher than earth. While, therefore, the bodily cheer and earthly merriment of Christmas are a good and proper setting for the feast, the spiritual side of this singular day of rejoicing is incomparably more important. Christmas is Christ's Mass by the true and ancient meaning of the word. Christ's Mass, whereat the memory of Christ's threefold birth is sung, first from all eternity in the bosom of His Father, then on that rare day in time when he lay in the bosom of His Mother Mary, and last on every day until the world's last end, when He is born again in the bosoms of His faithful followers. Therefore he who has not heard Christ's Mass and caught its spiritual joy on Christmas morning has missed the spirit of the feast, and his Christmas joy and feasting is a hollow thing and a mockery.

With Christ's Mass should come Christ's communion, the mingling of our soul with the spirit of the Babe of Bethlehem, the feeding of our hungry spirits upon His sacred flesh. Who that is worthy of the name of Christian will not receive Christ's saving body and blood with deep devotion on Christmas morning? It is the burning desire of the Word made flesh to come into our hearts. For this He has left the warmth of heaven for the cold air of earth. We must warm Him again in our hearts on Christmas morning. And through the entire day each Christian home should keep in all its ways the spiritual meaning of the feast. There should be a crib of Bethlehem, lovingly made and lit and placed where the children can come and look upon it and where their elders may tell them and remind themselves of the true inward meaning of Christmas. There should be gifts and bounty to the poor as well as presents to one's own, and some needy family should be warmed and fed on Christmas day, in memory of the charity of Christ, before one's own little group gathers about the Christmas board. A gift to the missions in

those far lands where the sad pagan peoples know not even the name of Him who was born on this day should also go forth among our other Christmas gifts. In a word, all that can serve to link our Christmas festival with a memory and a love of Christ should be done with reverence on this great feast of His love for man and man's love for Him.

If we bear all these things in mind, then Christmas shall be indeed for us a true Christ's Mass, a feast of heavenly love. We, in a way that the world without the Church can never understand, shall have captured the true spirit and soul of Christmas. For this is *par excellence* the feast of heavenly love, and all its great rejoicing but points to that inner mystery. He who loves Christ well and is well loved by Christ shall alone taste the full joy and glowing cheer of Christmas.

ON THE MAKING OF FACES

THERE is a rule of our human development which is quite awesome in its significance to our individual selves. We are continually suffering or profiting from its application. You as you are, and I as I am, and such a one as such a one is, stand, all of us, as living evidences of the application of this principle. Yet how little some of us attend to its importance! The momentous principle is this, that we make our characters as we make our faces, by the repetition of casual actions, and that every good thing we do and every bad thing we do writes its impress on our minds and hearts as it does upon our bodily countenances.

This is only another way of saying that actions make habits. A terse truth easily told; yet, if we understand and apply it, a most precious guide to the correction of whatever we perceive to be amiss within us. It is the short formula for molding our character, rooting out our vices and implanting virtues in us.

You may have observed how, after a certain time and to an experienced observer, a man's face is the index of his character, the record of his previous history of emotions and expressions. On the changeable and fleshy tablets of the countenance are written subtle but legible records of most human qualities and passions. Benignity and kindness a thousand times repeated write the unmistakable characters of a heart that is benign and kind, even on a man's expression of countenance, so that very little children can read them there, and will come to such a one and shrink from that other face which is written over with severity and unkindness. We have all our own skill, conscious or unconscious, of reading countenances, and, although we are often unjust and mistaken, we still trust in our deductions; which would seem to show that there is a human instinct to try to read the heart from the face.

How was this fleshy record written? By countless acts of gentleness or harshness. Each time the obsequious muscles gathered themselves into lines of rudeness or of kindness they learned the more to hold those out-

lines and contours to which they were becoming bit by bit accustomed. They were acquiring the habit of that expression, and the outward habit of the face forms but a visible index to the far more significant and mighty inward habit of the mind and heart. For if each new deliberate action was insensibly but surely changing the expression of the countenance, then, with a much more certain and radical action, each exercise of goodness or yielding to evil was having its inward effect in moulding the character and the heart. If it is true, and it is true in a real sense, that we are constantly making our own faces, then it is true in a much deeper sense that we are forever moulding and forming the countenances of our souls, which men term our character.

A man's habits have been called his second nature, and indeed they constitute a nature more sure in its operations and more calculable in its influence on his actions than the inborn disposition which he has from nature itself. Every human being comes to the consciousness of existence with a certain set of propensities and inclinations which of

themselves tend to draw him into action. Thus some are timid and some bold; some are inclined to ease and others to energetic effort; some are gentle, others rude—and so through all the characteristics of humanity. One can see these traits quite clearly even in children, and might predict what they would be in after life did one not know how powerfully the individual can change his character by actions contrary to the inborn inclination.

For let a man who is by nature timid and retiring practice assurance and courage, or even let him be thrown into circumstances which force him to the exercise of these qualities, and he will soon become more bold. Get him to repeat again and again these acts of daring, and his courage will become a rooted characteristic counteracting by the force of habit what may be a native timidity. So, too, of most other inclinations. Let a man by nature inactive and inert resolutely repeat acts of industry and he will acquire an energetic habit which will cloak over and perhaps quite conquer his native sluggishness. If one is by disposition rude and un-

kind, who does not know how the repetition of acts of deliberate courtesy and kindness will breed the contrary habits, until the boor may become a gentleman and the inconsiderate person grow to be courteous?

Even the superficial training of good breeding is singularly efficacious to subdue and change the natural instincts of men and women into the polished habits of refined society. Everyone knows, either from experience or hearsay, the ease and polish which good breeding bring to the perfect gentleman or lady. This exterior refinement is a result of training. It is the imposing of habits of consideration and courtesy upon natural selfishness and rudeness. It gives a uniform and polished sureness of demeanor in return for many acts of self-disciplining one's personal inclinations out of deference and regard to the sensibilities of others.

But the most remarkable examples of this change of the countenance of the soul by the cultivation of good habits is found in the careers of the saints. Under the influence of the grace of God, and inspired by a wish to imitate in their degree the perfections

of the Word made flesh, these heroes of God repressed to such a point those natural inclinations which they perceived to be displeasing to Him, and practised so determinedly the virtues which they knew Him to desire in them, that they changed to an astonishing extent their own inward character, making a new man, so to speak, out of the old and reproducing wonderfully from their diversity of character and disposition the lineaments of Christ, whom they thirsted and hungered to resemble.

One might multiply examples. There was St. Francis de Sales, the sweetest of mortals, whose lips distilled gentleness and kindness, whose countenance drew even heretics by its engaging mildness and sweetness, and whose whole person, like his writings, was suffused with the genial sunshine of charity. Once on a time, speaking to an intimate friend who has preserved the saying for us, the saint confessed that he was by nature harsh and unkind, and that it was only the persevering effort of years that had subdued the unkind instincts in him. Repeated and deliberate acts of gentleness and goodness had

so altered his countenance and his heart that from an unkind disposition he had acquired a nature sweet and kind like the nature of Christ. A very eloquent proof of the truth of this was the answer he gave once on a time when a very bad young man was brought to him for an admonition, in hopes that the saint could change his evil ways. The interview was fruitless, but through all his gentle reproaches St. Francis maintained an air of the most equal sweetness. After it was over some one remarked that if the saint had been more stern the young man might have listened to him. "It would have been no use," said the saint; "and besides, I was afraid that if I allowed myself to speak harshly I would have lost the little drop of honey, the little bit of human kindness, which I have stored in my heart by the efforts of these many years." He knew whence this characteristic of tender charity had come and with what infinite care and repeated effort he had gained it, knew, too, how easily lost by action is that which actions have acquired. Therefore he feared, even by one harsh saying, to distort the sweet and gentle countenance of his soul.

which he had made by so many efforts during so many years.

To ponder with realization upon this most practical principle of our human growth should give us no little consolation, it opens up such a practicable and immediate road to the perfecting of our disposition and our heart. We need not trouble about complex principles of spiritual progress nor vex ourselves with painful and confusing self-analysis. To correct a fault all we need is to set about perseveringly performing actions of the contrary virtue. To implant a good quality all we need attend to is the repetition of the corresponding good deed. This is the infallible way of developing our character, of making comely the countenance of our soul. It is, besides, the only way, barring a miracle. The laws of human nature ordain that by the repetition of good actions, and thus alone, good habits are formed and by the same simple means bad habits are rooted out.

It is curious how well we know the principle in merely earthly matters, yet how slow we are to apply to our soul's concerns the same obvious and practical principle. No