



The Warfare of the Soul Practical Studies in the Life of Temptation

SHIRLEY C. HUGHSON

A
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BOOK

THE WARFARE OF THE SOUL

PRACTICAL STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF TEMPTATION

BY

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PRIEST OF THE ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS

**WITH A PREFACE BY
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PREFACE

If we desired to describe our life here in one word, that word might be *Temptation*. From one point of view the purpose for which we are put into this world is to be tempted, that is, to be tried or tested, in order that the wheat among us may be separated from the chaff, and that the children of light may be manifested and divided from the children of darkness.

This *testing*, however, is not only that the good may be separated from the bad, it is the means by which the good becomes good; for by it latent virtues are developed and a character fitted for heaven is formed.

Let us regard a little child just baptized—it is an innocent child of God, but what is innocence? In many respects a beautiful attribute, but a purely negative one; for it is the attribute of an *untried* soul. That child must pass through the wilderness of temptation, and with the result either that the innocence will be transformed into *sanctity* or will be lost and give place to sin.

When our Lord was baptized, as He came up out of the water, the Voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased," and we read "*Then* was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil," and the temptation was a testing on the part of the Evil One, whether He were indeed the Son of God. So each child in baptism is made by the operation of the Holy Ghost the child of God, and *then* his whole life is a being led by one of two spirits—the Spirit of God, leading him through temptation to sanctity, or the spirit of evil leading him by temptation into sin. For St. Paul tells us, doubtless referring to this, that, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God." This however must be proved by temptation.

Sanctity is the positive virtue of the soul which has been tempted and has stood the test, has vanquished the tempter and won the victory and the reward—the Crown of Life. Happy is that soul, for St. James says, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." We must therefore strive to grasp the fact that temptation is not an evil, on the contrary it is the only way in which the soul can be developed. Instead therefore of meeting it with fear and trembling and great reluctance, St. James says, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." A well-known spiritual guide says, "But how are we to overcome temptations? Cheerfulness is the first thing, cheerfulness the second, and cheerfulness the third." This is but a homely way of putting St. James' injunction, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."

In the book of Ecclesiasticus we read, "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation." We must not suppose from this that only those who serve the Lord are tempted, though they are doubtless attacked by Satan in special ways. All men, however, whether they serve the Lord or not, have to endure temptation, but those who desire to serve Him will prepare their soul for temptation by studying its laws, learning how best to meet its assaults, and fortifying themselves with divine grace for the struggle.

This little book will be found most useful to such; for it will help them, not only to prepare for temptation, but will teach them the true purpose of the life of temptation, and the best methods of utilizing the attacks of the foe; so that they may leave no stain of sin, but rather may develop in the soul those Christian virtues which belong to sanctity.

ALFRED G. MORTIMER.

ST. MARK'S, PHILADELPHIA,

Epiphany, 1910.

TO THE READER

You do not need to be told that the writer offers you here nothing of his own. He has sat at the feet of certain masters whom through the ages the Holy Ghost has employed to speak to the souls of men.

He seeks only to bear you a message from them. May the same Blessed Spirit use these pages to enlighten the souls He loves. If the message makes you long to know God better, to love Him more truly, to serve Him more faithfully, it will not have been borne in vain, and he who brings it craves as his hire a spiritual alms,—a prayer that he, along with you and all God's people, may be found faithful at the end.

S. C. H.

ST. MICHAEL'S MONASTERY, SEWANEE.

Christmas, 1909.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE WARFARE OF THE SOUL

1. A Personal Issue
2. Not Peace, but a Sword
3. The Terms of the Warfare
4. The Nature of Temptation
5. Precept and Counsel

CHAPTER II

THE TEMPTER: HIS HISTORY AND NATURE

1. Satan's Fall and its Effects
2. The Hopelessness of his Warfare
3. The Limitations of the Tempter
4. The Restraint of the Divine Decrees

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPTER: HIS CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS

1. Satan, The Deceiver
2. The Fact of his Personality
3. His Experience and Wisdom
4. The Methods of his Might
5. The Soul's Safety

CHAPTER IV

THE UNIVERSALITY OF TEMPTATION

1. The Common Lot
2. Enduring Hardship

3. The Sufferings of the Saints
4. Satan in the Sanctuary
5. The Sacrament of Temptation

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRIT OF SOLICITUDE

1. True and False Anxiety
2. Worry Versus Faith
3. The Cure of a Doubting Spirit
4. God's Sympathy

CHAPTER VI

OUR PREPARATION FOR TEMPTATION

1. A Double Weapon
2. The Spirit of Vigilance
3. Prayer and Temptation

CHAPTER VII

TRAINING THE INNER LIFE

1. Environment and Character
2. Educating the Memory
3. Guiding the Imagination
4. The Practice of Constancy
5. The Practice of Calmness
6. The Practice of Patience
7. The Practice of Diligence

CHAPTER VIII

THE STAGES OF THE BATTLE

1. The Satanic Suggestion
2. The Response of the Natural Heart

3. The "Inferior" and "Superior" Wills
4. The Fatal Consent

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HOUR OF BATTLE

1. Realizing God's Friendship
2. The Divine Example of Humility
3. Instant in Prayer
4. A Holy Perversity
5. Scorning the Tempter
6. Staying not the Hand
7. The Final Phase of Victory

CHAPTER X

THE TESTS OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT

1. The Test of Common Sense
2. The Test of Doubt
3. Signs of the Soul's Victory
4. Spiritual Safety, Spiritual Victory
5. The Truest Test

CHAPTER XI

THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY GHOST

1. The Teaching of Temptation
2. The Bulwark of Love
3. The Lesson of Humility
4. The Lessons of Consolation
5. How to Learn our Lessons

CHAPTER XII

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

1. Hastening to Repent
2. A Tranquil Sorrow
3. A Spirit of Reparation
4. The Work of Amendment
5. The Gainsaying of Satan

CHAPTER XIII

THE GROUND FOR CHRISTIAN COURAGE

1. Members One of Another
2. The Church's Treasury of Grace
3. God's Interest in our Victory

CHAPTER I

THE WARFARE OF THE SOUL

I. A Personal Issue

The spiritual warfare is intensely personal. Any consideration of it is a consideration of definite personalities, divine, angelic, human, Satanic,—God, the Angels, the Soul, and Satan. We speak commonly of great principles being at stake in this warfare, often forgetting that it is not possible for a moral or spiritual principle to exist apart from a person.

As we shall try to learn in the following pages, God—the three Persons of the Ever-Blessed Trinity—is always to be the first thought of the Christian warrior,—God, His Presence, His power, and His loving interest in our victory. But the well-trained soldier has an eye not to his own resources only; he seeks to learn something also concerning the Enemy he is to face. Next to the Presence of God, nothing is so necessary to the Christian soldier as to remember the presence of the Tempter; either in his own person or in that of one of his evil angels. Although God has revealed nothing directly to us on the subject, yet His revelation concerning Satan's work is such that we can hardly escape from the conclusion that, as each soul has a guardian angel, so each soul has assigned to him by Satan an attendant evil spirit, whose whole business is to seek to lead the soul into sin.

We see how in the conflict we have tremendous personalities to deal with, the Personality of the triune God,—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,—and the Personality of Satan and his innumerable fallen angels, who, though finite and created, possess a scope and power which are, perhaps, so great that our human thought cannot compass them. But immeasurably below any of these as it is, our own personality must not be forgotten, for let it ever be kept in mind that *the issue of our individual battle depends on ourselves*. The laws of this war are such that on the one hand the powerful personal will

even of the arch-fiend himself has no power to control us, except in so far as our personal will, acting with complete freedom, permits it; and on the other hand, the infinite personal will of God never operates so as to compel us, unless again our will yield freely to His call. Satan cannot control or influence us against our wills, and God, reverencing His image in man, refrains His power and never forces man's love or service. The will of man is free, and this makes him the central factor in the spiritual warfare.

II. Not Peace, but a Sword

In sending them forth on their first mission, the Prince of Peace declared to His awe-struck disciples, "I came not to send peace but a sword." [1] The world being what it was, the Kingdom of Peace was to be founded only by conflict. Those whom He sent forth to found His Church understood this principle, and everywhere in the accounts of their journeys and labours, as well as in the words of counsel they give their converts, there is the sound of warfare, "the voice of them that shout for mastery." [2]

Everything indicates that the battle is fierce and desperate. Our Lord sends His message to the Seven Churches, and to each the reward is only "to him that overcometh." [3] We are warned of foes without and of traitors in the inmost citadel of our souls; of the "lusts which war against the soul"; [4] "the law in our members warring against the law of our mind." [5]

St. Paul exhorts us repeatedly to "put on the whole armour of God." [6] He sends his counsel to his son in the faith in order that he "war a good warfare"; [7] he pleads with him "to fight the good fight of faith," [8] and to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"; [9] and in his last days he bases his own hope of the crown of life upon the assurance of his conscience that he himself had "fought a good fight." [10]

So everywhere the New Testament rings with the sound of warfare, the shock and onset of battle. Everywhere we hear of foes and fighting, armour and rewards, life and death. We are told of the subtilty and ferocity of the Adversary, of the ranks and power of his evil angels. [11]

We are sent into the world just that we might spend our life in a state of warfare, and in so far as this condition is absent from any life, just so far is that life a failure. To have a knowledge of the force and resources of the enemy is as necessary to the waging of a successful war as it is to have one's own training and equipment complete; and he who enters upon the struggle is well armed beforehand if he has realized the seriousness of the conflict in which he is about to engage.

Every baptized soul is a member of the army of the living God. Have we grasped the truth that this is no light undertaking; that in this warfare there are no quiet winter quarters into which we may retire, no light summer campaigns to be gaily prosecuted against a foe who flees at our first approach; but that the struggle is inevitable, that it is real, that our enemy is powerful, sleepless, and relentless; and above all, that we are in the thick of the conflict as long as life endures?

Even the tenderest consolations that God gives His children concerning the warfare never lose sight of the inevitableness of it. We are given no false encouragement that would arouse a hope of escape. The very name by which the Body of Christ on earth is called,—the Church Militant,—is a standing witness of what the life of her members must be.

When St. Paul comforts the Corinthians with the assurance that the struggle they are enduring is common to man, that God has not given them more to endure than that which is coming upon all their

brethren, the Holy Ghost inspires him to guard this point carefully.[[12](#)] He assures them that God Who is faithful to His word, "not slack concerning His promise,"[[13](#)] "will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." The very fact of the approach of a trial or temptation is in itself the irrefutable proof that we are strong enough to conquer it, if only we use faithfully what we have, and what will be given. He then goes on to say that God "will, with the temptation also make a way to escape"; but the escape is not to be from temptation. He promises indeed to "make a way to escape," but only in order "*that ye may be able to bear it*,"—the escape is to be from the failure, from sin, never from the conflict so long as life endures. "There is no discharge in that war."[[14](#)]

This is the condition under which life in this world exists; the only escape from it lies in base surrender to the enemy of God and man. If we face this condition, and accept it without flinching, we are then in the position of a soldier who, having weighed well the purpose and significance of his enlistment, is ready with generous spirit to submit to all that it involves. No surprises or disheartening revelations of the nature of the struggle will meet us, because we shall have understood well in the beginning what we are undertaking and what we must expect.

III. The Terms of the Warfare

Let us in the beginning set clearly before ourselves a few simple facts, facts with which we have been conversant all our lives, but which our lifelong course shows us to have taken too little into account. These we must regard in a very personal way, for our study will be worse than futile if it be not intensely personal.

Let each one of us, therefore, set clearly before himself these fundamental propositions:

(1) Our Leader is our Lord Jesus Christ, fighting now, as He fought when He was on earth, in the perfect powers of His Sacred Humanity. We must for our own encouragement remember that though He is perfect God as well as perfect Man, yet it was not by means of His divine power alone that He fought His own battle against temptation and conquered. He won the victory by the use of His human will, fortified by His divinity. It was as Man, not as God, that He fought and conquered. Had he contended against Satan in His God-nature only, there would have been no real struggle, for even the slightest exercise of His divine power must have crushed the enemy in a single moment of time. It was just because He did fight as Man, in the power of His finite and created nature, that there could be a real conflict.

(2) As baptized Christians we are His soldiers, fighting with the powers and faculties of His perfect Humanity, which were given us when we were baptized. If we are indeed, as the Apostle declares, "members of His Body, of His flesh, and of His bones,"[[15](#)] then we fight with His human powers. No longer have we to use our own, but His perfect human faculties. No longer have we to plan with our weak minds; we have at our command the perfect intelligence of the Man Jesus, for "we have the mind of Christ."[[16](#)] No longer does the battle depend on our vacillating wills, for His perfect human will is so bound up with ours that it is not possible for us to be overcome except in so far as we fall away from this union with Him. And His love is our love, going out to God and to our fellow-man.

(3) The enemy is Satan, the prince of this world and of the hosts of hell; whose purpose in the warfare is the dishonour of God, and who fights against us just because we are the children of God.

(4) His chief mode of attack is what is commonly called Temptation, the alluring of the soul to

some thought, word, or deed that is contrary to the will of God.

(5) The successful resistance of temptation is a victory for our souls to the honour of our King. The battle is His; and the victory is won when we so yield ourselves to Him that He can employ us as instruments of His warfare.

(6) The entrance of any sin is defeat for our souls to our King's dishonour, and no sin can enter save in so far as we become partakers of the Satanic purpose and will.

(7) The entrance of serious wilful sin is a yielding of ourselves as Satan's captives.

(8) Such captivity means not an idle, passive confinement in some spiritual prison, but an active enlistment in the armies of hell to fight against our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us keep these considerations before us; let us ask the Holy Spirit to give us a right understanding of these truths; and our study of the Christian warfare will not be in vain.

IV. The Nature of Temptation

We have said above that Satan's chief weapon in his war against the soul is what is commonly called Temptation, whereby he allures the soul to consent to some thought, word, or deed that is contrary to the divine will.

Temptation is always a testing of the soul. This testing may be applied by God Himself, by Satan, or one of his fallen angels, or by one of our fellow-men.

God may be said to tempt man in the sense of applying tests to prove or instruct him, as when it is said that "God did tempt Abraham"[[17](#)] in commanding him to offer up Isaac. In every such case, however, God beforehand gives the soul He is testing sufficient grace to bear the trial. This is taught us by St. Paul in the text that we shall come back to over and over again: "God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."[[18](#)] Should failure and sin result, it would be because there had been wilful neglect to use the strength given. God cannot tempt man in the sense of inducing him to sin. Such a suggestion would be blasphemous. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man."[[19](#)] Trials may also come through man, acting consciously or unconsciously, under the direction of God, who might use such a one to try His servant. We do not mean to treat in these pages, however, this aspect of temptation. We are to deal with the word in its popular use, as meaning some inducement to commit sin.

Before going further, therefore, it will be well for us to define temptation in the sense in which we are using it.

Temptation is any solicitation, from whatever source, directed towards an intelligent, moral creature, who is in a state of probation, to violate the known will of God.

(1) All such temptation comes primarily from Satan as its source. He is originally responsible for every solicitation to sin, although he does not always act directly and immediately. He does perhaps most of his work through agents, men or devils. One very active agent of Satan is ourselves, though we often fail to realize it. By entering into occasions of sin we assist the tempter, and by repeated acts we so train our hearts to delight in some particular sin that no outside solicitation is necessary. We sin, and go on sinning, not because he is busy persuading us to it, but because, like rebellious Israel of old, we "love to have it so."[[20](#)]

(2) In order to constitute temptation, the solicitation must be directed to an intelligent, moral

creature. An idiot or an insane person cannot be tempted, because he has neither the intellect to understand what is going on, nor any moral responsibility.

(3) To be tempted one must be in a state of probation. Neither the Saints nor the angels in heaven, nor the souls of the faithful departed, can be tempted; they are beyond the sphere in which it is possible for temptation to operate. Nor yet can the devils, nor the souls of the lost, suffer from temptation, for the nature of temptation indicates a choice, and they have made their eternal choice, which at their Judgment received the divine ratification; for this, in its essence, is what the Judgment is,—the divine ratification of the choice the soul made when it was free to choose.

(4) Nothing can constitute temptation save what is a solicitation to violate the known will of God. He does not hold the soul responsible for so-called sins of ignorance, for there can be no real, formal sin save where there is knowledge.

It is a legal maxim in the kingdoms of this world that "Ignorance of the law is no excuse"; but, thank God, it is an excuse in the Kingdom of Heaven. He does not hold us responsible for that which we do not know. Let us remember, however, that much of ignorance of spiritual things is the result of our own culpable failure to lay hold upon the light and grace which He offers. Our ignorance is, perhaps in most cases, our own fault; and yet such is the tenderness of our God to His children, that He is willing to overlook it, and to count sin as though it were not sin.

Surely the soul that is not wholly base will long to make a generous response to this so great goodness, and will rise from its lethargy and seek by every means to lay hold upon the divine light, and strength, and knowledge, not only for its own sake, but to show a tender Father that His love does awaken in our hearts an answering love which quickens us to a generous service.

V. Precept and Counsel

When we speak of temptation being a solicitation to violate the known will of God, it is necessary for us to understand that conformity to God's will is not in every case required of us under penalty of sin. His will is revealed to us in two ways, in *precept* and in *counsel*. To violate a precept is in every case sin; to reject a counsel is, in itself, never a sin. God may set before us two alternatives, both of them being good, but one a higher and better thing than the other. In such a case, we are often—in fact, generally—tempted to accept the lower. For example, a young man may have set before him, at some particular time of his life, the alternative of serving God in work in his home parish, or of giving himself, by one great and final act of sacrifice and dedication, to the service of God in the monastic life. The former alternative is thoroughly good and holy, but none will deny that the latter is better. But the monastic life is a call of such a nature that compliance is never required under pain of sin; and one may even feel entirely sure that the call is directly from God, and yet be at liberty to refuse it because it is a form of service that belongs to counsel and not to precept.

While the soul is weighing the question, strong temptation invariably comes to choose the lower service. Not that the tempter is interested in our serving God in any sphere whatever, but he hopes that if he can induce us to choose the lower now, he may be able later on still further to lower our ideals, and so in the end induce us to reject the divine will in some matter that belongs to the precepts of God's law. With this hope he even strives earnestly to induce us to do a good thing in order to dissuade us from choosing that which is better.

So while it is entirely true, as we said above, that the rejection of a counsel is never, in itself,

sinful, yet there is great peril always in refusing the known will of God, even when He does not bind us to that will under the penalty of sin. The soul that truly loves is ever alert to perform the entire will of the beloved.

"The noble love of Jesus forceth man to work great things, and stirreth him up always to desire the most perfect. Love wills to be aloft and will not be kept down by any lesser thing."[[21](#)]

[1] St. Matt. x, 34.

[2] Exod. xxxii, 18.

[3] Rev. ii and iii.

[4] 1 Pet. ii, 11.

[5] Rom. vii, 23.

[6] Eph. vi, 11. See also Rom. xiii, 12; 2 Cor. vi, 7, and 1 Thes. v, 8.

[7] 1 Tim. i, 18.

[8] 1 Tim. vi, 12.

[9] 2 Tim. ii, 3.

[10] 2 Tim. iv, 7.

[11] See Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. II, pp. 113-114.

[12] 1 Cor. x, 13.

[13] 2 St. Pet. iii, 9.

[14] Eccles. viii, 8.

[15] Eph. v, 30.

[16] 1 Cor. ii, 16.

[17] Gen. xxii, 1.

[18] 1 Cor. x, 13.

[19] St. James i, 13.

[20] Jer. v, 31.

[21] *Imitation*, III, v. (Bigg's Trans.)

CHAPTER II

THE TEMPTER: HIS HISTORY AND NATURE

I. Satan's Fall and its Effects

We have already reminded ourselves that it is as important to understand somewhat of the enemy's force and resources as it is to have our own equipment and training complete. Let us therefore consider the adversary, for next to the unceasing recollection of the presence, power, and goodness of God, the most necessary thing for the Christian soldier is the recollection of the presence and character of the enemy. Vigilance in maintaining this recollection is what the Apostle solemnly commands.[[1](#)]

We cannot speak with theological exactness of the cause and occasion of the fall of Satan and his rebel host, for God has revealed but little concerning it; but when we compare Scripture with Scripture, it seems inevitable that the sin of Satan was one of pride, and, very probably, its particular form was a desire to make himself equal with God.

In the account given in Revelation of the war in heaven, St. Michael, whose name is simply a

Hebrew word meaning "Who is like God?" is mentioned as the captain of God's host, who fought against the dragon and his angels, and overcame and cast them out.[2] It would seem that the leader of the loyal angels took his name from the battle cry with which the armies of God, as they pressed upon the rebel ranks, repudiated the blasphemous claim of him who was seeking to be like the Most High.[3]

As we think of Satan as he is to-day, and as he meets us in the conflict, it will be of great value to us to keep definitely in mind the effect that his fall must have had upon his nature and powers.

Not only is the adversary finite, with all the limitations common to finite beings, but he is one who, by his fall from original righteousness, has become a blasted creature, maimed and wounded in all his faculties.

Man, too has fallen, and the blight is also upon all his powers; but with every return to God in penitence man's powers are recuperated; he regains somewhat of his former strength. Nay, more, the spiritual strength we lay hold of through penitence is often greater than that which we lost through sin. "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." [4] God through the Precious Blood of His Son so mightily overrules the evil that, as we think of our sin, we can indeed triumphantly cry, "*O felix culpa!*"

Not so with Satan and his companions. From the day of their fall the poison of the evil that is in them has been working relentlessly, and with never a moment's cessation, toward their ultimate destruction. By an humble, earnest effort for God's service in the little opportunities of daily life, we go on from strength to strength, while our foe, however powerful he may be in his warfare against the weakness of man, is daily drawing nearer to the time when he will lie in hell, an impotent and inert slave of the evil he has chosen as his portion.

Even now, when so much of his ancient might remains, we can see the signs of his growing weakness.

One illustration of the effect of his fall upon him is found in the stupidity which marks his work. It is almost incredible that, after all the long millenniums of his warfare, and especially his experience since the Incarnation, he should be so incapable of realizing the inevitable consequence of his warfare against God.

In innumerable cases he has seen the Saints strengthened by his antagonism; he has seen the weak becoming strong through the right use of the opportunities his temptations afford them; he has stood at the Judgment of souls as their accuser, and been covered with confusion as he saw his accusations rejected, and crowns given them, all the more glorious because of the occasion for battle and victory his hate had afforded them. All this he has seen, and yet its real significance has never dawned upon him.[5]

More astonishing still, in spite of his experience, he has never been able to see that when he joins the struggle with us he is only seeking to renew the old warfare which was brought to a final issue on Calvary to his eternal discomfiture; that it is not the weak human soul he is fighting, but the omnipotent God Who in human flesh, and by the exercise of human powers and faculties, bruised him under His feet, invaded his infernal kingdom, broke the gates of brass, and smote the bars of iron in sunder.[6]

Are we wiser than Satan? Have we caught the true significance of the battle, the vision of its final issue? Do we realize, when the conflict comes, that our heart is but the arena of a struggle between the omnipotence of God and the weakness of Satan, and that we are called to fight along with Him "Who is the Author of unconquerable might, the King of the Empire that cannot be overthrown?" If so, then there can be no fear or repining because of the battle, but with the glad war-cry, "Emmanuel,—

God with us!" can we plunge into the glorious strife, knowing that with His own right hand and with His holy arm will He get Himself the victory.[[7](#)]

II. The Hopelessness of his Warfare

The hopelessness of Satan's warfare is shown in its final issue. Sin entered into the world through Satan, and by sin came death.[[8](#)] Death seems, when we first consider it, Satan's triumph; but in reality it is his destruction. He pursues a soul through life, but the hour of death marks the absolute cessation of his power and influence. The faithful departed in the Church Expectant are in the hand of God, and nevermore can the torment of temptation touch them. The very act of wreaking the utmost of his power is the act which places them forever beyond even the possibility of communication with him. So both prophet and apostle cry out in an ecstasy of triumph, as the Holy Spirit leads them to this conclusion,—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"[[9](#)]

So also is it with "the spirits of just men made perfect,"[[10](#)] who, having been purged of all stain of sin, stand in the glory of the Beatific Vision in Paradise. Satan thought by means of death to make eternal life with God impossible; but by the divine overruling death is made the gateway of everlasting life. He watches the progress of the effect of sin; he sees the bodily weakness which he introduced into the race when he induced our first parents to sin, increasing, only to realize that the supreme result of evil in the world is to remove the soul he has been pursuing with malignant hate, forever from the sphere of his action.

Even with the lost the same holds good. With infernal glee he watches by the deathbed of a reprobate soul, of one that has yielded himself to his rule. He sees the last hour approaching; the dread coma of death settles down on the mind and heart where Satan's seat is; and he watches for the rending of soul and body asunder which will seal for eternity his claim to his possession of the sinner. The hour strikes; the horrible spasm of death seizes the frame and passes; the Evil One clutches with hellish eagerness the liberated spirit that is now his forever. The lost soul with the swiftness of thought is judged, Satan's claim is granted, and the lost wretch flees into outer darkness, the eternal slave of hell. But what a difference now transpires! for such a soul can no longer be used as the active instrument of the divine dishonour, and Satan finds satisfaction in possessing a soul only when he can use it as a co-worker with himself in his warfare with God.

III. The Limitations of the Tempter

Our consideration of Satan's strength has shown us something of the awful and malignant character of his office. We see that he is not a foe to be despised, and the soul that thinks lightly of his antagonism is marked by him as a sure victim. Yet despite all this, to fear Satan is to dishonour God. What would be thought of a soldier in the armies of an earthly kingdom who was afraid of the enemy? He may be far from despising him; he may recognize his power and skill, but to be afraid of him would be the mark of the caitiff. How much more dishonourable is it in the soldiers of Jesus Christ, our Captain, to stand in fear when He is fighting for us, and has promised us certain victory if only we be faithful.

This is the first consideration that should nerve and enhearten us; but there is a second and most

important one to which God would direct our attention, namely, the natural limitations of the adversary himself.

The popular notion of Satan is an extraordinarily erroneous one, and the reaction from it has driven many to a complete denial of his existence. Many make a god of him, endow him with attributes of deity, regarding him as both omnipresent and omniscient. But we are ever to remember that Satan is a creature, finite and limited.

(1) He is in no sense omnipresent. "No angel nor devil has any gift of ubiquity. If any created spirit be in one place, he is not in another. If he is busy protecting, or endangering, the soul of one, he is not with another." [[11](#)] Satan has no more power than we have to be in more than one place at the same time, although, through the faithful agency of his many evil angels, fellow-devils with himself, he is able to deal with every soul. We speak in popular language of Satan tempting us, but it is probable that most of our temptations, though inspired by him, are not brought to us by him directly and in his own proper person, but through spiritual or other agencies under his control.

(2) Again, Satan is not omniscient. This attribute, like that of omnipresence, belongs to God alone. Doubtless, in common with other purely spiritual beings, and in spite of his fall, he has, in virtue of his nature, vaster knowledge of things than we can now grasp, but his knowledge is necessarily limited and finite, and any attainment, or increase of it, must be through finite processes.

(3) Another truth that brings us the greatest comfort and courage is that which is revealed in Holy Scripture, namely, that he has no power of reading our minds and hearts. It must ever be a consolation to us to know that in times of temptation neither he nor the fallen spirits he employs can know what effect their evil suggestions are producing in our hearts, except in so far as we give outward evidence of it. [[12](#)] Could he at times see how troubled and afraid we are, how near to yielding, he would redouble his assault with such fury as might sweep us wholly away; but God in His merciful kindness withholds this knowledge from him.

This should teach us the necessity of a calm and untroubled front in times of temptation; giving no outward sign of perturbation that might encourage him; remembering how Satan's experience has given him skill beyond our thought in reading such signs. To give such outward indications would be to notify him of our fear of him; and also would advertise him that we were not putting our trust wholly in God. Let him be given these two assurances, and our chance of escape would be small.

IV. The Restraint of the Divine Decrees

As we have seen, Satan is limited as are all creatures, but his limitations are more than those which belong of necessity to a finite and created nature. Because of his rebellion and his warfare against the Saints, God by decree has set him his bounds, as perhaps He has done with none other of His creatures.

(1) He can tempt a soul that is in grace only with explicit permission from God. This is taught clearly in the history of the temptations of Job. [[13](#)] He defames the character of this servant of God, challenging God, as it were, to give him permission to test the Saint. The permission is given, and then, and not till then, is Satan able to lay siege to the heart of the patriarch.

(2) After God's permission has been given, the extent of the temptation is also specially marked out by God. He sends Satan forth with permission to try His servant, but decrees what he can, and what he cannot, do. "Behold all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thy hand."

This was the limitation of the first temptation, and when in it "Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly," for the further perfecting of His servant and the confusion of the tempter, He gives a second permission, for each detailed temptation had to be stamped with the divine approval. But here again was the definite bound set. "Behold he is in thine hand, but save his life."

But in many cases God sets for Satan an even more baffling limitation than was done in the trial of Job, not allowing him to know definitely how far he will be allowed to go. He has no rights in his work of temptation. God has made no covenant with him to allow him anything; he is permitted to operate little by little, here and there, and from time to time, not according to his own will or wish, but only as God wills for His own glory.

If he knew in the beginning the exact limit, if nothing more, he could so much the more intelligently prepare his plans. He is, however, in the position of a man who is bidden to prepare for a journey, but is given no idea of the distance it is to cover, along what road it will be, or what space of time it will occupy. The plan laid out in such a case must be, at best, a poor kind of thing. God has promised us that we shall not be tempted above that we are able. In other words, that He will preside over this battle, watching it in its every detail, and when the limit of our strength is reached, the tempter will be instantly checked. What must be his rage and chagrin to find so often the spoil of the battle apparently all but within his grasp, when suddenly his arm is shortened, his power paralysed.

[1] "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."—1 Peter v, 8.

[2] Rev. xii, 7.

[3] "It seems certain that this sin was pride, which is the beginning of all sin.... More specifically, the pride of the fallen angels seems to have been a refusal to accept the position of creature, subject in all things to their Creator."—Hunter, *Outlines of Dogmatic Theology*, 448.

[4] Rom. v, 20.

[5] "According to the divine economy, the Evil One is not consigned at once to the place of punishment allotted to him, but is permitted to be at large for the trial and probation of men; that he may, though contrary to his own design, render the Saints more righteous through patience, and become the cause of greater glory to them."—St. Macarius the Egyptian, *Institutes of Christian Perfection*, Bk. IV, ch. ii (London, 1816).

[6] Ps. cvii, 16.

[7] Ps. xcvi, 2.

[8] Rom. v, 12.

[9] 1 Cor. xv, 55. Compare Hosea xiii, 14.

[10] Heb. xii, 23.

[11] Moberly, *The Administration of the Holy Spirit*, p. 25.

[12] "For Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men."—1 Kings viii, 39.

"After all, with all his vast knowledge and experience, he is but a creature. He cannot know you from within; he is not omniscient, not omnipresent. He can only *guess* at your motives,—the secret spring of your actions."—Webb, *The Presence and Office of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 78-79.

[13] Job i and ii.

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPTER: HIS CHARACTERISTICS AND METHODS

I. Satan, the Deceiver

The foremost characteristic of Satan is that which marks him as a Deceiver. It was by deceit that he brought death into the world and all our woe. Our first mother was "beguiled through his subtilty,"[[1](#)] and "being deceived, was in the transgression."[[2](#)] Our Lord declares him to be the father of lies,[[3](#)] and the constant apostolic warning is against his falsehood and deceit. He secures the active allegiance of men by "blinding the minds of them which believe not";[[4](#)] he is able to lead astray God's people by being "transformed into an angel of light,"[[5](#)] and through his wiles and lying wonders he seeks "to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect."[[6](#)] So we are taught to watch and pray "lest the devil find room to deceive, who never sleeps, but goes about seeking whom he may devour."[[7](#)]

Nevertheless there is great consolation in the fact that his chief weapon is deceit. By using it he bears his testimony that, though we be far gone from righteousness, yet, should we be permitted to see clearly, truth rather than error would appeal to us.

No man chooses evil for evil's sake.[[8](#)] Before he makes such a choice he is deceived into thinking either that the thing is good, or that under the particular circumstances it is right for him to make what, under other conditions, would be a sinful choice. Thus, much of the sin we commit comes from making ourselves an exception to rules which we ourselves acknowledge, and it has been said that such action is of the very essence of immorality.

One of Satan's favourite deceptions is practised upon us in regard to himself. It has been well said that Satan's master-stroke in these latter times is his policy of persuading men that he himself has no existence. If an army disbelieves in the existence of an enemy, no guard will be kept, and it will be easily surprised and overcome.[[9](#)] So we may be sure that those who deny the personality of Satan will sooner or later be his captives. Knowing this he operates as hiddenly as possible.

How different is his plan of warfare from what it was two thousand years ago. Men believed in him then, and he fought them in the open. Now they question his existence, and he goes softly lest they should discover their error through his too manifest activity. In our Lord's time, for example, demoniacal manifestation was common; it is rarely heard of now. Satan does not care to be too much in evidence. He encourages us to think lightly of him that we may all the more surely fall into his snares.

Here we see the evidence of his absolute devotion to his cause. Wiser in his generation than the children of light,[[10](#)] he is willing to be effaced if thereby the glory of the kingdom of hell can be enhanced. We often mar what we do for God by conspicuously claiming the credit; he asks for no credit if only the result redounds to his power.

II. The Fact of his Personality

The question of the personality of Satan is one that we must briefly consider here. Do we believe in a personal devil? The answer to this question will show what is our attitude towards the spiritual conflict. We may go further, and say that it will show whether, in the last analysis, we believe there is any spiritual conflict.[[11](#)]

In these days when man is made the measure of all things, both divine and devilish, we often hear it said that every soul is its own tempter, that what revelation calls temptation is but the working out

of a so-called "evil principle" that resides by nature in every human spirit.[[12](#)]

Of course, there is a partial truth in this, for when we yield ourselves to Satan's power by consenting to sin, we then become his servants, and just as one man often acts as Satan's agent in tempting another, so, too, we can act as his agent in tempting ourselves. But it is none the less his personal work though carried out through another.

To deny the personality of Satan involves one in all manner of denials of Scripture and Church teaching. Revelation declares that God made our first parents and pronounced them "very good." [[13](#)] Whence then arose the inherent "principle of evil" that wrought their temptation? Did God create in them and pronounce "very good" that which asserted itself so desperately against His will, or did it come from a personally directed intelligence outside of them?

Again, in the second Adam, if He is indeed the God-man, the Incarnate Jehovah, whence came His temptation? If it came from some principle within Him, then just in so far as His temptation was greater than ours must the evil principle dwelling in Him have been greater; and when we consider the extent of His temptation we must then conclude that His human nature had more inherent evil in it than that of any other who has ever braved the perils of the spiritual conflict.

Again, the verdict of the Christian experience of all ages has been that the more nearly men attain to the likeness of Christ, the more they are tempted. Does then the increase of the Christ-character give added virulence and strength to the evil that is within?

These illustrations of temptation show that those who reject the personality of Satan and of his evil angels, and substitute for it the idea of temptation arising from an evil principle within, are involving themselves in conclusions which strike at the very fundamentals of divine revelation concerning God and His relations to man.

III. His Experience and Wisdom

One of Satan's most powerful means of warfare lies in his experience in dealing with the souls of men. We dare not presume to think that we can oppose or overreach him with any gift of discernment that we have of ourselves. His experience in this warfare has been age-long. Ours has covered but a few brief years. His devotion to his cause has been unflagging, and so, by his strenuous attention to the business in hand, he has acquired vast stores of knowledge as to methods of temptation. Our knowledge of attack and resistance is a poor and beggarly thing, because when God would place us in the school of temptation that we might learn this military science, we are wanting in devotion to our cause and miss the numberless opportunities that are offered.

Furthermore, Satan has dealt with millions of souls of the same type as ours, dealt with them and mastered them. It were the height of folly for us to imagine that there might be any thing in our nature, or in our aim and purpose, that he has not met and studied in characters far stronger than ours. Taken apart from God, there is nothing in us that can for a moment baffle so powerful and experienced a foe. We can present no new front to him. Only the infinite strength and variety of God's grace can supply that which will surely baffle and defeat him.

As we study the history of his dealings with the souls of men we see not only that he is faithful to his own abominable ideals and aims, and so acquires great knowledge of the methods which avail against us, but that he is faithful and methodical in using the experience he has gained.

He makes the most of what he has. If he discovers that a certain mode of temptation is effective

against men, he wastes neither time nor force in wandering afield after new things. He works one method thoroughly, getting out of it all possible dishonour to God, before seeking new ways and means. He never scatters his force, but is ever intensifying and concentrating it, daily seeking to perfect more and more his method of warfare.

Let us see how careful he is to utilize his own tremendous experiences. Take the first recorded temptation that he brought against man. What was his course of reasoning in devising it? "I fell through the desire to be like God," he reflects. "This same temptation will ensnare this new handiwork of God whom He has made in His own image and likeness." It was to him unthinkable that any intelligent being should not have that aspiration, and he approaches our first mother, promising as the reward of sin, "Ye shall be as gods." [14] His confidence was not disappointed. The lure attracted, man fell, and sin and death entered the world.

We note that he again falls back upon his experience in tempting the second Adam. He hears the Father's voice declare, "Thou art My Beloved Son," [15] and immediately he proceeds to test Him. Mark the substance of his insolent assault. "If thou art the Son of God, prove it, vindicate your claim. I challenge it. Turn these stones into bread, and by this miracle show me that you are like God." [16]

This he believed would be the supreme test. His own fall had come through his ambition; the fall of the human race had its beginning in the same proud aspiration; and surely, he argued, it would prove effective against this new opponent of his power as prince of this world. We know what was the issue of the attempt. No sin could enter the heart of the Sinless One, and yet He allowed Himself to be thus tempted that we might find in His example a means of offsetting the advantage our enemy has in his vast experience with men and their frailties.

IV. The Methods of his Might

Not in a single chapter, nor yet in many chapters, would it be possible for us to discuss all the forms of the might with which Satan wars against the servants of God. We must hasten on to the consideration of some of those that he most commonly employs.

(1) His activity. He never sleeps; he never rests on his arms. What seem to be pauses in the battle are only intervals he is employing to study us more carefully, and to plot some more subtle and ingenious method of attack. Even in moments of defeat he is alert to recover even the smallest advantage. How often when we have just won from him some hard-fought battle, and are pausing, as it were, for breath, our vigilance relaxed ever so little, does he discharge a Parthian shot of pride in our victory, or of impatience which, if it does not wound us grievously, at least mars the perfection of the victory we had secured by God's grace.

(2) His aggression. We are, perhaps, in many instances, ready to use the opportunities that present themselves to labour for God's glory, but how salutary a lesson have we to learn from him who, in the interests of eternal unrighteousness, does not wait for opportunity, but labours unceasingly to *create* occasions for the dishonour of our God. He goes up and down the world "seeking whom he may devour," [17] letting nothing slip that can forward his infernal designs.

In furthering the glory of God and the work of the kingdom we count ourselves to have done well if we have been fairly faithful to the opportunities that come. We hear much, among even the best of spiritual teachers, of seizing opportunities of grace, but little is said of *making* such opportunities, of watching and labouring, keen and alert to turn to good account and to God's glory every circumstance,

whether or not it seem in itself to bear the hall-mark of heaven-sent opportunity.

How much more zealous is Satan in the evil cause! He not only uses every opportunity that comes, but he counts himself to have done little unless he has forced occasions for wounding the divine Majesty and enslaving souls made in the image of God.

(3) His persistency. Though it is within the power of the soul, by a stout and persistent defence, to discourage Satan in regard to certain particular temptations, yet in regard to temptation in general he is never discouraged. However many times we may inflict defeat upon him, however mighty in battle the soul of saint or sinner may wax, he never resigns the hope that he may yet secure dominion in the heart in which God now reigns.

What a frightening suggestion this offers! He who knows us so well, better than we know ourselves, better than anyone knows us save God and our Guardian Angel, sees ever in us possibilities of final and eternal failure. There is always some definite thing in us that buoys up his hope that he may yet be able to persuade or deceive us into rejecting the service of God and accepting his. Every time we yield to the slightest sin or laxity, we encourage and embolden him still more, until he feels that he can safely attack the soul that but a little time before he feared. It is thus that we become responsible for our own temptations, raise up occasions for sin, and give, by our often deliberate acts, vantage ground and footing to him from which he can drive home a deadly stroke.

(4) A fourth characteristic is the patience with which he works. He bides his time. We should naturally think that when he found a soul in a sinful environment he would immediately use the occasion to lead it into some serious sin, but by no means does he always take this course. Often in the most sinful surroundings he does not, for a long time, allow the sight of sin to suggest participation in it. He waits until we are accustomed to its presence; until the sense of shock wears off. He begins by getting us to tolerate the fact of sin about us, for he knows that any toleration of sin in the general life with which we are surrounded is a long step towards tolerating it in ourselves.

So he waits with a patience born of a deep-laid plot. He notes that after a while we see our Lord fearfully dishonoured, and our souls are not thereby grieved and outraged; that we come and go in a world where He is being crucified daily, but with a smiling countenance that masks no broken heart beneath.

Then he begins to insinuate his suggestions to evil. Perhaps the temptation at first is to some slight sin only, merely venial. He would not rouse our slumbering conscience by the frightening temptations to that which is serious. But Satan has no interest in a soul committing venial sins merely for their own sake. Venial sin cannot deliver us into his power, and cannot keep us out of heaven.

It is well for us to remember this. Satan cares nothing for venial sin *per se*. He never tempts a soul to it save as a cunningly laid preparation for that deadly sin which follows logically upon a long and reckless course of venial sin; and the soul that deliberately yields to little temptations is knowingly, wilfully, and deliberately aiding and abetting the devil in his plan for the supreme dishonour of our God.

So through all these steps the Satanic patience endures. He sees the soul's sensibilities becoming more and more blunted; the conscience less and less sensitive. He sees the little act of sin lightly consented to, then the habit formed. He marks the soul's defences crumbling, and in a well-chosen hour, subtly and in some familiar guise, he presents the temptation to the great offence, and his triumph is complete.

(5) The last characteristic we shall consider is his ready adaptability to every circumstance that transpires in the midst of the battle. He cares not how we are tempted, if only our fall can be secured. We, in our self-will, often desire to serve God in some particular way, and lose interest when we

have to change our method. Satan gives us an example in this, for he cares not how he fights, if only he can, in some small measure at least, accomplish God's dishonour. He has no pet plans to which he clings in a self-willed way. Utterly devoted to his cause, he feels no reluctance or sense of personal chagrin at having to give up a certain method he has been using to dishonour God in us. He gladly and immediately resigns what he finds is not to the purpose.

We see this illustrated in the swiftness with which he shifts the point of attack, often with great readiness and seeming graciousness accepting as his own the point of view from which we reject his first overture.

This is vividly illustrated in his temptation of our Lord in the wilderness. In response to the first temptation, our Lord shows that man is not to live by bread alone, not by merely natural means, even though in themselves they may be good, but that he is to be sustained by a trust in God. Instantly Satan changes his front. He takes Him up upon a pinnacle of the temple and delivers the second temptation, which in substance is this: "You are entirely right. God must be trusted implicitly and in all things. Now give an evidence of your trust in Him. Cast yourself down, for it is written—(and here we see how the devil so completely shifts to our Lord's point of view that he begins to quote Scripture himself),—'He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'" But the Blessed One could not be deceived. Again fell the crushing *Scriptum est*, and again the tempter is vanquished.

As we have just seen in his quotation from Scripture, if it suits his purpose he will make use of the best and holiest things if only he can balk God's will,—things which, in themselves, he must fear and hate. "So he may cozen and deceive thee, he cares not whether it be by truth or falsehood," says à Kempis.[18] He will try to induce us to go to church when he knows that in so doing we may be neglecting plain, God-sent duties at home. He could not possibly desire us to meditate on holy things, and yet a self-willed meditation, to the neglect of charity or obedience, is most pleasing to him, and he will incite us to it, even smoothing the way for us, suggesting to us beautiful and holy thoughts, and glad to help us with our meditation because he knows it is being made selfishly, and therefore contrary to the divine will.

V. *The Soul's Safety*

Our assurance of escaping the power of this malignant and tireless foe lies:

(1) In never parleying or arguing with him. He is far cleverer than we are, and if we stop to consider his proposals, or to reason about them, our fate will, sooner or later, be that of our first mother, who, because she was willing to hear what the tempter had to say, found herself deceived to her utter undoing. Our only safe course lies in instant and vigorous rejection of all that he suggests.

(2) But, although we shall see later that it is often wise to ignore him wholly,[19] our resistance is not to be merely a passive one. We are to meet point with point, attack with counter-attack. If he is tirelessly active in his cause, there must be in us a corresponding activity and zeal for God's service and for the safety of our souls; a like aggressive spirit, a forcing of circumstances and conditions, wherever possible, that glory may be won for our King, and the power of the devil diminished; a like persistency, and equal alertness, a ready trying of one method, then another; and no matter what past failures may have been, a continuing the fight, that in the end we may be worthy of the victory.

If we can learn these lessons, though the strength and prowess of Satan be an hundred-fold greater

than that which human might can own, yet we shall have no fear of him. On the contrary he will fear us, delivering his attacks warily, lest he find his power shattered by the weapons with which we shall be able to oppose him.

We were considering a little while ago how Satan "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." [20] These words of St. Peter have another significance. True, he goes about with strong and ceaseless aggression, but he goes about seeking only those whom he *may* devour. He does not fall without discretion upon the throngs of men, as the lion upon the flock. He seeks only those who will, he thinks, in the end yield themselves to him. He skulks about, hiding himself, seeking, as we have seen, to blind men to the very fact of his existence, until he finds opportunity for attack when he thinks the soul will yield. Some strong souls he does not openly seek, for too often has he been defeated by them, and he fears to tempt them save in some insidious, hidden way. In dealing with such souls he loses his lion-like character, and lies in ambush like the coward who is afraid to strike save from behind.

A great comfort, therefore, we must draw from the thought that Satan's career has been one of failure as well as of victory. God's Saints, following the lead of the King of Saints, have on a thousand battle-fields trampled him under their feet; and with whatever insolent confidence he may approach us, it is never without a haunting, unnerving fear lest the issue be what it has been many times before, a crushing defeat.

It is not the weak human soul only that trembles at the impending conflict, but the soul of Satan, so often beaten down and humiliated at the hands of the weakest of the soldiers of God.

[1] 2 Cor. xi, 3.

[2] 1 Tim. ii, 14.

[3] St. John viii, 44.

[4] 2 Cor. iv, 4.

[5] 2 Cor. xi, 14.

[6] St. Mark xiii, 22.

[7] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[8] "The soul, from her nature, always relishes good, though it is true that the soul, blinded by self-love, does not know and discern what is true good."—St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, p. 122. (Thorold Trans., London, 1907.)

[9] "There is something satanic in the contempt and the ridicule with which men treat Satan. I say it is satanic because it is a Satanic illusion to make men cease to fear him, or cease even to believe in him. He is never more completely master of a man than when the man ridicules his existence,—when, as we hear in these days, men say, 'There is no devil.'"—H. E. Manning, *Sin and Its Consequences*, pp. 168-169.

[10] St. Luke xvi, 8.

[11] It is perhaps best to avoid such expressions as "personality of evil," lest they be misunderstood. "Evil cannot be personal in or of itself; it can only obtain the advantages of personal embodiment and action by being accepted by an already existing creature, endowed with will,—a creature which freely determines implicitly to accept it by rejecting good.... In Satan evil has become dominant and fixed as in a previously existing personal being; there was no such thing in the universe of the Almighty and All-good God as a self-existing or originally created devil."—Liddon, *Passiontide Sermons*, p. 95.

[12] "What do they exactly mean by this imposing phrase? How can evil itself be, strictly speaking, a principle? The essence of evil is absence of principle, principle being something positive. Evil is contradiction to positive principle."—Liddon, *Passiontide Sermons*, p. 88.

[13] Gen. i, 31.

[14] Gen. iii, 5, or rather "as God." The word in the Hebrew is simply *Elohim*.

[15] St. Mark i, 11.

[16] See Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 148.

[17] 1 St. Peter v, 8.

[18] *Imitation*, IV, xxx.

[19] See page 142.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNIVERSALITY OF TEMPTATION

I. The Common Lot

"So long as we live in this world we cannot be without tribulation and temptation. Whence it is written in Job,[1] 'The life of man upon earth is a temptation.'"[2]

Man did not have to wait for the full revelation of God in His Son before knowing this truth. Holy Job testifies to it out of his own experience, and the Son of Sirach gives the warning, "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation."[3] The constant and definite warning and promise of our Lord and His Apostles were to the same effect. In the only prayer He taught His disciples, a prayer He commands us to use daily, they are taught to say, "Lead us not into temptation";[4] and on the night in which He was betrayed, full of tender solicitude for their souls, He warns them, "Pray that ye enter not into temptation."[5]

In all His teaching He takes it easily for granted that temptation is an inevitable factor in the life of those who would follow Him. In the parable of the Sower He assumes, without so much as making the statement, that temptation must come to every heart in which the seed of the Word is sown.[6]

Everywhere His Apostles give us the same teaching. St. Paul testifies to the presence of temptation in his own life, and warns and comforts his converts concerning it, telling them of the sweetness and loving care of God in it all: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."[7] And further, God reveals to us the depth of our Lord's temptation as a source of comfort and encouragement: "In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted";[8] and again, He "was in all points tempted like as we are."[9]

So likewise is it through the writings of all the Apostles. St. James assumes the universal fact, and points out the way of temptation as the way of joy;[10] St. Peter shows how temptation leads on to "praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ";[11] and the Epistles of the Beloved Disciple, tender and full of all gentleness as they are, ring with the suggestion of the Satanic antagonism, the warfare and the victory. What a trumpet call there is to the elect lady and her children: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought."[12] It is like an echo of the revelation on Patmos, the message to the faithful Philadelphians, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."[13]

II. Enduring Hardship

It is a part of the temptation itself that, as we contemplate the fact of its universality, the question should arise in the soul, weary with the battle, sore with long buffeting, "Is there no rest, no cessation

from the strain and stress of the warfare?"

The question comes from Satan. Assuming the role of a comforter, he whispers to us of the hardness of the ceaseless struggle. It is a temptation to induce us to forget our character as the followers of our Lord. When we were baptized we were signed with the Sign of the Cross in token that we should "manfully fight under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto our life's end." [14]

In short, at our Baptism we were enlisted and sealed as soldiers, and a soldier who never fights has no reason for existing. A soldier who turns himself back in the day of battle is not only unworthy of his name and character, but is by this act reversing the whole principle of his life and vocation. We are members of the Church Militant,—the fighting Church. The Son of God has gone forth to war, the trumpet-call to His soldiers has sounded. It were shame upon the soldier of an earthly army should he, at such a time, linger and repine because of the battle, and surely those who contend for no earthly laurel, but for the "crown of glory that fadeth not away," [15] cannot afford to do less.

Let us never forget that we are members of an army, that it is a time of war; our Captain has gone forth with His host; "The ark and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house to eat and to drink?" [16]

We must not, however, leave the matter at this point, lest some be "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," [17] and find only despair where they looked for consolation. In the spiritual combat, unceasing as it is, there are many considerations which offer comfort. These we shall not here meditate upon at length. They will find their place before we close our study of this holy warfare. But it will help and encourage us to remind ourselves that in this struggle the exercise of strength does not exhaust the soul.

In the moment that we seem weakest, then are we strong, because Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness. [18] Then it is that God teaches us our own insufficiency that we may look not to anything that we have or do, but to Him that He may send us "help from the sanctuary and strengthen us out of Sion." [19] Great strain upon bodily strength depletes it, but the more unsparing the call upon our spiritual energies, the more are they confirmed and increased. Then again, the harder the battle, the more splendid the victory and the reward. Every Satanic device and energy that is directed against us does but swell the opportunity for a more glorious place in the Kingdom. So à Kempis says: "These help to virtue; these test the young soldiers of Christ; these fashion the heavenly crown." [20]

Thus does evil react upon itself for its own destruction, and surely none but a pusillanimous soul will desire to flee the honour of being used as the sure occasion and instrument of the glory of our God, and of the overthrow of Satan.

III. The sufferings of the Saints

The holy author of the "Imitation of Christ" tells us, "No man is so perfect and holy as not sometimes to have temptations." [21] The universality of temptation is found not only in respect to outward condition and circumstance, but also in respect to the character of those against whom Satan directs his malice. Saintly souls longing for a still greater saintliness, if they truly discern the things of the Spirit, will not fall into the snare of thinking that perhaps some day in this life they will become so like our Lord that temptation can never more vex and torment them. To become like Him will be to

invite more desperate attacks. The more we are conformed to His likeness, the more must we expect to arouse the hatred and malice of the Evil One. He who is the Holy of Holies was, just because of that fact, tempted as never other man was tempted.

Not only is our greater conformity to Christ the signal for Satan's attack, but we must expect the particular occasions of God's outpouring of grace upon us to be also the occasions of special and perhaps immediate assault.

It was so with our Lord. There are few words in the narrative of stronger or more valuable significance than the adverb with which St. Matthew begins the fourth chapter of his Gospel: "*Then* was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil."

Bishop Andrewes says: "When as Christ was but newly come out of the water of Baptism, and immediately after the heavens had opened unto Him, and the Holy Ghost descended upon Him in the likeness of a dove, and while He was yet full of the Holy Ghost, did the devil set upon Him";[[22](#)] and saintly old Leighton warns us: "Thou shalt be sure to be assaulted when thou hast received the greatest enlargements from heaven, either at the Sacrament or in prayer, or in any other way; then look for an onset. This arch-pirate lets the empty ships pass, but lays wait for them when they return richest laden."[[23](#)]

Thus the soul that has received special blessings of God must expect special attack, not only because it is natural for Satan to seek promptly to offset and quench the divine grace, but because when God gives us special spiritual strength He gives it in order that it may be used, and He Himself will supply the opportunity by permitting Satan to make his attack. "It is God's property to look for much at his hands to whom He hath given much. When He gives a man a large measure of grace, He gives the devil withal a larger patent."[[24](#)]

The like experience has ever been suffered by the Saints. We read of their struggles with temptation, and of the methods the adversary employs against them, and they sound often impossible and grotesque. We are inclined to dismiss them as the product of the childish imagination of some mediæval chronicler; but how do we know the method of the devil with the Saints? He never has occasion to deal with us in any unusual way. He is able to overthrow us daily with the most ordinary and commonplace temptations; how then dare we say how he might approach those against whom no common temptation can avail?

Thus are we taught not to look forward to growth in holiness as a means of escape from temptation. Such expectation would in itself be sin, because we should then be seeking God's gifts for our own selfish ease and indulgence, and not for His honour. If He should vouchsafe us the grace to attain to great achievement in the spiritual life, it would be a base return for His goodness to shut those graces up in our hearts (were such a thing possible), instead of using them in more extended endeavour for the glory of His Kingdom; instead of arming ourselves by their means for more complete and crushing conquests of His enemies.

The Saints are led along the path of sanctity that they may be more effective soldiers; not that they may by such progress escape from the presence of the foe, and find a pusillanimous peace in this life, while all the powers of evil are storming at the gates of the Kingdom, and making captives of the King's children.

Peace is to be had indeed, and in this life, "for the Kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,"[[25](#)] but, says à Kempis, "he that knows how to suffer will possess the greatest peace." Endurance of hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ is the only passport to honourable peace in this life, the only pledge of the "peace of God which passeth all understanding"[[26](#)] in the life to come.

IV. Satan in the Sanctuary

Thomas à Kempis tells us again, "There is no order so holy nor place so secret where there be not temptations."[[27](#)]

It would seem that the energies of Satan against God would, from the nature of things, find themselves paralysed under certain conditions. Surely, one should think, the devil could introduce his temptations more readily in a brothel than in a church, in ordinary secular employment rather than when we are engaged in the service of the sanctuary.

Such, however, is not the case. Amid the common employments of the carpenter shop in Nazareth we should scarcely have wondered had He been tempted; but that the enemy should have approached the Incarnate Son of God while in the midst of His great retreat in preparation for His ministry does fill us with astonishment. Or if it seem not unnatural that He should have been tempted in the desert solitudes, yet we do marvel at the audacity that led the tempter to bear Him to the holy precincts of the temple, and seize upon the circumstances there to tempt Him to seek other than His Father's will. But so it was with the Master, and so shall it be with the disciple.[[28](#)]

Who has not been tempted at the holiest times and in the most sacred places? Is it not, furthermore, the common experience that Satan the more eagerly and readily pursues us under such circumstances? There is a principle in it, and a most natural one. It is a favourite device of the enemy to assault us at such times for two reasons.

First, because he knows that could he induce us to sin under such circumstances, his victory would be greater, the dishonour of God would be deeper, the hurt to the soul more serious. Many a soul has been startled while kneeling in the very act of receiving the Blessed Sacrament by the swift, sudden onslaught of some strong temptation. To yield at such a time would not only bring upon it the guilt of the sin itself, but there would be added to it something of the nature of sacrilege. Satan knows this, and is keen to gain every advantage from it.

Secondly, he seeks to lead us into sin under these conditions because he fears especially what is going on in our souls. God is drawing near to us, and we are drawing near to Him.[[29](#)] We are hearkening what the Lord God will say concerning us,[[30](#)] and He is preparing to speak in our souls with the Voice that is "mighty in operation,"[[31](#)] with the Voice of which it is said, "He spake the word and they were made, He commanded and they were created."[[32](#)]

Satan knows how that Voice in the attentive heart can speak into being new creations of divine grace, and of strength unto the battle; and it is to his utmost interest that our hearts be turned aside from hearing the divine Voice within. It is a great blow to his power for a soul to make a good Communion, to pray a holy prayer, or to be able to listen piously and without distraction to a spiritual instruction or exposition of God's holy word. Such acts are acts of offensive warfare against him, and it is no wonder if he then rouses himself and his evil agents to check this inroad into his kingdom.

So let us not be surprised if many distractions come in these times of devotion, and if they endure long. Nor must we expect to be freed from them as long as we live, for they constitute one of Satan's favourite modes of attack. St. Francis de Sales was once asked by a Sister of the Visitation how she could be rid of distractions in prayer. With that wise humour so characteristic of the Saint, he replied, "Die and be saved."[[33](#)] He knew of nothing short of this, that could free one from Satanic interruption. "To be clean delivered from it," says Walter Hilton, "so that he shall feel no suggestion,

nor jangling of fleshly affections, or of vain thoughts at any time, that can no man come to in this life." [34]

Let us remember, however, that involuntary distraction is not sin. If as soon as we are conscious that the mind has wandered we bring it back again, our souls are clear. We may wander again the next minute, but as long as we continue by acts of the will to bring the attention back again, no sin is upon us.

The sin, at such times, lies in being disheartened, but a little reflection on the principle involved will keep us safe. Satan seeks to interrupt our prayers because he fears them; and God help the poor blinded soul who is happy and satisfied because the Evil One does not think his devotions are worth interrupting.

V. *The Sacrament of Temptation*

If temptation be so universal, and if, as is usually the case, it is a condition which is attached more particularly to the lives of those who are making the greatest effort of conformity to the divine will, we are irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that there must be some signal blessing to be gained from enduring it.

St. James tells us, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." [35] This apostolic beatitude can hardly be said to refer only to the blessedness that comes from so meeting temptation as merely to escape sin. This would make the beatitude a poor thing that might be supposed to belong as truly to the man who is never tempted at all. The Apostle is, we can be sure, speaking of a special blessing that comes from bearing a part in the spiritual warfare; and he goes on to say that the crown which constitutes the reward is not one that is promised to those who succeed in the negative work of merely avoiding sin, but to those who excel in the positive service of God, and exercise love,—"the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." So we see that the crowning blessing derived from being tempted is that it affords us the best possible opportunity of exercising that divine love which must be the motive underlying all our spiritual life and action.

So it may be said that the temptation of the present moment is the sacrament of the present moment. A sacrament is the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace; and temptation, if met with the right disposition, is a sign of a special grace with which God desires to adorn our souls, a grace which we make our own whenever we fight valiantly, and by the power of God gain the mastery over the temptation.

Satan seems never to have realized this truth, or else for the maintenance of his own kingdom he would refrain from his assaults on God's people. So has sin blinded the very Prince of Sin. He assaults the Saints of God. In a strength not their own they drive him back baffled and defeated, and the turrets of the infernal citadel topple and crash. In the age-long conflict with God, he has never learned how the divine purpose is using him and his malice, nay, giving direct permission for its exercise against Himself, in order that the eternal Kingdom may be the more surely built up among men.

[1] Job vii, 1. (Septuagint Version.)

[2] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

- [3] Ecclus. ii, 1.
 [4] St. Matt. vi, 13.
 [5] St. Matt. xxvi, 41.
 [6] St. Matt. xiii.
 [7] 1 Cor. x, 13.
 [8] Heb. ii, 18.
 [9] Heb. iv, 15.
 [10] St. James i, 2.
 [11] 1 St. Peter i, 7.
 [12] 2 St. John 8.
 [13] Rev. iii, 11.
 [14] Office of Holy Baptism.
 [15] 1 Pet. v, 4.
 [16] 2 Sam. xi, 11.
 [17] 2 Cor. ii, 7.
 [18] 2 Cor. xii, 9. "Weakness is the guardian of our strength."—Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, II, 337, quoting St. Greg. Mag.
 [19] Ps. xx, 2.
 [20] *Imitation*, III, xxxv. "It happens sometimes that men's souls are shipwrecked through evil thoughts, but also it is by the entering in of such thoughts that we become worthy of being crowned."—*Verba Seniorum*, x, 86. Quoted by Hannay in *The Wisdom of the Desert*, p. 221.
 [21] *Imitation*, I, xiii.
 [22] Andrewes, *Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 501.
 [23] Archbishop Leighton, *Commentary*, in loc.
 [24] Andrewes, *Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 501-502.
 [25] Rom. xiv, 17.
 [26] Phil. iv, 7.
 [27] *Imitation*, I, xiii.
 [28] St. Matt. x, 24.
 [29] St. James iv, 8.
 [30] Ps. lxxxv, 8.
 [31] Ps. xxix, 4.
 [32] Ps. cxlviii, 5.
 [33] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Conferences*, p. 138.
 [34] Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II, Pt. I, ch. viii.
 "A certain brother came to the Abbot Pastor, and said, 'Many evil thoughts come into my mind, and I am in danger through them.' The old man led him out into the air, and said to him, 'Stretch yourself out, and stop the wind from blowing.' The brother, wondering at his words, replied, 'I cannot do that.' Then the old man said to him, 'If you cannot stop the wind from blowing, neither can you prevent evil thoughts from entering your mind. That is beyond your power; but one thing you can do,—conquer them.'"—*Verba Seniorum*, xi, 50. Quoted by Hannay, p. 217.
 [35] St. James i, 12.

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRIT OF SOLICITUDE

Thomas à Kempis tells us that since the life of man upon earth is a temptation, "Everyone ought therefore to be anxious about his temptations and to watch in prayer." [1]

I. *True and False Anxiety*

The anxiety to which we are exhorted is not, however, that attitude of mind and heart which

would follow upon any uncertainty, or want of assurance, in regard to the result. The word à Kempis uses gives, in its original significance, no such suggestion. It is *sollicitus*, which has the force of *being wholly aroused*. That is to say, because life on earth is a temptation, we are warned that our whole being must be stirred in the face of such a condition.

There must not be a single faculty that is not keen and alert to enter, at a moment's notice, upon the conflict. Every part of our nature must be as a soldier fully armed, standing ready to spring instantly forward to the conflict at the word of command.[2]

The anxiety that engenders doubt and fear is indeed too often found among God's people. "It is never free from imperfections and always springs from some evil root of self-love,"[3] and is the result more of a lack of faith than of any true, supernatural solicitude for the safety of our souls. We can well afford to leave all these cares with God. Says the saintly writer we have been quoting, "Greater is Thy anxiety for me than all the care that I can take for myself; for he stands precariously who casts not all his anxiety upon Thee."[4]

The true Christian anxiety is closely akin to the virtue of Holy Fear, which, as we know, is one of the special gifts of the Holy Ghost. We are anxious about our temptations and the possibilities of sin, because we have a dread of offending a Father whose love has ever been poured out upon us in most precious benefactions. The soul recognizing God's goodness, and His tender, fatherly love, shrinks from the baseness and ingratitude of wounding that love. We are not afraid of God; we are afraid of offending God because we love Him. There are few virtues that are so immediately rooted in love as Holy Fear. Of course, we have no reference to that servile fear which St. John tells us is cast out by perfect love.[5] He refers to the fear of the slave who dreads to offend because he is afraid of the lash. Holy Fear is the fear that is aroused in the pure heart of a little child who shrinks from that which would wound the love of a tender father. We find the true expression of our filial anxiety in the familiar words of Faber's hymn:

"Oh, how I fear Thee, living God,
With deepest, tenderest fears,

And worship Thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears."

II. *Worry Versus Faith*

The presence of worry is proof of absence of trust in God. The two cannot abide in the same heart; and there is no more subtle device of the tempter than this of arousing in us the spirit of worry concerning our temptations. It is a temptation within a temptation, and this very complication has the effect of sadly clouding the real issue.

We have the word of the Holy Ghost that "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able."[6] The word *faithful* as used here by St. Paul signifies faithfulness in carrying out an agreement. It is implied that God has entered into a covenant with the soul that He will permit no temptation beyond our strength to assail us. The Apostle says that God is faithful and will fulfil His part in this covenant. But the soul that admits worry is, in substance, saying that it is not convinced of God's faithfulness in the matter, and considers, in spite of the promise, that there is much

to fear.

Worry is the mother of an innumerable brood of sins. Well did the Psalmist say, "Fret not thyself else shalt thou be moved to do evil."[[7](#)] He knew somewhat of the sources of sin. His own experience, as well as the inspiration of the Spirit, had taught him that the fretted soul was a fair target for a hundred darts of the enemy. "The very sound of the word anxiety is painful," says a modern writer; "next to sin there is nothing that so much troubles the mind, strains the heart, distresses the soul, and confuses the judgment."[[8](#)] Imagine an army troubled, strained, distressed, confused; what possible chance would it have of victory against a powerful and confident foe? It would be the plaything of the enemy, as indeed the human soul often is when it allows itself to be unnerved by a false anxiety.

Thus we see that the anxious soul is the doubting soul, and the soul that doubts God's goodness and loving care in the midst of the trial and conflict has already flung away its weapons and prepared the terms of its surrender to Satan. Even if our own experience did not teach us better, His word, so often repeated, should reassure us. What can be more comforting than the many passages concerning the divine care and compassion with which the Scriptures teem?

We recall the final summing up of the last great blessing which Moses gave his people from God before he went up into the mount to be seen of them no more. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."[[9](#)] Do these words leave room for anxious doubt that in every assault of the enemy He will be with us? Or those other words that have brought strong consolation to so many souls in the midst of the conflict: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"?[[10](#)]

Would that we could learn the lesson as the Psalmist learned it, that we might rest upon the divine compassion, not enervated as we too often are by human sympathy, but with our hearts thrilling with courage, fearing naught, knowing that He is faithful that hath promised,[[11](#)] and should the battle prove too strong He will save and deliver. "He shall send down from on high to fetch me; and shall take me out of many waters."[[12](#)]

III. The Cure of a Doubting Spirit

There are many practical means we can employ to allay that kind of solicitude which is both the cause and effect of a doubting spirit.

(1) Think not overmuch of the dangers of the warfare. The imagination brooding over them will be apt to paint them in lurid colours that will terrify and weaken. If the thought of the peril presses upon us, supplant it by recalling the oft repeated pledges of divine help. Think rather of the glory of a conflict in which God is our Leader, and in which victory is absolutely assured if only we do not lose heart but fight on to the end.

Recall the precious promises He has given us, and how that often in the very language of these promises we gain a glimpse of conditions of the war that ought mightily to encourage us. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you,"[[13](#)] says the Spirit, comforting us concerning the peril of the conflict. Glance for a moment at the particular words the Holy Ghost here chooses. "Resist the devil"; or, to go back to the etymology of the word, Stand against him; yield not one step to him however he may fling the full weight of his power against you. But what will be the result? Not only that your soul will be safe from stain or guilt, but that you will carry consternation into the ranks of hell. "He will flee from you," and the word used by the inspired writer means not merely that he will withdraw and

leave you, but that he will make a precipitate flight, as one in a panic flees from impending danger.[14]

Let us remember when suggestion of fear comes that this is in itself a special temptation from Satan, and nowhere in his temptations is he guilty of more deliberate lying. As a matter of fact there is no danger, even in the fiercest of his assaults, to the soul that cherishes the presence of Christ within. For if He be in my heart, then the conflict is between Him and the tempter, and so long as my heart is His, and I do not, by wilful sin, drive Him forth, it is as impossible for Satan to conquer as it was for him to have triumphed over our Lord in the great conflict in the wilderness.

In short, at such times all our Lord asks is that we maintain our hearts for Him that He may use them as battle-fields upon which to join issue once more with the adversary that He may administer to him another crushing defeat. True, He uses our faculties with which to fight, but the battle is His, and if we stand not in the way His will be the victory. There can be no real danger to the faithful soul when the struggle is conducted under these conditions.

(2) Speak not of your anxieties to everyone. We may rightly take counsel with some wise spiritual guide who may be able to interpret them for us; but experience shows us that many times much speaking of these matters gives body and reality to troubles which have no adequate ground, and which might easily have been driven away, had we only sought to divert the mind from them, and so to forget them, instead of impressing them still more on the consciousness by dwelling upon them in thought and conversation.

Above all things let not our conversation concerning our anxieties take the form of complaint, for in every case the complaint is against God. He is directing the detail of the warfare, and each complaint is an open questioning of His justice and wisdom and love. When Satan sees that our spirits are thus inclined, how quick he is to take advantage of it. How thick and fast do suggestions come that lead us swiftly on to that state of self-pity at the supposed hardness of our lot, that means a speedy extinction of divine grace within. Remember that complaint means disloyalty, and disloyalty is a long step toward open rebellion.

Even if our querulous spirit does not lead directly to such serious sin, it involves us in great peril. We have already seen that Satan has no means of knowing the effect of his assaults except by the outward indications we give. When we openly complain of the force of his attacks, are we not advertising him of our weak points? The garrison that is maintaining a siege not only seeks to keep its fortifications intact, but, should weakness transpire at any point, is most careful not to give the enemy knowledge of it. Keep a brave front always. This not only encourages our own heart, but discourages the adversary.

(3) We must also draw upon our past experience to convince ourselves that most of our anxieties have no real basis in fact. How many hours and days of troubled care can we recall which were proved by the issue of the event to have had reality only in our anxious imagination.

"My sons," said an old man on his deathbed, in giving his last counsel to his children, "I have had much trouble in this life, but most of it never happened." This is the universal experience, and it holds good with the solicitude that we feel over our temptations and other spiritual trials as in the less important matters of our temporal life.

(4) It will be a help to remind ourselves very frequently that in indulging a false anxiety concerning our spiritual difficulties, we are seeking to-day to bear the morrow's burden, something God means no soul to undertake. There are surely temptations enough to-day to require all of to-day's grace and strength; and, conversely, we know that no grace will be wanting for the trials of the present hour.

The promise is given to us as to God's people of old, "As thy days so shall thy strength be";[15] that is, according to the need of each particular occasion so will strength be given. There is no promise that strength will be given to-day to bear the anticipated, and often imaginary, ills of the future; and when we allow ourselves thus to anticipate them, we are courting sure defeat.

Satan delights to lead us into this false anxiety, for he knows we have at the present moment no grace to grapple with temptations and trials which do not belong to this time; and further, he knows that a faithful confidence in God now is the *sine qua non* to securing and storing up strength against the future trial. If he can disturb that confidence to-day, when the real temptation comes to-morrow we shall not have laid hold of the grace that was offered, and so cannot but fail, unless some extraordinary mercy of God saves us then in spite of our faithlessness.

Nor should we ever permit ourselves to forget that there may be no to-morrow. "Remember that it is God's, not thine." [16] How sad a case would it be (and doubtless there have been many such), if we should weaken our souls and God's power within them, by fretting over what might happen to-morrow; then, the call suddenly coming, find ourselves saved indeed perhaps, but occupying a lower place in heaven forever, because in troubling our hearts over the burdens of a to-morrow that never came we lost the grace of to-day. Every grace given us here is transmuted into glory there. Let us not lose one of them, for the graces proffered and accepted here are pledges of the measure of the heavenly glory that will be ours.[17]

IV. *God's Sympathy*

But, do what we will, after all, the best and only unfailing refuge from the snare of a false solicitude is to turn in these anxious moments to Him with Whom alone true sympathy is found. With profit may we hearken to the warning of the blessed à Kempis: "By mutual speech we seek mutual comfort, and desire to ease the heart overwearied with manifold anxieties..... But, alas, often in vain and to no end; for this outward comfort is no small loss of inward and divine consolation." [18]

In our solicitude we desire, and rightly desire, human sympathy, and God means us to have it. It was for this very thing that He sent His Son to take our nature and a human heart, full of warm love and sympathy, that we might find in perfection that for which we yearn,—the tender sympathy of our own kind. What sweet and strong consideration for our weakness is shown in this. Mere human sympathy only enervates, and in the end the soul is left weaker than before. Every man's experience has told him this, and yet deep in the human heart there is that uncontrollable longing for the loving touch of another heart, human like our own. God sees this, and condescends to it. He takes humanity, full and complete, up into the Godhead, that in Him we may find that human Heart that will give us perfectly the comfort and sympathy for which we yearn.

So in our solicitude let us turn to Him, our Elder Brother, and the disciple who lay on His breast at Supper will have no more loving a welcome, no sweeter a sympathy, than that which He will give to us who are wearied with the burden of life's warfare, and perplexed with the problems of the battle.

[1] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[2] "When the mind ceases to entertain religious anxiety, it becomes at the same time forgetful of the commandments, and while it thinks itself advancing, it wanders from the smooth road, and idles on its way."—St. Macarius, *Institutes of Christian Perfection*,

- Bk. I, chap. v.
 [3] Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, chap. xxv.
 [4] *Imitation*, IV, xvii.
 [5] 1 St. John iv, 18.
 [6] 1 Cor. x, 13.
 [7] Ps. xxxvii, 8. The R. V. reads, "Fret not thyself; it tendeth only to evil-doing."
 [8] Archbp. Ullathorne, *Christian Patience*, p. 128.
 [9] Deut. xxxiii, 27.
 [10] Heb. xiii, 5.
 [11] Heb. xi, 11.
 [12] Ps. xviii, 16.
 [13] St. James iv, 7.
 [14] [Greek: *pheúgō*], from which our English word *fugitive* is derived.
 [15] Deut. xxxiii, 25.
 [16] Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 158.
 [17] See a remarkable discourse in Dr. Pusey's *Lenten Sermons* on "The Losses of the Saved."
 [18] *Imitation*, I, x.

CHAPTER VI

OUR PREPARATION FOR TEMPTATION

I. *A Double Weapon*

If we have the right spirit of solicitude about our temptations, it will arm us with a double weapon against Satan which he will have no power to break. We are told that we are to watch in prayer,—*vigilare in orationibus*. [1] It is the command given by our Lord to his disciples in the Garden in the hour of the power of darkness: "Watch ye and pray lest ye enter into temptation." [2]

St. Paul, also, in his exhortation to the Ephesian Christians to "put on the whole armour of God," [3] does not regard it as enough to give the great list of virtues with which they are to be panoplied. The loins must indeed be girt with truth; the breastplate of righteousness must be buckled on and the sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace; while above all else there must be the shield of faith; and the great catalogue of the Christian soldier's equipment ends with the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.

But this armour is not sufficient for the warfare. Complete as it seems, something else is necessary to insure the victory; and so the great Christian warrior, who himself had "fought a good fight," [4] adds something more, namely, watchfulness and prayer,—"*Praying* always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and *watching* thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

How strong are his words, poured forth with such impetuosity of expression as to seem to a superficial reader to be almost tautological,—"*praying* with all prayer and supplication." How careful, too, is he to remind us that this prayer and supplication must be "in the Spirit," in response to the Spirit's impulse, and with the right judgment that He alone can give, and which He will give only to those who ask Him "nothing wavering." [5]

Nor will prayer alone suffice. There must be a "*watching* thereunto with all perseverance"; not

relaxing our vigilance, but maintaining it to the end. Neither is the soul to grow faint in its watch, nor imagine, in regard to any point, that careful guard is no longer necessary.

The word "thereunto" calls for comment. Does the vigilance enjoined apply only to the work of prayer which has just been mentioned, or does it reach back to the whole category of duties included in putting on the armour of God? At first glance it might seem inadequate to make it refer only to the all-embracing duty of prayer, but if we comprehend fully all that prayer means, we shall see that it is not necessary that we should directly connect the injunction to vigilance with anything else.[6] If we are keenly vigilant to pray as we ought in the power of the Spirit concerning truth and righteousness, faith and salvation, and all else that the Apostle has been describing, nothing will be wanting to us as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. How truly did à Kempis catch the thought which the Holy Spirit had given the great Apostle when he paraphrased our Lord's command in the words, "Be watchful in prayer."

Let us consider, then, this twofold weapon with which God will arm us, for we note that they are not two separate weapons. Our Lord said, "Watch ye and pray," and the blessed à Kempis gives us, as we have just seen, the true commentary on the command in the paraphrase, "Watch in prayer."

Vigilance without prayer would be to learn of the danger, and yet fail to guard against it. To pray without vigilance would be to expect God to work some miracle for us, to protect us when we ourselves had done nothing to employ the means He places in our hands for forestalling and defeating Satan. In short, it would be a sin of presumption. So one cannot avail without the other.

With this understanding clear in our minds, let us proceed to examine the relation of vigilance and prayer to temptation.

II. *The Spirit of Vigilance*

"*Watch.*" This implies much more than a mere guarding ourselves in a general way. It means that a systematic and regular guard is to be kept over our *whole life*, over *all* our senses and faculties, over *all* circumstances and conditions so far as we can by any means direct them.

Here again we may find our illustration in the world about us. Approach the camp of a well disciplined army. How quickly you are challenged. Seek to enter it on any side, and a sentinel, alert and suspicious, keeps you at a distance. The foe may be hovering in the darkness of the neighbouring forest, or he may be a hundred miles away, but this makes no difference in the vigilance of the guard. They take no chances. The enemy is abroad, and no man sleeps on his post. Nor is it the known weak points only, or only the side from which the attack is expected, that receives attention. Everywhere strict watchfulness is maintained, while the threatened points are doubly sentinelled.

We have in this the picture of what the watch about the beleaguered soul should be. The soul that means to give a good and generous service to God must guard itself at every point. How frequently, when attention is called to some sin, do we think, "Oh, that is not my weakness," or, "That would constitute no temptation to me whatever." Vain, boasting spirit!—trusting to escape from evil by merely natural means! How Satan gloats as he marks one point that is being left unguarded, and waits, alert and observant, for a favourable opportunity for attack. Through long time, months and years it may be, he maintains a steady, subtle work of suggestion, leading the mind little by little, unconsciously because no guard is kept, into an attitude where the temptation we boastingly defied will prove a terrible foe before whose sudden onslaught we shall go down in grievous and

ignominious fall.

If in truth God has spared us the fall into some sin that happens in the lives of those about us, our safety will lie not in self-congratulation, but in humble thanksgiving that only through the mercy of God have we been spared this stain. "But for the mercy of God, there goes John Bradford," exclaimed a rugged old Christian as a condemned murderer passed by on his way to death.

Again, our vigilance must be especially directed against the temptations to which we have already yielded. When a sin has once found entrance, it is easy for it to enter again, not only because experience of the sin itself makes it attractive, but because psychologically it is easy to do the thing we have done before. In my self-examination to-night I find that a certain sin has been committed. Let me mark it over against the morrow that the temptation, if it recur, may be stamped out quickly, lest the fault entering often become habitual, and a binding chain of besetting sin be forged about my soul.

Similarly must we guard the particular faculty that we find has led us into sin. Is it pride of intellect, the desire to show what little we know, the instinctive tendency to monopolize conversation, or to instruct and correct others? Or is it a weakness that has its seat in our affections, a tendency to condone sin in those we love, or a critical spirit against those for whom we have no natural affinity? Or perhaps it is a sin of speech; the unkind word we so easily speak, the idle boast of our own achievements; or the sin of idle conversation, the "objectless" talk that occupies so much of our conversation with others, and which our Lord so terribly condemned.[[7](#)]

Although no sin may have been committed, yet an oft-recurring temptation is always to be diligently watched. It indicates that Satan, who generally knows us better than we know ourselves, has reason to believe that here is a weak point in our armour; or that he thinks that God might, for some reason, be particularly dishonoured by our commission of the sin suggested at some special time or place.

Vigilance, too, must be kept regarding occasions of sin. For this reason we should practise not only daily examination of conscience that we may learn wherein we have failed, but we should begin each day with an anticipation of possible happenings. Where do I expect to go? Whom shall I see? What duties are to be performed which may occasion temptation? Perhaps I know that, if the expected routine of the day be not disturbed, I shall go to a certain place and shall meet certain people. The last time I was in that place something occurred which caused me to sin. Is the occasion of that sin still there? If so, I must note it, and be most guarded concerning it. Perhaps I shall meet a certain person who irritates and annoys me. This, too, I must note, and forestall by some prompt word or act of charity, before the temptation has time to present itself.

III. Prayer and Temptation

All this vigilance will, however, avail nothing unless it be combined with prayer. The good soldier in the field does not depend upon himself, but is constantly referring to headquarters for instructions, and this reference on the part of the soldier in the armies of the Kingdom is what we call prayer.

We must, however, get beyond the narrow and inadequate notion that prayer is confined to formal acts of praise, thanksgiving, confession, and petition. These are real and essential parts of prayer, and we have need of them as we shall see; but they are not all.

Every act of directing the human will towards the will of God is prayer in its truest and most

comprehensive sense. Every longing of the heart for God, every effort to identify ourselves with Him, our wills with His will, though there be neither word, nor even thought, definitely framed, is prayer. Our spoken prayers may have prayed themselves away; the mind and body may be so wearied that formal acts of prayer are a burden to the flesh, and well-nigh impossible. But these are not necessary if we are keeping our hearts turned towards Him, and are striving, even though at times we may not appear to succeed, to maintain, around and within, that atmosphere of loving devotion which is the Christian's way of keeping open the lines of communication with his base of supplies.

Our first duty in prayer, as a preparation over against temptation, is to address ourselves directly to the case in hand, and, pleading our own nothingness, to ask God to go with us through the day to defend and succour us. Pray about the particular occasion of sin that may seem imminent; pray with especial earnestness as we approach it more nearly. But the prayer must not be for ourselves alone. If there are others involved we must pray for them, that they too may be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

If the occasion we are approaching is one that is dangerous because we have before yielded to Satan, no prayer can be of greater effect than an act of contrition for the past sins, the commission of which is now involving us in renewed peril. Every act of contrition purifies the soul more and more, and adds to the strength with which we are to meet the confident enemy on the scene of his former victory, but this time to put him to flight. "*Amplius lava me*,"—Wash me more and more,—was the cry of the Psalmist in his great prayer of penitence.[[8](#)]

Here we cannot fail to consider the particular strength which comes from the greatest prayer of contrition,—sacramental confession and the absolution which follows. If the anticipated occasion be one of possible mortal sin, and if the sin of the past has been grievous, the best preparation will be the seeking of absolution in the tribunal of penance. Every sacrament brings its own particular grace, and the special grace of absolution is a power infused into us which will apply to the especial need of our souls. Satan has at some time been able to effect an entrance at some point; again he draws near to assault the absolved soul, confident that he will find the same avenue open. To his chagrin, however, he finds it not only closed, but fortified with a special gift of strength from God; and, fearing the shame of a defeat, he will often withdraw without attacking.

This is a common experience with those who habitually frequent the tribunal of penance. How many times have we had many and grievous falls into some particular sin; we make a good confession and go away not only cleansed, but strengthened by the grace of absolution; and after some days or weeks we begin to realize with a sense of joyful surprise that the temptation which a little while ago was constantly appearing seems to be entirely withdrawn. The occasion may arise, but the soul feels no drawing to that in which it had before sinned. It is the operation of the special grace of absolution, a grace which cannot be had other than through the Sacrament of Penance, whatever other great graces God may give us in reward for true contrition of spirit.

It is important that the work of prayer in preparation for temptation should cover every point. As we have already thought in connection with watchfulness, nothing must be done in the natural spirit; no temptation can be overcome by means of dependence on anything else but the gifts of divine grace. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."[[9](#)]

It is a part of the Faith that we can do nothing pleasing to God in the natural spirit. Nothing can be acceptable with Him, nothing can draw from Him the graces we need, save what is done through the power and influence of the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity.

The Apostle says that no man can do so simple a thing as to "say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost."[[10](#)] So it is the Holy Ghost Who is to be our guide and protector. Do we pray to the Holy Ghost? We pray often to the Father; frequently, perhaps, to God the Son, but how much is prayer

to God the Holy Ghost neglected amongst Christians! And yet He alone is the agent of the Godhead in the Church. His is the work of sanctification, as the Father's is the work of creation, and the Son's that of redemption. No grace comes to us save through the Spirit. Everything that comes into our lives from God, whether by means of prayer or sacrament, faith or good works, comes through the personal action of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore in preparing for temptation let us look to Him and pray to Him in all things; and thus "strengthened by His Spirit in the inner man,"[[11](#)] we can go forth to the day's conflict, knowing that the assaults of Satan and the occasions of sin can only bring us new opportunities of victory that will merit us the crown of life which is promised to them that overcome.

In the midst of this prayer in preparation for temptation we must expect to find ourselves the objects of Satan's peculiar malice. All prayer is a challenge to him, but none so much as the prayer by which we are gaining new force and resource to employ against him.[[12](#)]

In this, as in all else, we see how carefully Satan conducts his warfare. If it were possible to do so, what leader would fail to attack his enemy when he was in the very act of laying in new supplies of food and ammunition upon which to subsist, and with which to fight?

Lastly, in the very moment of temptation our prayers must be strong and unceasing. The more the temptation increases, the more fervently—yea, desperately—must we pray, crying out as a drowning man might call to the only one from whom he could expect help.

But, says one, there's the rub. How can I pray when a thousand distractions are thrust in so powerfully from every side? We are to find the answer to such questions in our Lord's hour of deepest temptation in Gethsemane where we are told that "being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly"[[13](#)]—literally, more intensely.

Let the intensity of our prayer keep pace with the intensity of assault. We can more than defeat Satan if at such times we compel ourselves to pray with greater care and exactness, framing with extraordinary care the very words we are speaking to God, and if our perturbation be such that we can find no words to utter, let us not grow faint, but remember that this was precisely the case with our Lord in His Agony, when He prayed over and over again, "saying the same words."[[14](#)]

By his constant effort to interfere with our prayers, especially in seasons of trial and temptation, Satan gives his testimony to the efficiency which we shall acquire if we are earnest in our work of preparation for the battle. He fears it with a fear born of long experience. "Grievous indeed to us," says St. Bernard, "is the temptation of the enemy, but far more grievous to him is our prayer."[[15](#)] He has through all the ages contended against the grace and strength of God as he found it in its manifold forms in the Saints. He sees the history of the spiritual warfare repeating itself in us, and surely it should be a source of rejoicing to us that he should count us as foes to be feared, as he feared in other days, or in our own time, the great Saints and warriors of the Kingdom of God.

[1] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[2] St. Mark xiv, 38.

[3] Eph. vi, 11-18.

[4] 2 Tim. iv, 7.

[5] St. James i, 6.

[6] See *The Speaker's Commentary*, in loc.

[7] St. Matt. xii, 36.

[8] Ps. li, 2.

[9] Zech. iv, 6.

[10] Cor. xii, 3.

[11] Eph. iii, 16.

[12] "St. Thomas and many other grave doctors say that it is by reason of the war that the devil is accustomed to make against those that are in prayer, that the Church, directed by the Holy Ghost, ordains that we should begin all the canonical Hours with this verse, 'O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me.' Whereby we implore God's assistance in prayer against the snares and temptations of the enemy."—Quoted by Rodriguez, *Christian Perfection*.

[13] St. Luke xxii, 44.

[14] St. Matt. xxvi, 44.

[15] St. Bernard, *Serm. in Dedicat. Eccles.*, III.

CHAPTER VII

TRAINING THE INNER LIFE

I. Environment and Character

A psychological principle we should never lose sight of is that the attitude of mind and heart towards all moral questions is just what we choose to make it. Surround a man with debasing associations, and let him yield to the resulting influences, and he becomes debased. On the other hand, the influence of a pure and noble environment makes for purity and nobility of character. Every man in his inner character, and in that outward expression of character that we call life, is the product of the influences to which he yields himself.

One of our chief dangers, however, is that many influences flow out from our daily environment of which we are quite unconscious. We are not always in a position to realize our surroundings and their effect, and even when we can realize them, it is often beyond our power to control them. But before an external influence can work any hurt to us, there must be something within that answers to it. A child may pass unscathed through an environment of vice, because there is nothing in the child-heart that responds to the call of sin.

Our Lord had this in mind, perhaps, when He laid it down as a condition necessary to entrance into the Kingdom of God that we should become as little children,[1] and He was able to make this condition quite absolute, because while no man can control his external environment and the consequent influences, he can, by the deliberate use of his will, acting in the power of the Holy Ghost, create, in very large measure, whatever interior condition he wishes. By his daily course he can develop a moral and spiritual interior that will habitually respond with alacrity to the evil and be deaf to the good; or, on the other hand, one that will not only rise up quickly to entertain every good influence and suggestion, but will in a large measure (though never wholly in this life) be even unconscious like little children of the presence of evil influences.[2]

So let us learn how to create an interior environment in which the Holy Ghost will be the dominant force. Otherwise Satan will surely surround us with so much of sin, that becoming accustomed to it, and to the thought of it, we shall be unable to resist the effort he will make to use our faculties as instruments for his work.

Nor must we wait until conscious of his approach before seeking to create the proper interior environment. In most cases it will then be too late. It is not easy to surround ourselves with an atmosphere of good and pious thought in the moment of assault. We must be beforehand with him. In

times of peace we must prepare for war.

We may be quite sure that it is with the intention of affording us the opportunity to do this that God often gives us rest from the attacks of the enemy. He does not mean us to lie idle at such times, but to seize the opportunity to train for future battles, just as soldiers in barracks engage in daily drill that they may be more efficient fighters when again called to take the field. "After thou hast escaped these temptations, or else if our Lord hath so kept thee (as He doth many by His mercy), that thou hast not been troubled much by any such, then it is good for thee that thou beware of turning thy rest into idleness."[3]

Let us consider how Satan uses certain of our faculties as instruments of sin, and see how by a definite system of spiritual exercises we can so forestall him that he will find nothing in us ready for his use.

II. Educating the Memory

How much sin, for example, is due to the action of memory! It is indeed strange that this wonderful faculty, which more than any other operates to give unity, consistency, and proportion to our life, should be so often used to call up past sins that we may sin them over again in will if not in deed. We linger with pleasure, by the exercise of this faculty, over past sins, making them our own again, staining our souls once more with that which we thought had been buried forever in the far-off years.

We bring to renewed life old revenges, ancient hates, and revel again amid scenes of impurity which can never be re-enacted in real life. Such acts, frequently indulged, grow into a habit, and the habit becomes necessity when the memory not only easily and naturally reverts to those events and conditions of the past that were bound up with sin, but becomes so trained that it must recall the evil, and can only with great stress, difficulty, and distaste be made to recall that which is good.

If, on the other hand, by persistent acts of will we force the memory to recall the righteous passages from our past, far-off happenings sweet and holy, we, little by little, train it to retain these righteous things, while all other impressions grow more and more dim as the years go by.

Those who have practised such methods find that after a time the memory, even when left alone, will engage itself with that which is good, just because it has become accustomed to it, and will reject the evil (in many cases, of itself, without the direct interposition of the will), because long exercise has so trained it that in its ordinary operation evil memories are repugnant to it.

Therefore keep the memory definitely busy. Too often when we think it is browsing, as it were, carelessly among the fields of the past, it is, as a matter of fact, being subtly directed by Satan, until, ere we know it, it has fallen upon some evil thing whose touch is poison.

III. Guiding the Imagination

So likewise with the imagination. Perhaps no human faculty is responsible for so much sin, and there is a peculiar heinousness in sins of the imagination. In His mercy God has limited our sphere of sin. There are certain evils impossible for us because He has withheld us from the condition necessary for their commission.

Instead, therefore, of being grateful for such a blessed limitation, we use the imagination to conjure up impossible situations. We create new worlds for ourselves, new theatres for our exploits of pride and wickedness, and in them, through will and imagination, we enact the sin that it would be impossible to commit in our actual external lives.

This strong activity of the imagination can and must be directed. If this mysterious faculty be so prone to produce its own creations, if we indeed will dream of things that do not belong to the present moment, let them be holy things.

Yes, let the imagination run as fast as it will, check it in nothing save in the subjects of its activity. Let it transport us to heavenly places. Let it picture to our astonished vision the things that will be hereafter, the company of heaven, the companionship of the Saints, the glory of the Lamb.

Or, if these ranges be too lofty, let the fancy create new earthly theatres for our activity. Let us picture ourselves following Jesus as He "went about doing good";[4] let us see Him healing the lepers, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, blessing the little children; let us bring vividly before us the great example of His life; and let the picture so burn itself, through the power of the imagination, into the very fabric of the brain, that we cannot choose but make it the model for our own lives.

So, after a time, the imagination will become so trained that it will ever be creating holy things, and presenting them for our consideration, and will become incapable, in the end, of producing any picture that could not find ready reflection in the stainless mirror of the human mind of our Blessed Lord.

When we consider the method of thus training the inner man, we find that our course must be shaped by means of certain practices, which should be strenuously pursued if real progress is to be made. These practices will be, as à Kempis says particularly of one of them, as a rudder guiding the ship, keeping it on its proper course. Those we shall consider especially are: (1) Constancy of mind and will; (2) Patience; (3) Calmness; (4) Diligence.

IV. The Practice of Constancy

Thomas à Kempis says, "The beginning of all evil temptations is inconstancy of mind, and small confidence in God, for as a ship without a rudder is tossed to and fro by the waves, so the man who is slack and quits his purpose is many ways tempted."[5]

God, knowing human weakness and incapacity, requires but little of man, but He does emphatically require that this little be resolutely purposed, and definitely executed. The soldier who threshes wildly about the field, however fiercely and courageously, is not the one to contribute to the victory. He who sets a definite purpose before him; who knows just what he wants to do, and allows nothing to shake his purpose, is the one on whom the commander can depend to accomplish something in the battle.

So in our spiritual warfare the most important factor is definiteness of purpose, and constancy in executing it. The Christian warfare must be conducted by rule. When I arise each morning to the work of another day, I must know, as far as possible, what that work is; I must know the particular method by which it is to be performed; I must have submitted it all to God so that, feeling assured of "a right judgment in all things," I shall be able to go forward to my duty without doubt or hesitation. The army that knows not when to fight, whose officers are in confusion and uncertainty regarding the next move,

falls an easy prey to the enemy. But let the same army be provided with a definite plan of campaign; let every officer and man, each in his place, know just what he is to do under every condition that may arise; and the enemy will have no easy task to defeat it.

This all points to the necessity of the Christian having a Rule of Life, and holding fast to it; allowing himself to be drawn off to nothing else until that be fulfilled. Satan has a subtle way at times of seeking to disturb our spirit of constancy by suggesting something that, in itself, is better and higher than that we have resolved upon. But let us not be deceived by this clever move on his part. If we have undertaken a definite thing for God, that is the highest and best for us until it be accomplished; and the thought that any thing can be more pleasing to Him is but a wile of the devil; and to entertain the suggestion is to be guilty of pride. Better a small and humble service well performed, than great things poorly done. "Our advancement and perfection consist not in the performance of very extraordinary things, or in the being employed in the highest and most labourious offices of religion, but only in doing our ordinary actions well, and in acquitting ourselves well of whatsoever obedience employs us in, be it ever so mean or easy." [6] So Christian perfection, against which all temptation is directed, consists in doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

The conclusion of the matter is that we cannot be safe unless our whole life is lived by definite, practical rule; a rule for rising in the morning, for prayers, for our Bible reading, our Communion, our Confessions, for the commonest details of our daily routine, leaving nothing to be decided by chance or whim. A life thus ordered and carried out with constancy of purpose and will, for the glory of God, is a standing menace to Satan's power. He fears it, because he knows that it possesses a power against which his long experience and consummate skill are as nothing.

V. The Practice of Calmness

A life lived as has been described above is one that will be dominated by a spirit of calmness, a calmness born of strength. The strong man is always the calm man. An agitated spirit is the evidence of a conscious weakness. The soldier who has faith in his commander, who knows he can rely on the weapons furnished him, and who is certain that his strength is greater than that of his enemy, is not excited in the face of attack. He receives it with serenity because he feels assured of what the result will be. It is uncertainty that brings agitation; it is the uncertainties of life that produce the worry that kills—and worry means want of faith. But the Christian soldier is beset by no uncertainties. If, in unswerving trust, he keeps his will firm for God, knit up with the perfect human will of our Lord, he knows there are no contingencies in the warfare he is waging. There can be but one issue,—that of complete and glorious victory.

If this assurance concerning the issue produces calmness, the spirit of calm will in its turn react upon us for the greater certainty of the victory. [7] The heart that is calm is the one that is capable of seeing all things in their true nature and relation. Such a heart is not easily deceived by the tempter, nor can it be frightened by the clamour of his onslaught. With steady hand it parries his deadliest thrusts, and assuming the offensive is able in its turn to inflict mortal wounds upon the power of Satan wherever it may be manifested.

VI. The Practice of Patience

Patience is also a necessary virtue that has constantly and assiduously to be cultivated if we would be ready always for the battle.

(1) We are to be patient with God, biding His time, tarrying His leisure,[[8](#)] awaiting whatever He may send in the conflict, assuring one's heart always that He rules and overrules, and that all things work together for good to those who love Him.[[9](#)]

(2) We know the necessity of patience with our fellow-men. Our daily experience show us how large a proportion of temptation arises from failure to bear with those among whom we live, not infrequently those who hold the first place in our hearts. A wholesome remedy for impatience with those about us is to remember ourselves. "Endeavour to be patient in bearing with the defects and infirmities of others of what sort soever they be: for thou also hast many which must be borne with by others. If thou canst not make thyself what thou wouldest, how canst thou expect to have another to thy liking? We are glad to see others perfect; and yet we mend not our own faults. We will have others severely corrected: and will not be corrected ourselves. The large liberty of others displeases us: and yet we will not have our own desires denied us. We will have others restrained by laws: but will not in any way be checked ourselves. And thus it appears: how seldom we weigh our neighbour in the same balance with ourselves."[[10](#)]

(3) All these things we have just been considering are doubtless familiar to us, but perhaps the thought of patience with ourselves is not so common a one, although there is no more important a factor in all the Christian warfare.

Patience must be exercised towards oneself as towards a weak and wayward child. We are not to expect too much of ourselves. To turn upon oneself angrily or bitterly because we cannot immediately drive away some persistent temptation, or because we have yielded,[[11](#)] is an act of spiritual pride. It shows that we thought ourselves quite able to cope with the tempter; prided ourselves indeed upon our spiritual powers; and are now in a state of surprise and indignation that we should have failed; when all the while, had we known ourselves, we should have seen that the real wonder is that we are ever able at all to resist him successfully.

Nor must we be surprised if there seem to rise up out of our own hearts foul and humiliating temptations. We are not to forget that we are made from the dust of the earth that can, of itself, bring forth naught but thorns and thistles. The material of temptation is everywhere, within and without, the soul "having the worst temptation within itself in its own temptibility."[[12](#)]

Nor will he who understands himself and his own weakness grow impatient with the long continuance of the battle. He will recognize that if he had his just deserts he would long since have been cast out from God rather than permitted to wear the King's uniform, and fight battles for the honour of His Name. He who knows himself will go softly all the days of his life, knowing that only by so great a salvation as that wrought on Calvary has he been preserved from the power of the enemy. So "by little and little, and by patience with long suffering through God's help thou shalt better overcome, than by hardness and thine own pertinacity."[[13](#)]

VII. The Practice of Diligence

There remains to be considered the spirit of diligence that must characterize the soldier of Christ. Keep yourself always busy with the things of God. Keep the whole mental faculty engaged; keep it under the command of the Holy Ghost, for just as in all else that belongs to man, if God does not

direct it, Satan will. There is a deep spiritual truth in the old proverb, "An idle brain is the devil's workshop."

Not only will this course superinduce such habits of thought and character as will strengthen us mightily, but, the human mind being what it is, will render it often impossible for Satan to find lodgment in it for his temptation.

The mind can only be engaged with a limited number of things at any one time. This varies with various persons, according to their mental training and development, but even the most highly developed mind can compass but few things at the same moment. Our common mental processes consist of one thought, or group of thoughts, thrusting out others, and taking their place until in their turn they are displaced. Since this is the case, one's safety from evil thoughts lies in diligently keeping the mind filled with good and holy thoughts. Keep the will at work calling up a continuous procession of suggestions and pictures of things righteous and God-like, and when Satan approaches to insinuate into the heart his temptations, he will find it so full that there will be no room in it for him or his works.

This must be done in an organized and methodical way. Let us not trust to chance opportunity. At every moment the will is, consciously or subconsciously, making a choice either for good or evil. Our part is to seize upon these moments and force that inevitable choosing to be not only righteous, but definitely and explicitly a choice of righteousness.

Practise over and over again the work of choosing God. Arraign before the mind things good and evil, the higher and the lower, that the will may be drilled in the repeated preference of what belongs to Him.

This will be a much simpler method than may seem at first. How many moments are there in each day when we are, of necessity, unoccupied. We have to wait five minutes for an appointment; we spend a quarter of an hour on a crowded car; we have a little distance to walk to reach some destination; or occasionally there is a wakeful hour at night. What are we doing all this time? We can be sure the will is operating. It stands sentinel to admit or repulse every thought that comes; and what is the nature of the thoughts admitted? Idle thoughts, critical thoughts of those about us, silly vain thoughts of self,—how covered with confusion and shame we should be if some by-stander were able to look within and see the busy, thronging procession that streams through our mind unchallenged, nay more, welcomed and indulged. Yet this is the very opportunity God gives us to busy ourselves for Him: and instead of using it, we let it run to sinful waste, marring our whole character, for as a man thinks, so he is.

How much better would it have been had we said, when we realized the unoccupied minute: "I will use this little time to make an act of love, of hope, of faith. I will speak to Him familiarly in some ejaculation of prayer. I will, for His praise, repeat some psalm I may know by heart. I will pray for some of these people, strangers though they be to me."[[14](#)] Then immediately perform this resolution in a most definite way, framing with care even the very words with the lips, that the body as well as the mind may have its part in the work.

Try this for a month, earnestly and persistently, and at the end of that time see if the whole inner being does not spontaneously turn to such holy exercises. So far as the human aspect of it is concerned, it is a mere matter of psychology. The mind acts thus, because it has been trained to it. The repeated act has formed the habit, and the habit in its turn repeats the act; but through and in it all is divine grace, the very life of God, operating in the infinite activity of His love.

Especially must we exercise this diligence when we perceive the tempter's approach. When we become conscious of the slightest suggestion that seems to point to sin, let the will rally all our

faculties to expel it, and to fill the mind so full that it can have no chance of returning. But here as everywhere else must we be on our guard against Satan's subtilty and power. Often in response to such an attitude on our part, he presents some attractive thought, pure and good, perhaps; then another and another, leading the soul that is not watchful by a long train of associated ideas up to the goal he has prepared, to some one thought that is either itself sin if consented to, or the ready vehicle of sin.

Accustom the mind with unwearied diligence to such thoughts as we can readily, conceive finding place in the mind of Christ, rejecting all others. "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." [15]

Let the mind be thus employed, and Satan may indeed be able to lead us along some line of thought up to the place of temptation, but it will be only to find, as with our Lord, when he bore Him up to the pinnacle of the temple, that this place of his own choosing will prove the scene of his own utter defeat.

[1] St. Matt. xviii, 3.

[2] "A temptation can never be divorced from a course of life. It is woven into the very texture of life's continuity. It is a temptation because of what we are *at the time*. It is the conditions of the crisis which make a moment, a decision, critical.... It is thus the whole setting of a life which brings temptation. So temptation is never clean detached from the past, or the future, of the tempted; for there is no such thing as a human experience which has not its roots in the past, and its fruit in the sequel."—H. J. C. Knight, *The Temptation of our Lord*, p. 55.

[3] Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. I, Pt. II, chap. i.

[4] Acts x, 38.

[5] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[6] Rodriguez, *The Practice of Religious and Christian Perfection*, Vol. I, p. 86. Pere Grou teaches "that nothing is small or great in God's sight; whatever He wills becomes great to us, however seemingly trifling, and if once the voice of conscience tells us that He requires anything of us, we have no right to measure its importance.... There is no standard of things great and small to a Christian, save God's will."—*The Hidden Life of the Soul*, p. 206. ("Half-a-Crown" Ed.)

[7] "Be still, then, and know that I am God."—Ps. xlv, 10. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."—Isa. xxx, 15.

[8] Ps. xxvii, 16.

[9] Rom. viii, 28.

[10] *Imitation*, I, xvi.

[11] "You are vexed at the vexation, and then you are vexed at having been vexed. I have seen people in the same way get into a passion, and then be angry because they had lost their temper!"—St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, xxvii.

[12] S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, p. 186. (Bohn Ed.)

Bishop Andrewes in his second sermon on the Temptation of Christ, speaking of it being impossible for Him to have sinned since there was no fire of concupiscence in Him, quaintly says: "To us the devil needs bring but a pair of bellows, for he shall find fire within us."—Andrewes, *Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 508.

[13] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[14] A busy Wall Street financier not long since told the writer that for several years, whenever stepping from an omnibus or car, in the thronged street or crowded railway station, he had made a practice of offering an ejaculation of prayer for his fellow-passengers.

[15] Phil. iv, 8.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STAGES OF THE BATTLE

The spiritual masters in every age are at agreement concerning the process by which the soul passes from a state of grace into a state of sin. They express it in various ways, and in varying degrees of elaboration, but when analysed it can be brought down to three steps given us by St. Gregory, *Suggestion, Pleasure, Consent*.^[1] Thomas à Kempis presents it somewhat more fully, and it is with his statement of the process that we purpose engaging ourselves.

"First," he says, "a bare thought comes to the mind; then a strong imagination; afterwards pleasure, and evil motion, and consent."^[2]

I. *The Satanic Suggestion*

First of all, then, "the bare thought,"—*simplex cogitatio*,—"comes to the mind"; or more literally *runs upon (occurit)*, the mind. The word is full of action. The suggestion of evil does not drift into the mind in any merely accidental way. It is propelled from without by a strong, alert intelligence,—none other than the Tempter,—and under just the conditions and circumstances that his experience shows him are the most advantageous for his uses. À Kempis doubtless had here in mind St. Paul's thought, expressed to the Corinthians, "There hath no temptation *taken* you, but such as is common to man";^[3] the idea being that of the temptation laying hold of the soul as a warrior might take hold upon his adversary in battle.

He proposes the evil thing, not perhaps as a thing sinful in itself, for, as we have already seen, his experience has taught him that few souls, even of the most depraved, can be induced to accept evil for evil's sake. He presents it sometimes under the guise of that which is positively good; or perhaps, with an assumption of great virtue, he acknowledges it to be wrong in itself, but seeks to persuade us that it would be right for us to make an exception of ourselves under the peculiar circumstances that are present.

It is necessary for us to study with care the subject of suggestion of sin, lest either through Satan's wiles, or our own ignorance, we be deceived, to our soul's hurt. It is at this point that we must understand the difference between temptation and sin. The failure to grasp this difference has been the cause of great distress to many faithful souls; it has been the root of fatal discouragement in numberless cases, and, in not a few, of downfall and final wreck.

The suggestion may often be the result of our past unfaithfulness. It is not always easy to trace the pedigree of a temptation, but in most cases it is highly likely that it is to be traced back to some failure of our own in the past. Men indulge themselves; they whet the imagination with evil thought and conversation and reading. They develop their passions by giving rein to them. By continued failure to resist, they go on in the same sin under many varying conditions, until a hundred commonplace, every-day happenings, entirely innocent in themselves, become charged with sinful suggestions, recalling the old sin whenever they occur. It is as though a commander should plant powerful batteries about his own fortress, preparing them to be used by the enemy. Thus learning from our past, we know how to guard ourselves for the future. Present faithfulness is the pledge, and the only pledge, of future security.^[4]

Or it may be that Satan, accustomed to success in leading us astray in certain things, is encouraged to suggest like evil to our minds again. However this may be, whether the suggestion arises from the evil bent that our minds have received through former yielding, or whether it be Satan's device and unprovoked solicitation, *there is no sin in the mere fact that evil is suggested to*

our minds, however persistently or strongly.[[5](#)]

In any case it had its origin outside of us, and unless we have deliberately run into the occasion of sin, or in some culpable way invited it, we are in the immediate case not responsible for the suggestion.

Therefore, the suggestion can in no way be regarded as sin, for unless our wills have brought it about, or consciously encouraged it, our souls are unstained. Without the action of the will, no sin can enter the heart. "What is done without, or against, our will, rather takes place in us, than is done *by* us."[[6](#)]

"No risings, then, of any passion, yea, though it should rise again and again, against thee, and by rising weary thee, and almost wear thee out: no thought by night when thou hast not power over thy soul, and thy will is not conscious: no thoughts by day, which come to thee again and again, and besiege thee and torment thee, and would claim thee for their own: no distractions in prayer, even if they carry thee away, and thou lose thyself and awake, as it were, out of a dream, and thy prayer be gone,—none of these things are thine. Nothing without thy will is thine, or will be imputed to thee. It is not the mere presence with thee of what thou hatest: it is not the recurrence, again and again, of what thou loatest, which will hurt thee: not even if it seems to come from thy inmost self, unless thy will consent to it."[[7](#)]

II. The Response of the Natural Heart

Following upon the suggestion, à Kempis tells us there comes "a strong imagination." The undisciplined soul does not instantly turn from the suggestion. It allows a vivid picture of it to attract and hold the attention. This may be quite involuntary, and, if so, is not in itself sin, but unless the attention be speedily withdrawn there follows the second stage of temptation, namely, Pleasure. *Deletatio* is the word à Kempis uses, which has the sense of a pleasure which entices one from the right way.

Here again, however, we must make the careful distinction between temptation and sin, if we would not be entangled in a fatal network of scruples. Though there may spring up in our hearts a distinct sense of delight at the thought of committing the sin suggested, yet in this delight itself there is no sin, unless the will enters in to confirm it.

This is not the kind of delight that St. Paul speaks of in his terrible condemnation of those "who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness";[[8](#)] for if the will comes in promptly to resist the sense of delight, we are free from blame. The pleasure which often follows the suggestion of sin to a faithful soul, while definite, and perhaps even long continued, has its seat in our lower nature, in what spiritual writers call the "inferior will" of which we shall speak presently. So long as it does not capture the higher will, no sin has been committed.

A simple illustration will suffice to show what is here meant. One is walking with a companion on the street. Some one appears in sight who has recently wronged him. All the memory of the wrong surges up in the heart instantly, and there comes a sharp suggestion to say some unkind, revengeful thing. The heart responds to the suggestion, and it would be a real pleasure to speak this unloving thought. But, realizing the sin of it, we refrain; we even say to ourselves, "It would be an intense satisfaction to speak, nothing would give me so much pleasure; but I know it is not the will of God, and therefore nothing will induce me to do it."

Here is the Satanic suggestion, followed by a definite sense of pleasure therein, and yet so met and disposed of that no sin, but rather the blessing of a victory, results. And this victory is more to God's honour than it would have been had we rejected the temptation with disgust, having found no sort of pleasure in it. When we found pleasure in it, but refused it, there was a greater victory over self and Satan.

III. *The "Inferior" and "Superior" Wills*

The existence of the two operations of will in man is proved from Holy Scripture. St. Paul, writing to the Roman Christians, lifts the veil from his own spiritual experience and shows us how they operated in him. His experience we all recognize as our own.

"I find then a law," he says, "that when I would do good"—that is when I will to do good,—"evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inner man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."[\[9\]](#)

It is well before going further to inquire what is this "inferior will" that manifests itself in the great Saints, as well as in us sinners, and in which this delight at the thought of sin is said to have its place. How is it to be distinguished from the higher will, which, while acknowledging the sense of pleasure, yet refuses to yield to it? And what relation have these two wills to the act of consent, which constitutes the sin? Let us find the answer to our question in one of the best of spiritual masters, the author of "The Spiritual Combat":

"Although we may be said in this combat to have within us two wills, the one of the reason, which is thence called reasonable and higher, the other of the senses, thence called sensual and lower, and commonly described by the words 'appetite,' 'flesh,' 'sense,' and 'passion'; yet as it is through the reason that we are men, we cannot truly be said to will anything which is willed by the senses, unless we are inclined thereto by the higher will.

"And herein does our spiritual conflict principally consist. The reasonable will being placed, as it were, midway between the Divine Will which is above it, and the inferior will or the will of the senses, which is beneath it, is continually warring against both, each seeking in turn to draw it, and bring it under obedience."[\[10\]](#)

It is the inferior will that runs forward with delight to act upon Satan's suggestion; it is the higher will that checks this precipitation and says, "I know it is not the will of God, and therefore nothing will induce me to do it." This higher will is what is commonly meant when we speak of the human will being conformed to, or arrayed against, the Divine Will. It has to act before man becomes responsible.[\[11\]](#)

It is this higher will that enjoys its freedom, and therefore constitutes in us a part of the divine image. There is no power that can compel it until, by its own free action, it yields itself to that power. God, reverencing His image, as He sees it in us, will not force a reluctant will to serve Him; and Satan cannot.[\[12\]](#) Scupoli says again:

"God has, in truth, endowed our will with such freedom and such strength, that were all the senses, all the evil spirits, nay, the whole world itself, to arm and conspire against her, assaulting and oppressing her with all their might, she could still, in spite of them, will or not will, most freely all that she wills or wills not, and that how often soever, whensoever, howsoever, and to what end

soever, best pleases her." [13]

It is on these grounds that the "superior will" has been called the "Royal Faculty," because like a king it sits enthroned over all other faculties, guiding and ruling them. No matter what dispositions we may have, they are inoperative until the will commands; and according as the will dictates, so is our whole life. We, and all that pertains to us, are good or bad according as the will operates for good or evil.

Let us understand clearly, however, what is meant by the freedom of the human will, lest we fall into error. As we have seen, the will is indeed free. Satan cannot force it; God will not. But this does not mean that the will is free to stand alone. It means simply that the *will is free to choose*. Man was made for service. It has been said that the dream of mankind has ever been of liberty, but the one practical question that faces us every moment from the cradle to the grave is, Whom shall I serve? Furthermore, there are but two alternatives of service,—God or Satan. Man, from his very nature, cannot choose to serve himself. Brought down to its final analysis, all service is that of God or Satan, heaven or hell.

Nor is man and his life, so organized that the will can choose once for all, and have done with it. We may choose once for all, but that same choice must every day and hour be repeated and ratified, else it will not stand. [14]

It is a thought that must give us pause, that in every waking moment of our lives, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, the will is choosing, and that each several choice is making for our eternal weal or our eternal woe; is gathering material for an immortal crown, or for our accusation and possible condemnation at the end.

Nor is it possible, as we have just seen, for the will to refrain from choosing. It is free to choose what it will, but choose it must. Some have thought it possible to stand neutral, but not so. "Not to choose is to choose amiss." Not to choose the service of God is to choose the service of Satan.

The will, like our other faculties, does most readily that which it is accustomed to do. The law of habit holds good here as elsewhere, and habit is mostly acquired by the repeated performance of little acts. We do not ordinarily perform great deeds of love as a means of training; rather do we perform them because we are already trained. Some great act of love may confirm the will in its tendency Godward, but it is not in high and lofty things that we are to seek our training. Therefore in training the will so that it may acquire the habit of spontaneously choosing God in all things, it must be taught to acquiesce constantly in the little hourly leadings towards Him. If we make a habit of consenting to another person, after a time it is difficult to refuse consent. This holds equally good with the sweet and happy rule of the Holy Spirit when we have aligned our wills with His, and with the horrid slavery of hell when we have committed our wills to Satan.

In fitting the will for the great warfare, it must be taught little by little, in numberless minor things, to consent to God's Will. So after a time the habit will be formed; God's Voice will become the signal for prompt action, and the voice of Satan will be as the voice of a stranger whom the will, like the sheep in the parable, will not follow.

Surely then it will be worthy to be called the Royal Faculty, for as a king indeed will it reign, one with the Will of Him Who is the King of kings.

IV. The Fatal Consent

We see that there is no power that can compel the will, unless it be that the will has, by its own act, delivered itself to be bound by Satan. This brings us to the third stage—Consent. The suggestion to evil may be strong, the pleasure that follows may be keen; and yet there is no sin until the will has yielded consent; until its denial, its hesitation, have been beaten down, and it has cried, "I yield."

It is around this point that the conflict centres. The suggestion may count for nothing; it is often but a random shot that the enemy fires on the chance of striking a vital point, "just as a besieging army sends rockets here and there into a city to try for the powder magazines." [15] The pleasure that follows, great as it may be, is not in itself sinful, and may be the occasion of greater merit and grace to the soul that feels it and, instead of yielding, beats it down ruthlessly. But if Satan can induce the will to give consent, the deed is done, the evil has entered, and, in proportion to the seriousness of the matter, the divine love is quenched, and the power of the devil quickened and strengthened.

A distinction, too, must be made between deliberate and indeliberate consent. St. Francis de Sales refers to what he calls inclinations to sin, [16] when the mind, not being thoroughly aroused, may amuse itself for some time with a thought or imagination, without reflecting that it is a temptation to sin.

Father Augustine Baker says likewise, "The simple passing of such thoughts or imaginations in the mind is no sin at all, though they should rest there never so long without advertence, but only the giving of deliberate consent to them"; and to constitute this deliberate consent he requires that the mind must be "fully awake,"—that is, to the fact that these were of the nature of sin,—and had reflected on them." [17]

Our only hope lies in a stubborn refusal of consent. Our safety lies in fixing the will on this one thing. Never mind how fiercely the enemy may assault. He may deliver charge after charge with a rapidity that bewilders the soul, and makes it grow sick and dizzy. We may seem to be beaten down under his feet, and all the storms and billows of a fierce and terrible temptation may sweep over us, and yet so long as from the midst of the confusion we cry, "I will it not," the soul is safe. [18]

The refusal of consent should be instant upon the first consciousness of temptation. It is of great peril to dally even for a moment with the sinful suggestion. Not only does it encourage the tempter on the one hand, and weaken our powers of resistance on the other, but deliberate dallying with evil is a sin in itself. It means that an outpost has been surrendered, and even though in the end we reject the main suggestion, yet we have by no means come off unscathed. We are less capable of resisting the next attack than we were before; for "the imagination of sin, the dallying with it, the indulgence of the senses, short of what the soul must own to itself to be a grave fall, steeps and drags the soul more thoroughly in sin, immerses it in a thicker and more blinding mist, interpenetrates more the whole moral texture of the soul with evil, than, at an earlier stage, does the actual sin itself." [19]

It is not always, however, with confusion and noise of battle that Satan seeks to force our consent. Often the hardest temptations to endure are those in which he comes very gently, and with long continued pressure seeks to weary, and discourage, and break down the will.

It is a fatal error into which scrupulous souls are not infrequently led, to think that the long continuance of the suggestion, or even of the delight with which our lower nature responds, constitutes consent. The devils have a mysterious power, allowed them by God, of holding a temptation before the soul continuously or repeatedly, and we are often as powerless to put it away as we are to refuse to see an object which is actually reflected on the retina of the eye.

How many times have loving hearts that would choose death a thousand times rather than dishonour our Lord become sick with terror when in the midst of such prolonged temptation there comes a dread whisper within, "You have consented, though you knew it not." It is the voice of the

tempter, and the ruse is a favourite one in his warfare against the soul, for he knows that for us to think we have sinned is almost as fatal in its effects on the *morale* of the soul as to have actually yielded consent.

So when the lying whisper comes, let us cry out against him, charge him with his lie; and then turning swiftly to our Lord, renew our allegiance to Him with such strong, passionate acts of love, that the evil spirit, filled with despair, will take his flight, departing from us "for a season."

[1] S. Greg. Mag., *Regulae Pastoralis*, III, xxx. See also the opening paragraph of Dr. Pusey's sermon on "Victory over Besetting Sin," *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. II.

[2] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[3] 1 Cor. x, 13.

[4] "Our trial, by God's appointment and mercy, lies mostly in some few things. We bring trials upon ourselves which God did not intend for us. We increase manifoldly our own trials by every consent to sin."—Pusey, *Parochial Sermons*, Vol. II, p. 121.

[5] "Past sin involves present trial, not present sin. When a man has once turned to God his past sin will not be imputed to him either in itself, *or in its effects*. One who has given way would by God's just appointment, visiting for sin, have trials. He need not, if he wills not by God's grace, have sin." *Ibid.*, p. 335.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 334.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 338.

[8] 2 Thess. ii, 12.

[9] Rom. vii, 21-23.

[10] Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat* (Pusey's Trans.), chap. xii.

St. Francis de Sales, in a letter to the Mère de Chastel, has a delightfully characteristic passage, full of paternal tenderness combined with playful and reverent humour, in which he sets forth the mode of action of the two wills. "Indeed, my dear daughter Marie," he writes, "you say truly that there are two beings in you. The one is a Marie who, like St. Peter, is tender, sensitive, ready to be irritated by a touch. This Marie is a daughter of Eve, and so her temper is frail. The other Marie wills to be wholly God's; and in order so to be, she wills in all simplicity to be humble and gentle towards everyone, and she would fain imitate St. Peter after he was converted. This Marie is the child of the Blessed Virgin. These two diverse Maries come into collision, and the bad one is so bad that often the other scarce knows how to defend herself, and then perforce she fancies herself beaten, and believes the bad Marie to be stronger. But not so, my poor, dear child; the bad one is not stronger than you. She is more perverse, more enterprising, more obstinate, and when you lose heart and sit down to cry, she is pleased because it is so much time lost for you; and if she cannot make you lose eternity, at all events she will try to make you lose time. My dear daughter, rouse your courage ... be watchful of your enemy; tread cautiously for fear of the foe; if you are not on your guard against her she will be too much for you. Even if she should take you by surprise, and make you totter, or give you a slight wound, do not be put out.... Now do not be ashamed of all this, my daughter, any more than St. Paul was when he confessed that there were two beings in him, one rebellious against God, the other obedient to Him."—St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, lvii.

[11] "It is impossible," says the Abbot Moses, "for the mind not to be approached by thoughts, but it is in the power of every earnest man either to admit them or reject them. Their rising does not depend upon ourselves, but their admission or rejection is in our own power.... The movement of the mind may well be illustrated by the comparison of a mill-wheel. The headlong rush of water whirls it round, and it can never stop its work so long as it is driven by the water. Yet it is in the power of the man who directs it to decide whether he will have wheat, or barley, or darnel ground by it. For it must certainly crush that which the man in charge of it puts in. So the mind is driven by the torrents of temptation which pour in on it from every side and cannot be free from the flow of thoughts, but we control the character of the thoughts by the efforts of our own earnestness."—Cassian, *Conferences*, I, 17, 18.

[12] "The power of divine grace, like that of the Adversary, is impulsive, not compulsive, that the free power of our will may be entirely preserved. Wherefore, for the evil things which a man does by the influence of Satan, it is not Satan that receives the punishment, but the man himself; forasmuch as he was not involuntarily forced into those things, but was consenting in his own will. In the same manner also with respect to what is good, Grace does not ascribe it to itself, but to the man, and it therefore assigns to him glory, as the cause of good to himself. For grace does not so constrain by compulsive force as to render a man's will incapable of altering; but though it be present to him, it gives way to his free and arbitrary power, that his will may be manifested how it is disposed to good or to evil. For the law is not applied to our nature, but to our free-will, which is able to convert itself either to good or to evil."—Macarius, *Institutes of Christian Perfection*, Bk. VII, chap. iii. (Penn's Trans., London, 1816.)

[13] Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, chap. xiv.

[14] "I shall fulfil Thy Will if, for Thy Love, I contradict my own, which Thou wilt not in any way constrain, but dost leave it

perfectly free that I, by voluntarily and constantly subjecting it to Thine, may become dearer and more full in Thy sight."—St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue on Consummated Perfection*, in Drane's History of St. Catherine, Vol. II, p. 348.

[15] Faber, *Growth in Holiness*, chap. xvi.

[16] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, cxiv.

[17] Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, pp. 284-286. See also Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. 2, Sec. 1, chap. viii.

[18] Using anger as an illustration, Father Baker enters into a detailed description of what may happen, and yet the soul be free from sin. Perhaps there is not one of us who can read the following words without a sense of deep gratitude and relief concerning not infrequent experiences of our own. He says: "A person being moved to anger, though he find an unquiet representation in the imagination, and a violent heat and motions about the heart, as likewise an aversion in sensitive nature against the person that hath given the provocation; yet if, notwithstanding, he refrains himself from breaking forth into words of impatience to which his passion would urge him, and withal contradicts designs of revenge suggested by passion, such an one, practicing internal prayer and mortification, is to esteem himself not to have consented to the motions of corrupt nature, although besides the inward motion of the appetite [i.e., the inferior will], he could not hinder marks of his passion from appearing in his eyes and the colour of his countenance."—*Sancta Sophia*, pp. 237-238.

[19] Pusey, *Lenten Sermons*, p. 264.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE HOUR OF BATTLE

"Like as the children of Ephraim, who being harnessed and bearing bows, turned themselves back in the day of battle." [1] Thus does the Psalmist recall a day of shame and humiliation in the history of God's people. Well prepared for the battle, with every hope of victory before them, the children of Ephraim failed in the hour when they faced the enemy.

Thus has it been with many souls in the spiritual warfare. We may be forewarned, we may be armed with the manifold gifts of the Spirit, and yet fail, for the preparation is not everything. When in the actual presence of the foe, the soul must smite boldly and well. The weapons God supplies must be used. Not to use a grace is to lose a grace.

I. *Realizing God's Friendship*

It is easy to find theories of opposing temptation; but often hard to apply them in the actual moment of the assault. The cause lies in the fact that we do not realize our relation to God. God is our friend; and we must think of Him in the ordinary terms of earthly friendship. The Eternal Son came to earth and was Incarnate, just in order that we might find in Him an earthly relation, by means of and through which we might be able to rise up to the heavenly friendship.

So far as mere intellectual knowledge is concerned, we know quite well what we are to Him, and yet so dull is our appreciation of it that it is only with painful care that we are able to keep from mortally offending this good God. We should have slight regard for an earthly friendship that rested on so precarious a foundation. When shall we come to that blessed time when our friendship with God will be as spontaneous in its action, and as free from peril of violation at our hands, as the friendships we enjoy with those fellow-mortals whose hearts are knit up with ours in loving earthly friendship!

Before we go on to consider definitely the methods we may profitably employ when the battle is actually upon us, let us use an illustration that may help us to grasp very practically just what our

relationship is to God.

You know a man whom you look up to with profound regard and reverence. Not only this, but his unfailing goodness to you under many and various conditions has claimed and won your deepest love and gratitude. This man has an enemy, a despicable character, universally known to be devoid of every sentiment of common decency and honour, who has for years scrupled at no means, even the foulest and most contemptible, to injure the object of his hate. You know these facts to be true, and have yourself had the misfortune to have many dealings with him, and have always found that his actions justify the low opinion that all right-thinking men have of him. One day this creature has the audacity to approach you, and try deliberately to turn you against your benefactor, and to induce you to consent to something that would be to the dishonour and contempt of the one to whom you owe so much. How long would you listen to him? Do you think you would stop to weigh calmly the arguments for and against his proposition? Or would you not, without a moment's hesitation, turn upon him with indignation, and drive the contemptible creature from your presence, with a sense of loathing, almost of contamination, that you had been made to listen to such a suggestion?

We do not have to go far to find a key to the parable. The benefactor whom we regard with so deep a reverence is our loving heavenly Father, who has claimed and won our love through the goodness and mercy with which He has followed us all the days of our life. The enemy whose age-long efforts have ever been for His dishonour is the devil, who seeks to make us the instrument by which he would dishonour God. When illustrated thus, the audacity of the tempter, and the insulting character of every temptation, are made plain.

This simple parable will surely enable us to grasp the relations between God and ourselves and Satan, and with this realization fresh upon us, we can go on to consider some of the special methods we may use to overcome God's enemy and ours.

II. The Divine Example of Humility

It is interesting to note that when our Lord was assailed in the wilderness by the Tempter, His method of resistance was to turn immediately to the consideration of His Father's word. He did not address Himself to the pros and cons of the Satanic suggestion. He inflicts instant and crushing defeat upon His adversary by turning His attention, not to the character of the temptation, but straight to the will of the Father.

In this our Lord showed by His action what He afterward taught concerning Himself when He said, "I can of Mine own self do nothing." [[2](#)] His first act in His temptation was to declare His entire dependence on His Father. So, if in our temptations, we would share His victory, our method of battle must follow His. The tempted soul must fling itself instantly upon God in the humblest acknowledgment of dependence. Much of our failure in the conflict arises from a forgetfulness of this. How often does the very dread of the sin so agitate the soul that instead of turning to God, we stand, as it were, fascinated by the horror of the suggestion, losing precious moments that should be devoted to flinging open all the channels of communication with God, that His own strength may flow into us for the battle. This course of defence is effective in two ways.

(1) First, as regards God. Nothing can so completely open the channels of communication with Him as an utter abandon of humility in His presence. Scripture is full of the divine teaching on this point. The Holy Spirit declares by the great Prophet of the Incarnation, "Thus saith the high and lofty

One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and lofty place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the spirit of the humble."[[3](#)] St. James declares, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble;"[[4](#)] and St. Peter, repeating the same teaching, adds this exhortation, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time."[[5](#)]

(2) But not only does this self-abasement in the first moment of temptation bring down new power from God for the struggle, but it has a direct and disastrous effect on Satan. Nothing so completely bewilders him as self-humiliation. He, the very personification of pride, cannot understand how a soul can for a moment so humble itself. He is puzzled, nonplussed. He knows not how to proceed. He thought he understood us; he had studied our lines of defence, and thought he knew just how to approach and break through them; but this unexpected manoeuvre shatters his plan of battle. Many a soul that, in the approach of temptation, has thus flung itself at the feet of God has, while lying there awaiting the divine word, felt the awful sense of the Satanic presence pass, and the sickening tug of temptation cease. The enemy in the face of a situation so far beyond his power of understanding had made haste to withdraw his attack, lest while thus fighting in the dark he should meet still more humiliating defeat.

III. Instant in Prayer

The humble soul is always the praying soul. The soul that realizes its dependence will lose no time in calling upon Him on Whom it leans, and this earnest prayer is the weapon in the warfare, without which certain overthrow must ensue.

As in the case of humbling ourselves, the use of this weapon is to be considered in its relation both to God and to Satan.

(1) Its relation to God. We know that prayer for help must of necessity bring help, because the divine promise is given and repeated a hundred times in Holy Scripture, that the Lord will hear us in the day of trouble.[[6](#)] It is needless to multiply texts. One word of God the Eternal Son suffices, "And shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you He will avenge them speedily."[[7](#)]

Impossible as it may seem, the prayer of the humble heart can command the very Godhead. Ascending to the throne of grace in union with the intercession of Christ, the cry of the hard-pressed child of God has power to liberate the divine Omnipotence, and set in motion all the infinite energies of the kingdom which come forth in their unconquerable might to wage war on our behalf.

This power that the praying soul has over God (we dare use such an expression with entire freedom) is one of the mysteries of our union with Him, and since He has given us so repeated a revelation of it, we can expect nothing of Him if we neglect it.

One or two Scripture passages will make this clear to us. When Israel rebelled and Moses prayed for them, God's answer was, "Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them."[[8](#)] Why should the Omnipotent One have spoken thus since none is able to hinder Him or bind His hands? The Holy Ghost, speaking by the Psalmist ages after, gives us the meaning when He says: "He said He would have destroyed them had not Moses, His chosen, stood before Him in the gap."[[9](#)] The wrath of God was paralysed in the face of the prayer of the Saint.

Isaiah, sounding his lament over the lost condition of Israel, says, "There is none that calleth upon

Thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee."[[10](#)] The Hebrew tongue affords us no stronger expression than that which the Spirit here inspired the prophet to use. The meaning is, to lay, as it were, violent hands upon God, by means of prayer, and with a holy audacity to hold Him back from launching the thunderbolt of His wrath against the apostate nation. The expression "stirreth up himself" indicates by a bold rhetorical stroke the power which the prophet knew such a one would have if he could be found among the sons of Israel. When used in the Old Testament it invariably implies the arousing of some mighty force, which when once awakened would sweep all before it, as when Balaam prophesied concerning Israel, "He couched, he lay down as a lion, as a great lion; who shall stir him up?"[[11](#)]

Thus in the power of prayer shall we be able to sweep all before us, if in the hour of temptation we pray with a like holy audacity.

(2) But not only does prayer in the hour of temptation call the power of God to our succour, but the bare fact that we pray at such a time completely overreaches Satan. The primary reason of his temptation is to draw us away from God. If the invariable result of temptation is thus to draw us the more surely and closely to His feet in prayer, the tempter will not be slow to realize that he is being used as the instrument, and his assault as the occasion, of accomplishing this very thing that his labour is directed against. When he realizes this, baffled and discouraged, he will have no alternative but to withdraw.

We must say a word about ejaculatory prayer, for in the hour of temptation this method of prayer is to be our chief source of strength. Most frequently, perhaps, in temptation there is no time or occasion for formal prayer. Our appeal to God in such times must be instant. These prayers of ejaculation have been described as "short, sharp, and swift darts [Latin, jaculum, a dart], and desires, shot by our burning hearts, and reaching heaven in an instant. Our forefathers, the Saints, frequently used them, for being short, they trouble not the memory; being fervent, they rouse our dulness and dryness to affection and devotion; being frequent, they still renew our attention to God's presence, and put us perpetually in mind of our duties."[[12](#)]

To this, it may be added that ejaculatory prayer is apt to be a measurably perfect prayer, because, being so quickly finished, the devil has not time to chill its fervour by distractions, such as we invariably suffer from in longer forms of prayer. Even were it so disposed, the average mind cannot act with sufficient quickness to perceive the distraction ere the prayer be finished.

Those who study God's word piously will find numberless prayers in the very language of the Holy Ghost, which will be most effective in the moment of danger. The briefer these are, the better. The Psalter is full of them, and there is no better military exercise for the Christian soldier than to spend his time when not actually in battle, in learning as many of them as possible by heart, so that they may be ready at hand when the battle begins.

Short, quick prayers like the following will be found of great profit:

"O Lord, my God, in Thee have I put my trust; save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me."[[13](#)]

"Save, Lord, and hear us, O King of Heaven."[[14](#)]

"Save me, O God, for Thy Name's sake, and avenge me in Thy strength."[[15](#)]

"Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness."[[16](#)]

"Lord, he whom Thou lovest is sick."[[17](#)]

"Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O Lord."[[18](#)]

"Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God, for I will yet give Him thanks which is the help of my countenance and my God."[[19](#)]

"O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee."[[20](#)]

"Thou, Lord, art my hope."[[21](#)]

"O help us against the enemy, for vain is the help of man."[[22](#)]

"Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice."[[23](#)]

We need not multiply instances of these prayers. Let each one take the Psalter, the Gospels, and other parts of Scripture, and go over them for himself, copying them out, committing them to memory in quiet times, thus filling his quiver full of heaven-tempered darts, the use of which in time of stress will surely put to flight the audacious enemy.

It is well to remember in the use of prayer in the moment of temptation, that the mind must be wholly set upon God. There is real danger in trying to pray while at the same time our thoughts are upon the special form of temptation that is being presented. Turn your back upon it, and cry to God. Think only of Him, His goodness, His loving protection. The diversion of the mind alone is a victory over the tempter; and where it is turned from him, and set upon strong and holy appeals and aspirations, it is not possible but that the enemy will be driven utterly from our path.

IV. A Holy Perversity

Another effective method of resistance is to make a rule of doing, in a definite and precise way, and instantly if possible, just the contrary of what Satan is seeking to induce us to do. For instance, he insinuates into our minds some bitter, resentful, and uncharitable thought. We know the thought is evil, and we abhor it accordingly, nor do we give any sort of consent to its presence; but still it is not easy to crush. Perhaps it is a revival of some old bitterness in regard to a real wrong done us long ago. We fight hard against it, and thus save ourselves from sin; but how much shall we add to Satan's discomfiture, how shall we indeed crown our victory, if, instead of expending our energy in the merely negative work of refusing admittance to our hearts of an unloving thought, we proceed to do or say some loving thing; or at any rate offer a resolution instantly to God to watch for an opportunity, and, if need be, to go out of our way, to perform some act of kindness before the day is over.

Or in case of temptation to pride, personal vanity or self-assertion, to perform some little act of meekness; or when the temptation is to some form of self-indulgence or selfishness, deliberately to do some unselfish thing, preferring for our greater self-denial something that naturally we should not care to do.

A simple illustration will show how discouraging such a course will be to the tempter. Suppose whenever you had occasion to ask a certain acquaintance to do something for you, instead of complying with your request, he did just the contrary thing, and that with a precision and regularity that gave evidence of a deliberate plan and policy. Suppose again that this contrary thing was the very act that he knew was most displeasing to you. How long would you persist in your applications to him? Surely, not for long. So will it be with Satan. He is far too intelligent a creature, and knows and serves his own interests all too faithfully, to continue his efforts long under such conditions.

V. Scorning the Tempter

A most excellent method, which can often, though not always, be applied, is that of ignoring the

tempter. It is a helpful thing in the Christian warfare to remember always that Satan is the embodiment of pride. Nothing cuts the proud soul so deeply as being ignored. It can endure opposition, even defeat, but the thing that is intolerable is to be taken no account of. So when Satan attacks, in not a few instances, the resistance that to him will be the most cruel will be to go calmly on one's way, ignoring him. As St. Francis de Sales says: "You should not answer, or seem even to hear, what the enemy says. Let him hammer as he will at the door; do not you even say so much as, Who is there?... Beware that you never open the door, either to peep out and see what it is, or to drive away the clamour."[[24](#)]

An illustration similar to the one employed in our discussion of resisting by doing the thing contrary to the temptation will help us here. Imagine yourself having occasion frequently to apply to a certain person for a service. Imagine such a person deliberately ignoring you whenever you spoke, pretending not to hear you, gazing with feigned absent-mindedness out of the window. Do you think you would long continue your application to such an one? Indeed you would not. Pride, even right-minded self-respect, would forbid it; and you can be sure Satan, acting on the same principle, will soon cease to annoy you when he finds himself the object of so studied a contempt.

Since the human mind, however, always demands something upon which to be engaged, we can much more successfully ignore Satan's addresses if we divert the mind by an act of the will into some totally different channel. "Temptations," says Walter Hilton, "vex the soul indeed, but do not harm it, if so be a man despise them and set them at naught; for it is not good to strive with them, as if thou wouldst cast them out by mastery and violence, for the more they strive with them, the more they cleave to them. And therefore they shall do well to divert their thoughts from them as much as they can, and set them upon some business."[[25](#)]

This diversion of the mind will be all the more effective if it is in the direction of those holy things which Satan abhors. Therefore "let us turn our hearts to converse with God, which is better than to reflect upon our temptations and troubles. Let us be so attentive to Him, that we have neither leave nor leisure to give ear to Satanic suggestions."[[26](#)]

VI. Staying not the Hand

We are told in the Second Book of the Kings[[27](#)] that when the prophet Elisha was fallen sick of the sickness whereof he died, Joash, the King of Israel, came unto him. The man of God commanded him to take the arrows and smite upon the ground, whereupon the King, weak in ambition, and with no vision of God's destiny for him as a national deliverer, smote thrice upon the ground and stayed. "And the man of God was wroth with him and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it." If he who goes forth to fight for God would utterly consume the enemy, he must seek the vision of His purpose for him, and if he is truly ambitious of heavenly honours it is not far to seek.

We can quite safely say that God never predestined any soul barely to win the victory. He plans high things for all his children, but how many are there who never attain them because, like the king of Israel, they are giving Him a spiritless service. They smite thrice with the arrows of deliverance and stay their hand. They are content to remain on a low spiritual plane, within the pale of divine grace indeed, but satisfied with this, and using their further energies for passing earthly things instead of devoting them with a burning splendour of enthusiasm to an ever higher service in the kingdom that shall have no end.

How disappointing are such lives to God! He had meant to promote them to great honour, and they have no aspiration above the lowest place. Nor can they plead that they know not His purpose for them. The Scriptural revelation is full of the highest assurances. God lays wide open before us the plan He has prepared for our glory. He tells us in a hundred passages, every utterance eloquent with love, what it all is, and He stays in His description only when the finite mind of man cannot follow Him; and then He cries: "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." [28]

If we are to rise up to satisfy the divine measure of our predestined glory, we must smite not thrice, but five or six times. We must smite not only until we feel the assault stayed, but until we are sure that the tempter has acknowledged himself defeated. Some spiritual guides advise the soul pursuing the tempter, not allowing him to depart from us without further chastisement and humiliation. "Do not leave off the conflict until the enemy is, as it were, wearied out, dead, and yields himself up discomfited." [29]

"When the assaults have ceased," says Scupoli, "excite them again, so as to have an opportunity of overcoming them with greater force and energy. Then challenge them again a third time so as to accustom yourself to repulse them with scorn and horror." [30]

Remember, however, as a point of the most extreme importance, that this course should never be adopted in temptations against faith or against purity. In these cases there should be an immediate avoidance of the thought and occasion of the temptation, and the mind should be instantly diverted utterly from it by definite occupation of a contrary nature.

VII. The Final Phase of Victory

The counsel of the author of "The Spiritual Combat," appeals to us not only as coming from a great guide of souls, but because (as is always the case with the wisdom of the Saints), it answers our sense of the fitness of things. A poor soldier he would be who never planned to fight on the offensive, who never sought to carry the war into the enemy's country. The Blessed Christ has organized the armies of the Kingdom not merely for the protection of a weak and incapable people, but for the positive conquest of Satan through the strength and aggressiveness of His soldiers. In the account of the armour of God as given us by St. Paul, [31] we are, it is true, told of the breast plate, the shield, and the helmet, all armour of defence; but we are also told of the feet shod that the soldier might march straight forward; and of the sword of the Spirit with which we are to slay the adversary.

Under the old dispensation, too, the Spirit taught the like truth. In one of the chiefest of the Psalms of consolation,—the 91st,—the soul is spoken of as finding its refuge in the very secret place of the Most High; as being covered with His wings,—shielded from the mysterious terror that walks by night, from the arrow that flies by day; and there is mention of shield and buckler, weapons of defence. But also there is mention of the splendid feats of aggressive conquest that God expects from those to whom He accords His almighty protection. "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet."

The contrast between the earlier part of the Psalm and this sudden promise is startling. Heretofore God and the angels have been the actors prosecuting their work of protection and defence. Now it is as though He said, "I have hid thee in My tabernacle, and now it is *Thou*, the defenced one, who shall tread upon the lion and adder; Thou, and I only as acting in and through thee!" [32]

The Hebrew form of expression the Holy Spirit employs presents two powerful word-paintings. When it is said, "Thou shalt *tread* upon the lion and adder," there is the suggestion of stamping in pieces, of treading one's enemies as grapes are trodden in the wine-press; and where the promise is made, "The young lion and the dragon shalt thou *trample under feet*," the Holy Ghost is lifting up before ancient Israel, in their own language, the picture of the terrible onset of armed horsemen beating down the enemy with ruthless trampling beneath the iron-shod feet of the horses.

Thus are the soldiers of God called upon not only to vanquish, but to tread the hosts of hell as grapes are trodden in the vintage; not only to cause them to flee, but to pursue and trample them with terrible strength as victorious horsemen trample down the flying foe.

[1] Ps. lxxviii, 10.

[2] St. John v, 30.

[3] Isa. lvii, 15.

[4] St. James iv, 6.

[5] 1 Pet. v, 6.

[6] Ps. xx, 1.

[7] St. Luke xviii, 7-8.

[8] Exod. xxxii, 10.

[9] Ps. cvi, 23.

[10] Isa. lxiv, 7.

[11] Numbers xxiv, 9. See also Job xli, 10, and Ps. xxxv, 23, and lxxx, 2.

[12] Castaniza, *The Spiritual Conquest*, pp. 405, 406. (Vaughan, 3d Ed.)

[13] Ps. vii, 1.

[14] Ps. xx, 9.

[15] Ps. liv, 1.

[16] Ps. li, 1.

[17] St. John xi, 3.

[18] Ps. xlii, 1.

[19] Ps. xliii, 5-6.

[20] Ps. lxiii, 1.

[21] Ps. xci, 9.

[22] Ps. cviii, 12.

[23] Ps. cxxx, 1.

[24] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, xi.

[25] Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, I, Pt. II, Sec. 2, chap. i.

[26] Castaniza, *The Spiritual Conquest*, p. 459.

[27] 2 Kings xiii.

[28] Cor. ii, 9.

[29] Scupoli, *The Spiritual Combat*, chap. xiii.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] Eph. vi.

[32] Compare Romans xvi, 20: "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under *your* feet shortly." "The God of peace" goes forth to war, fighting in order to secure that peace whereby His title of "Prince of Peace" is justified; and it is His power that will bruise Satan, but the bruising is to be under *our* feet. We give ourselves to Him that He may conquer in and through us.

CHAPTER X

THE TESTS OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT

It is all very well to sit down calmly, and consider, as we have done, the stages of temptation, and

to draw definite conclusions as to the point at which the temptation passes over into sin. Such principles as these are not hard to discover. In fact, as a general rule it is comparatively easy in any matter to arrive at moral principles. If we cannot think them out for ourselves, any handbook of Christian ethics will give them to us, cut and dried.

The real stress and strain in life arises from the difficulty of applying principles to special cases in hand, and it is just this difficulty that is experienced amid the shock of the conflict by many souls, even those who are illuminated by the Holy Ghost.

I. The Test of Common Sense

What practical tests, therefore, can we bring to bear in order to know whether the will has consented? Before entering upon a discussion of them, we can sum up the whole matter by saying that to everything must be applied the test of common sense. At no time are scruples so apt to intrude themselves as when we seek to apply tests to discover whether or not we have sinned; and no spiritual scruple was ever based on common sense. On the contrary, the cherishing of scruples always points to some positive lack of mental balance. Above all things, we are to be reasonable with ourselves. We shall find with ever so little consideration that the laws which apply to the conditions of our ordinary daily life are the laws that must apply to our spiritual life. There will be no danger of perplexing scruples if we apply the same rules to the inquiry concerning sin as we should apply to a question of ordinary human relations, and as dutiful children we must give our heavenly Father credit for as much loving generosity in His dealings with us as we know would be employed by an earthly parent who had ever showed us a tender and loving consideration.

So bearing these things ever in mind, we can proceed to think of the further tests we may apply, to show whether or not we have consented to the devil's temptations.

II. The Test of Doubt

"If you doubt whether you have consented to evil, always take the doubt as a negative."[[1](#)] This is the rule laid down for us by St. Francis de Sales. In it he follows the great spiritual teachers in holding that if sin, especially mortal sin, "is not *more than certain*, you should decide that it does not exist," especially if the conscience is prone to be tender.[[2](#)]

It is a principle of divine, as well as human law, that a man is to be counted innocent until he is proved guilty.[[3](#)] We must give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. This we can do safely, and without scruple, provided we have been ordinarily faithful in the use of the means of spiritual knowledge that God supplies, such as Prayer, Sacraments, etc. We must insist upon this; in the first place, because the nature of the human mind demands it. A thing that the soul really abhors could not possibly find entrance without its certain knowledge. In the second place, because justice requires it. We are bound to exercise justice towards ourselves as well as towards others, and it would be manifestly unjust to regard a man as guilty of a crime so long as the case is involved in reasonable doubt.

The third reason why we must acquit ourselves when doubt exists, is that it is a grave danger to the soul to become accustomed to the idea of committing sin. It is a principle of psychology that it is much easier to perform an action when we have grown used to the thought of it.

A fourth reason is thus expressed by St. Francis in a letter to the famous Angelique Arnauld, Abbess of Port Royal: "If you accuse your soul without just cause, you spoil its courage, and turn it into a mere coward." [4] It is the Christian's duty by every means to encourage his soul and to do nothing to discourage it. The Psalmist gives us repeated examples of this, as for instance, when he cries, "Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me. Put thy trust in God, for I will yet give him thanks which is the help of my countenance and my God." [5] Discouragement has been called "the temptation of temptations." [6]

The soldier would not be tolerated in an army who made it his business to go up and down the lines in the course of the battle discouraging his fellows. We always feel that there is a peculiar meanness about the man who tries to take the heart out of those about him. We must in these spiritual matters, under pain of sin, be as fair to, and as considerate of, our own souls as of the souls of others, for we have no special rights over ourselves in such matters. Our souls are not our own. "All souls are mine," [7] says God, and we wrong Him when we injure any soul.

It does not acquit us to plead, as silly souls are sometimes heard to do, that we are injuring no one but ourselves. In the first place, this is not true. Every hurt we inflict on our souls, every discouragement into which we lead ourselves, is not only a wrong to God, but inflicts a hurt on every soul that is bound up with us in the Communion of Saints. This is just what the Apostle meant when he said, "Whether one member suffer all the members suffer with it." [8]

The care and constant strengthening of our own souls is a part of the obligation laid upon us as our brother's keeper; [9] and we know the curse that fell upon Cain not only for his crime of blood, but in punishment for the far greater crime of refusing to recognize the solidarity of humanity, and the duties that arise therefrom. He murdered one man's body, but who can tell how many souls we have been slaying though weakening our own power to help and rescue them in their hour of conflict.

Even were it true that we injure none but ourselves by injustice to our souls, we are in this case injuring that which belongs, not to ourselves, but to another, namely to God, and He will let no such wrong go unavenged.

Although we are not to accuse ourselves in such cases of doubt, it is well to speak of them to a wise spiritual guide. [10] This will afford us the opportunity of receiving such counsel as will aid us should the particular form of assault be repeated.

It is also a discouragement to the enemy to see that his schemes are thus understood and exposed. He loves ever to work in the dark, and it is a matter of common experience that he often abandons a plan of temptation when he finds it has been detected and discussed by those against whom he has been plotting.

III. Signs of the Soul's Victory

In the course of the struggle there are many circumstances and conditions by which we can test how the battle is going. We shall consider some of these, choosing certain ones which Satan often uses for our discouragement by presenting them to us in a wrong light. It is a favourite device of his to snatch at the very circumstance which a good God, ever tenderly solicitous of our safety, allows for the consolation of His faithful soldiers, and by presenting it from a false point of view, turn it into an occasion of scruple and unnerving anxiety.

(1) Continuance and increased severity of attack is proof that the will has not yielded to the

temptation. An army does not direct its assaults against an enemy who has already surrendered. So rather than be frightened, we should draw comfort from the fact of continued temptation.

"It is a good sign," wrote St. Francis de Sales to Madame de Chantal, "when the enemy storms so lustily at the door; it proves that he is not attaining his end. If he had attained it, he would not clamour any more; he would go in and be satisfied. Keep this in mind so as to avoid scruples."[[11](#)]

But although Satan's fiercer malignance of attack be a sign that the soul has not yielded, it is far from being the kind of sign that justifies our pausing in the struggle. If the tempter uses renewed energy and fierceness in his assaults, the soul, in order that it may continue in safety, must also employ a corresponding increase of energy in bringing into action the increased grace that the Holy Spirit stands always ready to give to those who ask Him. It is just for this that the Blessed Spirit waits upon and presides over the conflict. "Hence gather we this comfort," writes the saintly Andrewes for our consolation, "that the Holy Ghost is not a stander-by as a stranger when we are tempted, *tanquam otiosus spectator*, but He leads us by the hand, and stands by as a faithful assistant."[[12](#)]

(2) A sense of fear that we have consented, or at the thought of the possibility of consenting, is an excellent indication that we are, as yet, free from the sin to which we are being tempted. He who has actually entered into the sin and made it his own by a deliberate operation of his will, has not ordinarily the attitude of fear towards his sin. The act of consent brings a certain complacency with respect to the sin, and a blindness of spiritual vision, which leaves no room for fear, and which is only disturbed by penitence.

"You will not yield to the temptations which you know and fear; for the fear of falling is one of the best gifts of the Holy Spirit. Through that holy fear He arms His servants against danger, and teaches them how to conquer themselves.... If you had no fear I should fear for you.... Fear then, and let your holy fear be lifelong. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always.' But keep that fear within due limits, so that you do not become discouraged and forsake your work; let it rather move you to renewed hope, and more earnest watchfulness, self-mistrust, and confidence in God."[[13](#)]

(3) Grief at the temptation implies, of necessity, that the will is still in a state of opposition to the suggestion. "So long as you are grieved at the temptation, there is nothing to fear, for why does it grieve you save because your will does not consent to it?"[[14](#)] A glance at the nature of grief shows this to be true. Grief is the emotion that arises when we are forced to suffer that which is contrary to the will.[[15](#)]

On the other hand, the absence of grief should rouse us to inquire if our souls be not in a dangerous state of tepidity. If one were seriously to suggest our doing something that would be a marked dishonour to an earthly friend and benefactor, there would be an almost immediate sense of shock and grief that we should be thought capable of such baseness.

There would, in all likelihood, be a sense of disappointment with ourselves that we had given so poor a testimony of our love and loyalty that anyone could think it possible for us to be thus untrue to our friend. So, along with the grief at the presence of the temptation let us make sure that there be a very deep searching of heart to find what there is in our life to encourage the tempter to think we would be untrue to a Father who has loved us with an everlasting love,[[16](#)] and whose tender compassions are renewed to us every morning.[[17](#)]

(4) A consciousness of the existence of temptation is generally a sign that the will has not wholly, at any rate, yielded consent.

The entrance of sin into the soul by consent marks the cessation of struggle, and therefore, when there is still a clear sense of struggle, we are to conclude that as the temptation is still going on we have not yet given full consent. Dom Baker assures us that "A well-minded soul may conclude that

there is in the will a refusal to consent to the suggestion, even in the midst of the greatest disorder thereof, *whilst the combat does not cease*." [18] Those who are wholly unconscious of temptation are too often those who have yielded to the tempter, and he troubles them no more. Those who still feel the pressure of his enmity can thank God and take courage that the devil still counts them worthy of his antagonism.

Says Walter Hilton: "The soul needeth to be ever striving and fighting against the wicked striving of this image of sin, and that he make no accord with them, nor have friendship with them to be pliable to their unlawful biddings, for in so doing he beguileth himself. But verily if he strive with them, he need not be much afraid of consenting, for striving breaketh peace and false accord." [19]

IV. Spiritual Safety, Spiritual Victory

The reader will observe that although we are speaking of the soul being kept from the power of Satan, yet the heading of the foregoing section speaks of the signs, not of the soul's *safety*, but of the soul's *victory*. There is a significance in this choice of words, for in the spiritual combat the soul that is safe is indeed victorious. Herein lies one of the radical differences between the spiritual warfare and any other. In the world's wars an army may be safe from defeat and capture, and yet be far from victorious. But in the spiritual life, to be safe is to be the victor. There are no drawn battles in this warfare. Once the soul has been enlisted in God's army, once it has been signed, and sealed, and has put on the whole armour of God, thenceforth to be safe is to be victorious, not to be conquered is to conquer Satan. So we may seem to be making but little progress, but if we hold fast that which we have no man can take our crown.

This is made quite clear to us in the message of the Spirit to the Seven Churches of Asia. [20] The Church at that time was hard-pressed. The fires of persecution were burning out the dross, and purifying her over against the coming of the Lord. It was a time for longsuffering, for patient waiting until the arm of the Lord should be bared to avenge her of her adversaries. So the Spirit speaks not of Pentecostal achievements; there is no mention of mighty triumphs that the world could see and applaud. It was a patient waiting, finding her strength in sitting still. [21]

What is it under these conditions that God requires? No aggressive plan of advance is outlined; only a patient faithfulness wherein would lie victory and reward. Examine them one by one. Ephesus receives praise of God because "Thou hast borne and hast had patience." Smyrna is only to "Fear none of those things that thou shalt suffer." Pergamos is praised, because "Thou boldest fast My name, and has not denied My faith." To Thyatira it is said, "That which ye have already, hold fast till I come." Sardis has lost somewhat of the heavenly gift, but she will yet be safe if she will but "Strengthen the things that remain." Philadelphia is accounted worthy of great promises because "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word and hast not denied My name." Nor has Laodicea, "neither hot nor cold," over whom the curse is suspended, great things demanded of her. It is only, "Be zealous therefore and repent." Let her only undo her evil and she, too, will have the blessing.

From none of these are great things asked. If they will but hold fast, and in the power of the Spirit let not Satan have the advantage, the grace of God within them will so operate of its own inherent force and activity that each will be counted among those that overcome, and will receive the gracious reward promised to those who are worthy to be ranked among the victors in the Kingdom. What strong consolation is here! What proof of the love and compassion of our God! Only yield not to

Satan, hold fast that which thou hast, and thine shall be a share in the glory of the victorious Son of God.

V. *The Truest Test*

We have considered briefly some of the tests by which we may try ourselves in the battle, but, after all, is it best to engage ourselves in the application of any tests? There are indeed certain strong, God-reliant souls who are not content unless they can thus test themselves. If they believe the Holy Spirit is leading them to this, well and good. Let them follow such a divine call wherever it may take them, for the leading of the Spirit can never be other than a leading of perfect wisdom and perfect love. But doubtless for most of us who desire to serve God in true simplicity, it is far better to place our whole trust in Him, do what we can, lean in childlike faith upon His great love, and not seek to measure our progress on the way.

Such tests may help many, but they should be strictly avoided if they lead to introspection and self-analysis, those deadly foes of true devotion; above all, if they lead to self-satisfaction and pride. If the application of these tests produces mental doubt, distress, and scruple, or vain complacency, take it as a distinct warning from God to let them alone, for in souls of this temperament any such testing of self will cause them to fall by the wayside, or else to fix their eyes so earnestly on the road they are treading that they will lose sight of Him Who is at once their Guide and their Goal. "Let us love Him," says one who knew the love of God very deeply, "without striving to inquire too inquisitively what we are doing for love's sake, so long as we know that our aim is to do all things in and through that love." [22]

Yes, our safety is to keep the love of God warm in our hearts. If this be done, nothing else matters. If we can say, or even have an earnest, honest desire to say, with the pilgrim in Hilton's parable, "I am naught, I can do naught, I have naught, and naught do I desire to have, but only Jesus and His love," [23] this will be the highest test of our spiritual progress; and this love of God increases most when not held down by formal tests and methods. Says St. Bernard, "*Modus diligendi Deum, est diligere sine modo*"; which saying Augustine Baker beautifully paraphrases: "The measure and manner of loving God is to love Him immeasurably and freely, without a prescribed manner." [24]

[1] *Spirit of St. Francis de Sales*, chap. xii.

[2] Gaume, *Manual for Confessors* (Pusey Translation), p. 179.

[3] Gury, *Compend. Theol. Moral.*, II, pp. 278-279.

[4] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, cxiv.

[5] Ps. xliii, 5-6.

[6] St. Francis de Sales, *Letters to Persons in Religion*, p. 141 (Mackey Trans.). This same Saint warns us against discouragement that enters under the guise of humility. Speaking of the virtue of self-mistrust he says: "Your mistrust of self is good, so long as it is the groundwork of confidence in God; but if it ever should lead you to being discouraged, disturbed, vexed, or melancholy, then I entreat you, reject it as the greatest possible temptation, and do not allow your mind to argue or dally with the anxiety or depression to which you are disposed. It is a simple and certain truth that God permits those who seek to serve Him to encounter many difficulties, but also that He never leaves them to sink under the burthen so long as they trust in Him. The great thing you must heed is never to let your mind argue in favour of the temptation to be discouraged, under any pretext whatever, not even under the plausible pretext of humility."—*Spiritual Letters*, cii (Lear Edition).

[7] Ezek. xviii, 4.

[8] 1 Cor. xii, 26.

[9] Gen. iv, 9.

[10] For conditions under which doubtful sins should be mentioned in confession, see Lehmkuhl, II, 317.

[11] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, xi.

[12] Andrewes, *Sermons*, Vol. V, p. 499.

[13] Gaume, *Manual for Confessors* (Pusey Trans.), p. 90.

[14] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, xiii.

[15] Speaking of certain temptations which result from past faults of our own, Dr. Pusey says, "They are suffering, not sin; nay, so long as they are suffering they are not sin."—*Parochial Sermons*, II, 334.

[16] Jer. xxxi, 3.

[17] Lam. iii, 22, 23.

[18] Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 237.

[19] Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II, Pt. 2, chap. iv.

[20] Rev. ii and iii.

[21] Isa. xxx, 7.

[22] St. Francis de Sales, *Spiritual Letters*, xxxvii.

[23] Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection*, Bk. II, Sec. 1, chap. viii.

[24] Baker, *Sancta Sophia*, p. 413.

CHAPTER XI

THE SCHOOL OF THE HOLY GHOST

One of the most precious promises in Holy Scripture which is repeatedly made to the faithful is that they shall be taught of God. "Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle them shall He learn His way." [1] "I will inform thee, and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go; and I will guide thee with Mine eye." [2] "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord"; [3] "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things"; [4] "He will guide you into all truth." [5]

I. *The Teaching of Temptation*

One of the chief courses of instruction in the School of the Holy Spirit is that of temptation. Victory over Satan is a very glorious achievement, but it is only half, and so far as our earthly life is affected, the smaller half, of God's purpose in sending and permitting temptation. He means us in every battle to gain a knowledge of self, a knowledge of our weak points, that realizing them our wills may be incited to co-operate with His to re-enforce them. [6]

(1) One of the first lessons it is needful for us to learn is that when great difficulty is experienced in resisting a temptation we are to regard the point of this particular assault as one that requires strengthening. How wonderfully does the divine wisdom force Satan himself to be our instructor and, in permitting him to buffet us, compel him to proceed according to a principle which teaches the soul its own needs, and so turns to his own undoing, and to the profit of the one who is tempted.

Even when, for the time being, he gains a victory, the same principle holds good. After true penitence has come to make good the breach, how much has the soul learned, how sensitive it is at that particular point, how alert to perceive any renewed attack, how full of a holy desperation that the same disaster come not again.

Satan's desire is to keep us in ignorance of our weakness, and he would persuade the sinner that

his relation with God is at all points what it ought to be. Then, having soothed the soul with the opiate of deception, he would bind us hand and foot. But whatever he may be able to do with those who have submitted themselves to his unholy will, God will not have it so with those who are seeking to be faithful, but forces Satan to act as His messenger to warn us.

"Temptations," it has been said, "are often very profitable to us though they be troublesome and grievous." [[7](#)] We have much to learn in the consideration of this saying. Why should a child of God who is daily and consciously receiving and enjoying the gifts of a loving Father find the direct solicitation to offend Him so difficult to overcome? If one whom we knew to be our enemy should try to persuade us to commit some act that would be a deep dishonour to a loving earthly parent, we should not find it hard to repel the suggestion. More than this, the fact that such a thing had been proposed would instinctively impel us to some immediate word or act of devotion, that would leave no shadow of doubt upon our love and loyalty.

An answer to this question comes from the Holy Ghost in the very temptation that is vexing us, for in it He would teach us two truths:

(1) The first is a very humiliating one, namely, that although our reason recognizes our relation and duty to God, yet somewhere in our nature there is a powerful tendency to choose evil rather than good, the service of Satan rather than the love of God.

The Apostle describes his own experience in his letter to his Roman converts. "That which I do, I allow not," he says, "for what I would, that I do not, but what I hate, that I do.... The good that I would, that I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do." [[8](#)]

Nor need we be in the dark concerning its extent, for the struggle for the right is always grievous in proportion to the strength of the tendency to choose what Satan offers.

(2) Again, when God permits a temptation that is hard to overcome, He is giving us a sign that should teach us that our love for Him is wanting, and that He means us to try by every means to increase it. We ought to be able to act towards God as we do when one whom we love with an earthly love is involved. We read the lives of the Saints, and we see with what ready indignation they rejected Satan's suggestions. It was because their hearts were full of love for God; and when they were asked to dishonour Him, they felt that an indignity had been put upon them, and they rose up against it with all the force of a nature made strong and pure by divine grace.

II. The Bulwark of Love

At the risk of a digression, we must here consider how we can increase our love and acquire that quality in our souls which will enable us to meet with a sense of outrage any persuasion to violate God's will.

The difficulty we experience in repelling Satan points directly to the duty of practising those things which will give us an increase of love and loyalty to God. This is to be accomplished by the execution of some practical resolution which might be framed in this fashion: "I found it hard to refrain from wounding Him; I know, therefore, that my love for God is weaker than I thought. I will therefore this day seek to increase my love in two ways: (1), I will watch for the evidence of His love for me, and will meditate upon it, and upon my unworthiness of it; (2), I will, by His help, force opportunity of doing a definite number of loving acts toward Him and others, that by the practice of love I may increase my love."

Then if we would secure a sure increase of love, we must permit no sort of indefiniteness to enter into the fulfilment of our resolution. It must be carried out with precision.

For our meditation, nothing could be more profitable than to write out with fulness and care the account of some blessing that has come to us through God's love; and by the side of it write a like definite account of some infidelity of ours toward Him. The shame of the contrast, if our hearts be not wholly bad, cannot but drive us to Him with a fuller desire, which will win from Him the gift of a renewed and strengthened love.

The acts, too, must be of the most definite kind. Go out of your way to speak or do some loving thing, offering it, at the time, to God as your work of love to Him. Or it may be some simple act of prayer, such as kneeling with great recollection and deliberation, folding the hands, and lifting the heart in silence for a moment to God, then repeating, very reverently and devoutly, the Lord's Prayer, or some other short devotion. Then, after a pause, add, "Dear Lord, I offer Thee this, to show Thee that I love Thee, and that I want to love Thee more"; or some such little prayer as that of Fenelon's: "Lord, take my heart, for I cannot give it Thee; and when Thou hast it, keep it, for I cannot keep it for Thee; and save me in spite of my sins."

Many a sinner has followed some such simple, child-like method, and God's response has come into his heart with a thrill of awakening love that has startled it with its sweetness and power, and filled him with a keen sense of personal dishonour at ever again wounding the heart of Jesus by parleying even for a moment with the tempter.

III. The Lesson of Humility

The greatest of all lessons the Holy Ghost teaches us is that of humility. Thomas à Kempis shows that one of the special points of profit in temptation lies in the fact that in it "a man is humbled." [[9](#)]

The most necessary virtue the Christian soul must learn is that of humility. When our Lord would give His disciples the chief reason why they should learn of Him, He said it was because, "I am meek and lowly in heart." [[10](#)]

It was a common expression of the Fathers of the Church that humility is the mother and mistress of all virtues, and they loved to see in the etymology of the word (*humus*, earth), the suggestion of the soil under our feet, in which, though often unpleasant and repulsive, all fair flowers and fruits have their root and draw their sustenance.

We have only to consider pride, the vice which is the contrary of humility, to understand what is meant by the statement that without humility no other virtue can exist.

The first of the great virtues, Faith, can certainly not exist along with pride, for it is of the essence of pride to make for self-confidence, as opposed to trust in God or in anyone else besides one's self.

Hope cannot exist, for the true God-ward Hope which constitutes this virtue has in it an element of meekness and patient waiting on God that is incompatible with the presence of pride.

Nor can Love and pride exist in the same heart, for love is necessarily unselfish, and the proud soul is essentially bound up in self.

How then are we to obtain this so necessary virtue of humility? St. Bernard gives us the answer, an answer by no means original with him, however, but which has been the burden of the spiritual masters of every age of the Church. "*Humility is nurtured only by humiliations.*" The soul that constantly rejects that which humiliates can never acquire the virtue of humility, for it is deliberately

refusing to learn the lesson set for it by the Holy Ghost.

Let us not be surprised if God then sets very definite lessons for us in the school of humility. We should not be so foolish as to think we could acquire the knowledge of an earthly trade or profession, without applying ourselves to the lessons set for us. If a young man applied to a lawyer to be allowed to study the law under his direction, he would feel that it was hopeless if the lawyer said: "You need not trouble to work at this thing very much. Just stay around my chambers for a year or so, and you will find yourself a pretty good lawyer." This would not satisfy him. He wants to be told that the law is a jealous mistress, that he must labour long and hard if he would win her honours. His common sense tells him that this is necessary. But, alas, in learning the highest of all knowledge, that of humility, we refuse to use common sense. We think we can acquire it without the lesson of humiliation.

(1) Temptation humbles the soul by showing it the possibilities of its degradation. Satan knows us much better than we know ourselves, and it is not likely that he would solicit us to commit a certain sin unless he saw something in us that encouraged him to think we would, with some persuasion, be willing to do it. Let us be sure that the presence of a special temptation, however it may at the time repel us, is the proof that there is something definite in our nature that would be attracted by this solicitation, if the grace of God were not holding us back. So temptation brings self-knowledge, and self-knowledge is the first degree of humility.

(2) Temptation, by showing us the possibilities of degradation which, but for the grace of God, would become actualities, enables us to exercise the virtue of humility towards others. If we really understand the natural tendency towards what is evil, and that only through the divine mercy are we saved from the worst forms of sin and corruption, it will be impossible to maintain an "Holier than thou" attitude towards others.

"If thou shouldst see another openly sin, or commit some heinous offence, yet oughtest thou not to think the better of thyself, for thou knowest not how long thou shalt be able to stand fast in good. We are all frail, but thou shalt esteem none frailer than thyself."[[11](#)]

This humbling self-knowledge will also produce a train of virtues which will grow out of and at the same time, by their operation, further and deepen, a spirit of humility. Let us consider three of them.

(1) How quick we are to criticise the sin we see in others, but there could be no such arrogance if through Satan's temptations we were daily made to realize what is possible in ourselves. On the contrary, we should be filled with the gentle sympathy that a man feels for one who is in the grip of some dread disease from which he himself has just recovered; and sympathy is always humble.

(2) The sight of the degradation of the world in its sin will fill us with a true gratitude to God that we have so far escaped the peril into which Satan had succeeded in leading others, and true gratitude is necessarily humble because even the smallest exercise of it is, as far as it goes, a recognition of our dependence on another, and pride would be unwilling to admit any such dependence.

(3) There will, in view of sin as it appears in life about us, be awakened a wholesome fear, such as that which seizes upon a man whose companion has been struck down at his side by the sting of a deadly serpent,—a fear that will drive him back in humble dependence on God, and make him realize how utterly powerless he is, of himself, to avoid a like fate.

IV. The Lessons of Consolation

The teaching of the Holy Ghost is not confined to warning us of danger. He has also many lessons of encouragement and consolation for us in the hour of temptation. Certain of these have already been considered, and those that we shall consider now, must be disposed of briefly. Perhaps some of us may take them up at another time as themes for further thought and meditation. Such an exercise would be of great profit, for Satan so constantly seeks to discourage us in the field, that we may be sure that it is the loving will of God to offset this by holding before us always that which will enhearten us, and fill us with somewhat of that "stern joy" of the battle which must ever thrill the true soldier in the discharge of his trust.

(1) Temptation is an advertisement to the soul that it is, at least in some degree, in the grace of God.

To forget this is always a cause of weakness. It is a common thing to hear the complaint, "Something must be wrong with me, or temptation would not come so persistently and in such manifold forms."

To see the fallacy that underlies this complaint, one has only to think of our Lord "in all points tempted like as we are." [[12](#)] No one was ever so beset with temptation as He was, and if constant temptation be a sign of something wrong within, then no one was ever quite so far gone from righteousness as was our Lord Christ Himself. [[13](#)]

Something is indeed wrong, from Satan's point of view, with the soul whom he besets with many snares. He is not satisfied with us. There is altogether too much divine love and power in our hearts to please him, and so he sets the battle in array against us. Surely it is a thankworthy thing, one that must bring great joy, to have the evidence that Satan regards us as his enemy.

Suppose no temptation assailed us,—what a terrible significance this would have! When we went to prayer, or to Communion, or about the commonplace, God-sent duties of the day, what a fearful thing it would be if Satan, observing us, were to reflect that he had no reason to attack us because, do what we might, he was sure that no harm could come to his kingdom through us!

There are men in the world, many of them, indeed, who have no temptations, and who cite the absence of such experience as proof that the Christian teaching concerning the devil and his work is false.

Alas, they know not their own misery, for "never art thou more strongly set upon than when thou believest thou art not at all assaulted." [[14](#)] Satan does not assail them, and in thus refraining he acts on the same principle as does a warring king who lays no siege to a fortress that is already in his possession, whose sometime defenders lie in his dungeons, chained hand and foot.

But as we saw in our first chapter when considering the terms of this warfare, the captivity that such untempted souls are enduring is no idle, passive confinement in some spiritual prison. These worldly souls are the most effective soldiers of him whose very existence and power they deny. He has no reason to unmask himself to them. He "leaves them alone, they are doing his work. The blasphemer is not tempted to blaspheme. Why should he be? He blasphemes already. The unbeliever is not tempted to unbelief,—he has lost his faith. The scoffer is no longer tempted to scoffing,—he scoffs enough already to satisfy even the 'god of this world.'" [[15](#)]

(2) Temptation is also an advertisement to the soul that God has some special mark of His love to bestow at the particular time.

Every occasion of temptation is pregnant with graces and heavenly favours which God has in store for the victor. Calling us forth to the battle is just His way of calling us to lay hold of some increase of strength He has prepared for us.

(3) Great comfort is laid hold of by the soul in contemplating that in temptation God is but

furnishing us the opportunity to carry out His commands,—"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven";[[16](#)] and, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."[[17](#)] Unless such commands are fulfilled there can be no redemption for us. God has done His part and done it perfectly. So far as His work is concerned, He could, when yielding up His soul on the Cross, most truly cry, "It is finished,"[[18](#)] for everything necessary for God to do in order that man might lay hold on salvation was accomplished. But man must have his part. Salvation can come to no soul that does not labour for it, and temptation is the opportunity definitely prepared and presented to us by a loving God that the work of the Cross may not for us have been wrought in vain. Therefore great consolation must come with every assault, and as we feel the weight and thrust of the awful conflict, let us joyfully cry, "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation! Why art thou so heavy, O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me! Look up and lift up your head, for your redemption draweth nigh!"[[19](#)]

(4) The greater and more prolonged the temptation, the greater should be our consolation. The fact that the assault is fierce and persistent gives the blessed assurance that the soul has been faithful in the little temptations. The tempter realizes that if he is to have us at all, it must be at great cost and labour; that we are not going to sell ourselves cheap.

(5) We sometimes hear men complain against God's justice because He permits souls to be so beset by the Evil One; but as a matter of fact his antagonism reassures us on this very point. Temptation is Satan's tribute to the divine justice. He is the Accuser of the brethren, and in tempting us he is acknowledging that he must have something real wherewith to accuse us at the Judgment.

(6) When strange, terrible, and unaccustomed flashes of temptation come, we learn with great joy that the tempter is puzzled concerning us. Our steadfast service of God has baffled him, and he can only experiment with us, as it were, hoping a weak point may by some means be discovered. Such temptations, in many cases, mean that the tempter is working in the dark.

(7) Great comfort must be found in the thought of the victory that awaits us if we are faithful. This should not arise merely from the sense of relief at escaping a fall, but from the happy thought that in every such victory, great or small, Satan is weaker in my life than he was before, and God and His love are stronger. True, great conflicts may be still in store for me, but I have greater strength than ever before for meeting them and overcoming. So while the warfare continues, the soul grows keener for the struggle, and finds greater joy in it, because it realizes its strength, and rejoices, as does every strong man, to use it.

Many other points of consolation may be found in the spiritual combat, but these will suffice to show us how much of joy there is in the active, militant life of the Christian, if we only try to find it.

Let us, then, thank God for temptation, and if it presses us hard, let us rejoice the more, for it is His way of sending us the pledge of our peace with Him, the guerdon of His love.

V. How to Learn our Lessons

How are we going to recognize all these lessons as they are presented by the Spirit? There is hardly time in the thick of the battle to pause to think these things out, as we have done in the quiet hour we have given to the reading of this chapter. The soldier cannot stop to draw calm conclusions, and to study the purpose and effect of tactical movements, when the enemy is thundering at the gate, and all but making his way in.

One simple suggestion may help us. Let us make a practice of studying our past temptations, as soldiers are wont to study the great military campaigns of history in order to learn methods of warfare. Go to some War College and see the eager young officers as they follow a skilled instructor, all poring intently over a diagram of some battle fought and won a century ago. "Here Napoleon made his mistake; there was the movement by which the field was won; that splendid manoeuvre turned the enemy's flank." They study every move, the effect it wrought, whether it failed or succeeded, and why. And thus, combined with their own practice, men learn the art of war.

In some such way let it be with us in the spiritual conflict. The School of the Holy Ghost is a War College in which the campaigns of the armies of God and Satan are to be studied under the guidance of our divine Instructor. How constantly has the Church studied the great campaign prosecuted against Satan by our own great Captain in the wilderness! How much has been learned by the study of His methods of resistance and attack! The lives of the Saints, too, are but studies of military campaigns waged for God.

But perhaps most profitable of all will be the study of our own battles. Under the guidance of the Spirit, go back to some recent temptation, (always excepting scrupulously temptations against faith and purity); study its circumstance, how it arose, if it came through any fault of ours. Did we presumptuously run into occasion of perilous temptation? If not, what occasion did the enemy seize upon for his attack? Was there parleying with him? Did we meet it in the first moment with prayer and acts of faith, hope, love, contrition, and humility, or were these powerful weapons not brought to bear? Through it all, did we strive to keep our lines of communication with our headquarters and our base of supplies open by prayer? Or did we forget who our Leader was and grow panic-stricken? Can we recall the particular point at which downfall began? Or, if there was victory, what prayer, what thought, was it that imparted a sudden strength to the heart, and drove home the thrust that put the enemy to flight? Or what painful pressing on, inch by inch, forced him at last to fly the field? And when we beheld him fleeing, did we secure ourselves, and spike his guns, as it were, by fervent acts of gratitude to God who had given us the victory?

We may not be able to find answers to all these questions, but if in the beginning of such a study, we find only a few, well and good. We shall profit by them, and in the next temptation use the knowledge gained; and so shall we go on, gaining more and more knowledge out of the study of our own experience, and more and more faithfully putting that knowledge to use, until we become skilled and practised campaigners in the wars of the Lord; until, indeed, we become worthy to be enrolled among those of whom the Apostle speaks, "Who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." [[20](#)]

All this while, however, we are not to neglect our study of the spiritual campaigns of others. In the pages of the Bible, in the lives of the Saints and holy men, in their own experiences that they have recorded for us in their spiritual writings, we can find innumerable things with which we can compare, and by which correct, the conclusions of our study of the principles of the warfare.

These are especially valuable when found in the biographies of the great servants of God, for in such records we find the theory actually worked out in the lives of men of like passions with ourselves.

A beautiful illustration of this is recalled from the life of that great champion of the Faith, Bishop Gray of Capetown. When in the midst of his contest with the heretic Colenso, when the Church and the world seemed combined against him, from one of his long wagon-journeys across the lonely African veldt, he writes, "I find great comfort in repeating the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer." What a mighty weapon was that! Have we used it as did this servant of God?

[1] Ps. xxv, 8.

[2] Ps. xxxii, 9.

[3] Isa. liv, 13.

[4] St. John xiv, 26.

[5] St. John xvi, 13.

[6] "One does not arrive at virtue except through knowledge of self and knowledge of Me, which knowledge is more perfectly acquired in time of temptation, because then man knows himself to be nothing, being unable to lift off himself the pains and vexations which he would flee."—St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*, p. 119. (Thorold Trans., London, 1907.)

[7] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[8] Rom. vii, 15 and 19.

[9] *Imitation*, I, xiii.

[10] St. Matt. xi, 29.

[11] *Imitation*, I, ii.

[12] Heb. iv, 15.

[13] St. Luke says, "When the devil had ended every kind of temptation, he departed from Him until a convenient season."—Chap. iv, 13. "He was tempted throughout the forty days, and that what is recorded is merely an illustration of what took place. The enemy tried all his weapons, and was at all points defeated."—Plummer, *Internal. Crit. Comment*, in loc.

[14] St. Jerome, Epistle to Heliodorus.

[15] H. E. Manning, *Sin and its Consequences*, p. 173.

[16] St. Matt. vi, 20.

[17] Phil. ii, 12.

[18] St. John xix, 30.

[19] 2 Cor. vi, 2; Ps. xliii, 5; St. Luke xxi, 28.

[20] Heb. v, 14. The words of the author of the Epistle may be paraphrased somewhat as follows: "Who by reason of the possession of perfected habit have the mental faculties exercised (by a course of spiritual gymnastics), for discriminating between good and evil." See Westcott and Alford *in loc.* St. Macarius, speaking of these spiritual gymnastics, says, "We have need of many and great efforts, of much secret and unseen toil, to be able thoroughly to sift and scrutinize our thoughts, and to exercise the languid senses of the soul to discern both good and evil. We must continually arouse and excite the debilitated members of the soul by a close application of our minds to God."—*Institutes of Christian Perfection*, Bk. I, ch. vii.

CHAPTER XII

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

We may set before ourselves the methods of warfare that lead to spiritual victory; we may study them with all care and prayer; but the weakness of our nature being what it is, we must not expect to go through life without meeting defeat at the hands of the enemy. Even the Saints have not been immune from sin. When St. Paul spoke of sinners, he added, "Of whom I am chief." [1] St. John not only said, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," but he added those terrible words, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar." [2]

A most necessary part, therefore, of our instruction in the school of the soldier is concerning the course we are to follow when we find we have fallen; how we are to find our way back from the captivity; by what means we are to renew our allegiance to our divine Leader.

We all know that the necessary thing is *Repentance*, but it is not everyone who understands what repentance is. In its essence repentance is not an emotion; it is not a mere attitude of mind; it is a work, a serious work, and in many instances a hard work. In this chapter we do not purpose using any special method, scholastic or otherwise, of showing what this work is, or how it should be accomplished. In a simple, perhaps informal way, we shall, as the Holy Ghost may guide us, consider

some of the aspects of the interior spirit we must cultivate if, after a fall, we would by true repentance come back to our loving Father.

I. Hastening to Repent

It will help us if we recall one of the principles we thought of in the beginning of our study, when we were considering the terms and conditions of the warfare. We learned then that any fall into sin, in the measure of its seriousness, means, "not an idle, passive confinement in some spiritual prison, but an active enlistment in the armies of hell to fight against our Lord Jesus Christ."

When we think of this, we shall understand that the first consideration must be the speed with which we must hasten to release ourselves from the horrid bondage into which we have fallen. Two reasons for this haste suggest themselves.

(1) First of all, the soul that desires to love will make all speed in order that God's Name may be relieved of the dishonour that befalls it when one of His family, one called by His name, signed and sealed as His soldier, renounces Him and gives in his allegiance to the Devil. We can brook no delay in such a matter. How keenly sensitive is human honour in like affairs! Let us not think that the divine honour is a duller thing than that indefinable possession men guard as the most sacred of all their moral treasures.

(2) Again, for our own sakes, no time is to be lost in returning to God. Sin is a poison. Every moment the poison remains in the system makes it more difficult to expel. It is absorbed and carried to every part of the body, working wherever it touches with deadly effect. If we should take a poisonous draught by mistake, how instant we should be that we might be rid of it. How much more insistent should we be that the poison whose effects are eternal should not be given time for its deadly work.

It is at this point that Satan's temptation comes in. "What is the use?" he whispers, "you will sin again." So does he try to discourage us, and the soul who thinks only of self is apt to stop and listen. Not so with him whose penitence has its root in love; not so with him who feels keenly that his act has dishonoured a loving, tender Father and Friend. He will not brood over his fall, for he knows that every hour of such weak repining is an hour of added sin. He will sweep the temptation aside, and cry with strong resolution, "I will arise and go to my Father!" For he knows that if he waits, the numbing influence of the poison will creep into heart and will, and that after a time he may have neither desire nor power to repent.

We must not leave this subject, however, without finding a reply to Satan's suggestion,— "It is of no use; you will sin again." Many a soul has been entrapped by it. Many a one, through fear of future failure, has been held back from righting the present wrong. But to yield to such a fear is to commit a special offence against the Holy Ghost. No promise is more constant in Holy Scripture than that if we rise in the strength He will give us, go forward again, and set no special task for ourselves beyond just doing the best we can, He will keep and sustain us. "He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways;"[[3](#)] "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."[[4](#)] "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid;"[[5](#)] "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."[[6](#)]

What completer assurance can we ask of the Holy Spirit than these repeated promises that God will fight for us, defend us on every side, and give us the victory? and he who fears to rise and go

forward in the face of such assurances, is assuming that the Spirit has spoken falsely, or that God will not keep His word.

II. A Tranquil Sorrow

Our penitence, though prompt and swift, must withal be tranquil. True penitence allows no place for excitability.

(1) Because it grasps the truth that our fall was not a matter for surprise. It was only what we are to expect when, failing to use the grace God constantly offers, we venture upon our own strength. The only wonder and surprise should be that we do not fail a hundred times more frequently.

(2) Because surprise at falling indicates pride. We imagined we were strong. In self-righteousness we prided ourselves on our security, and we found that "security is the suburbs of hell." But true penitence knows no such pride, and therefore feels no surprise. The broken and contrite heart is, of necessity, the humble heart; it is the heart that thanks God with wondering gratitude for every hour of faithfulness to Him.

(3) Again, true penitence is tranquil because it is sure of acceptance at the Father's hands. Perturbation in its approach to God would indicate uncertainty of mind as to its reception; and this would mean a lack of trust in His promises. Consider again what the promises are: "Turn unto the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness";[[7](#)] "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God;"[[8](#)] "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out";[[9](#)] "The Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."[[10](#)]

Can the heart desiring to return to the allegiance of our God have any qualm of doubt in the face of such promises? If there is true penitence, rather will it return in a confident peace, knowing with a most assured certainty that "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him."[[11](#)]

(4) The penitent soul turns to the Father in tranquillity because it knows that, though there has been grievous fall, yet all is not lost. He will give it another chance. In the Father's house are many mansions, and He is still preparing a place for us. All the treasures of His Kingdom may yet be ours if we come back in true sorrow. We broke our resolution, we wounded Him again in the same old sin, but He has not given us up. Even while we are wondering how we can ever face Him again, He is starting out on His way to the wilderness to seek the sheep that is lost. The stones of the way cut His Sacred Feet; the thorns and briars of sin tear His Hands as He bends down to extricate the entangled soul; but He cares naught for these if only He can fetch home again His banished one.

We are told that "The Saints are the sinners who kept on trying." They reign in glory to-day not because they were pure from sin, but because when sin entered in they did not forget the Father's tender love, but came back, calm and sure, to the peace of His pardoning embrace.

III. A Spirit of Reparation

A heart that loves, and that has offended the object of its love, naturally longs for opportunity to make reparation. If our return to the divine allegiance after a fall is in the smallest measure sincere,

we shall not have to spur ourselves on to a desire for reparation. It will spring up unbidden, strong and dominant. The heart will be restless and disquieted until opportunity be found.

This desire is not a supernatural gift only. It belongs even to the natural heart of man. We see it showing itself in little children. Mark the child who has offended a loving mother, who has wept out its heart-broken confession on her bosom, and been forgiven and soothed, and sent away restored to the mother's favour. How quick is that little one all day long to watch for and grasp opportunities of responding to her slightest wish. The little heart instinctively longs to make good the wrong of its disobedience. So with the heart that, having sinned against God, has repented. This is one of the best tests of true and godly repentance. If we long to repair the wrong, if we are quick to seize opportunities to honour Him whom our sin had dishonoured, there can be no question that we have sorrowed after a godly sort.

How does God meet this spirit on the part of the penitent?

Here enters the divine Love and says, "My child, you have indeed dishonoured Me in your sin, and wounded and crucified Me afresh. Your love demands an opportunity for reparation and my answering love will give it you. Go forth to this renewed battle; show that you can be a good soldier of the Cross. Fight valiantly that you may win even greater glory for My Name than that which was lost by your failure."

What more can the generous heart ask of God? Suppose when we came to Him in deep sorrow for our fault, He should say to us, "I will pardon you, but never will I give you the opportunity of serving me again. I trusted you once and you failed me. I will not trust you again."

Would our hearts desire heaven on such a condition? I think there is not one of us who would not feel that to stand in His presence among the redeemed on such terms would be the veriest hell. But the love of God deals not thus with sinners. "Though you have failed Me," He says, "I will trust you again. Go forth once more. My grace will make you strong; My love will hedge you round about."

IV. The Work of Amendment

The true test of penitence is amendment of life, but God does not require actual amendment before receiving us back into His service. What He demands is that we have a firm purpose of amendment. No man can say what he will do in the future. The future belongs to God. It may never be ours at all. It is ours at the present moment to make a resolution of amendment, and then to trust in God to fulfil in us this resolve.

From the nature of things we can never arrive at any mathematical demonstration of having amended. On the contrary, it is the invariable experience of those who are striving most earnestly in God's service, that the more they strive the less they think they are accomplishing.

St. Paul did not think when he was persecuting the Church that he was the chief of sinners. But when he had seen the Lord in the way, after he had been rapt to the third heaven, after he had suffered hunger and thirst, cold and nakedness, stripes and imprisonment, for His Name's sake, after he had given up everything that the world counted dear, after men saw he had attained to such sanctity that his name was one of power in all the Churches, then came to him the deep sense that he had accomplished nothing. He thought of himself as the chief of sinners, and counted that he had laid hold of nothing for God; that he must forget the things that were behind and reach forth unto the things that were before if he was to attain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.[[12](#)] Men trembled

at his words of burning rebuke, while he trembled lest having preached to others he himself should be a castaway.[[13](#)]

The experience of the great Apostle is shared by every soul who loves God, and the reason is plain.

The nearer we approach to our Lord, the more vivid is the contrast between our sin-stained souls and His perfect life. In the illumination of His near presence every fault stands out in awful prominence, and though there may not be a tenth of the sin that once filled our lives, our consciousness of it is a hundred-fold increased.

This must be the case if we are vigilant; and Satan finds in this condition much occasion for temptation. Let us illustrate. A certain man has all his life been a slave to the sin of anger. Every day he has been guilty of it. It becomes so common a thing in his life that he sins habitually, forgetting it five minutes afterward. He kept no account with himself. Had he been questioned about it, he could have given no idea of the frequency of the sin. This man is converted. He now fights hard, and maintains a careful watch over himself. Where sin formerly came and went without attracting notice, now every approach of it is keenly felt. At the end of the day he can recall distinctly a half-dozen falls, and he is tempted to think the case is hopeless. But last week there was a score of falls, though he scarcely remembered two of them at the end of the day. Now he remembers thrice that number with terrible vividness. But the increase of consciousness of sin is not the increase of sin. He is amending his life, though quite the contrary *seems* the case.

These considerations show us how untrue, of necessity, must be all our estimates of our progress in amendment. We have no outside point of view from the vantage-ground of which we can form a right judgment.

Therefore God says to the sinner, "Make your resolution in honesty of purpose; commit it to Me; do the best you can; above all things never violate your own conscience; and under no circumstances try to estimate your progress. If you should see that you had advanced, pride and presumption would arise to imperil you; if you could see no progress, the temptation to despair might unnerve you. Commit your ways unto Me; that will bring a man peace at the last."

V. *The Gainsaying of Satan*

We have said that the true test of penitence is amendment of life. We can hardly read this sentence without being conscious of temptation, for it is here that Satan brings in one of his most subtle suggestions. We can hear him taunting the soul: "Is this all you have to depend on for your hope of salvation? Have you ever really amended your life?"

And then with that mysterious power that God has given him for the trial of the Saints, and which he uses so pitilessly, he flashes upon the mirror of the mind old sins, sins of long ago, of which we repented in bitterness and tears, it may be; but which we took again to our hearts time after time. We made our Confession, we said to God in the presence of His priest (for he could not have absolved us without this), "I firmly purpose amendment." Then we went away and sinned again and yet again. After a time we came back to Confession. The same acknowledgment, the same promise,—and then the same old sin again.

Thus has life gone on, year after year, and yet we dare to look to God to take us back to our old allegiance. Satan tells us all this; and it loses nothing in the telling. It is very terrible, and the soul

shrinks back appalled.

Then swift as thought the voice of the tempter comes again: "What is the use? You will sin again; why not give it all up?" Many a soul has followed his counsel to its eternal loss. It sounded plausible. It seemed to fit exactly into our own experience; and yet it was a lie.

It was a lie because in all that he said the tempter was deceiving us as to the true meaning of amendment. Satan's knowledge of what perfection is, is a very strange and wonderful thing. An angel from heaven could not set up a higher standard than he is able to do when he is seeking to discourage a struggling soul. *Amendment does not mean perfection of life; it does not mean never committing some particular sin again.* This was not what we resolved; it was not what we told God we purposed doing. What amendment does mean is, "*to change for the better.*"[14] This is to be the spirit and resolution with which we return from the captivity of sin. It is all God asks.

But the tempter is not yet vanquished. Quick comes the whisper in the soul,—"Have you done even this? Has there been a change in your life for the better? Have you any assurance that your life is in the smallest degree better than it was a year ago?"

Staggering questions these, to the soul that is ignorant; but the soul that is wise, the soul that is really under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has its answer ready.

"I do not know whether I have done this or not. I know not if my life is changed for the better, or if I am living more as Christ would have me live than I did a year ago. Moreover, I am not concerned to give you, God's enemy and mine, any answer to these questions. I have no account to render to you. But one thing I know; when I sin I can come back to Him. I kneel at His feet, I put my hands in His, I look up into those eyes brimming with love, and I say, 'Dear Lord, here is my poor heart all full of sin again; I lay it at Thy feet. Wash it in Thy Precious Blood, and make me strong to serve Thee better. I am sorry and I purpose to amend, but I am weak. Be Thou my strength; fight Thou against them that fight against me, and let me be the victor in the end.' I speak thus to Him, and leave it all with Him. I sin again, and again I come and kneel at His feet; and though I have to come daily to Him with the same burden, His embrace is never less tender, His words not less sweet, His eyes are ever full of the same old love.

"Am I amending my life? I know not,—He knows. Is my soul a saintlier thing than it was a year ago? I know not,—He knows. All I know is that I love Him, and I want to love Him more; and that when I think on Him my heart is at peace."

[1] 1 Tim. i, 15.

[2] 1 St. John i, 8 and 10.

[3] Ps. xci, 11.

[4] St. Luke xii, 32.

[5] St. John xiv, 27.

[6] Heb. xiii, 5.

[7] Joel ii, 13.

[8] Dan. ix, 9, 10.

[9] St. John vi, 37.

[10] 1 St. John i, 7.

[11] Ps. ciii, 17.

[12] Phil. iii, 13-14.

[13] 1 Cor. ix, 27.

[14] *Vid.* Webster.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GROUND FOR CHRISTIAN COURAGE

In His instructions to His disciples, while not hiding from them what were to be the hardships and, as the world counts it, loss, that must accompany His service, our Lord was ever full of words of encouragement. He strove always to show them that while the following of Him was not what the natural heart would look for as a flowery path, yet, if understood aright, His yoke was easy and His burden light, and that those who bore it would find rest for their souls.[1]

Particularly in His last discourse to them He sets forth repeated words of encouragement. Twice He used those words of tender assurance, "Let not your heart be troubled," adding, "Neither let it be afraid." [2] Four times He declares in substance, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do." [3] He assures them that He Himself will be diligent in praying the Father for them that the Blessed Comforter may abide with them forever.[4] He declares that if they will but abide in Him, they will be able to bring forth eternal fruit of victory.[5] Sorrow indeed shall be theirs, but "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy," a joy that "may be full," a joy that "no man taketh from you." [6] And the great discourse concludes with a pledge of their final victory,—words of lofty encouragement that should ever be in the hearts of His soldiers, sustaining in them the spirit of a divine valour: "These things I have spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." [7]

Let us therefore, as the final study we are to make of the conditions and progress of our spiritual warfare, consider the grounds we have for encouragement at every stage of the battle.

I. Members One of Another

The Church of God, "the Body of Christ," [8] as St. Paul repeatedly calls it, which is "the blessed company of all faithful people," is a living organism. When the Apostle says it is "the Body of Christ," and speaks of us as members of that Body, he means that the members bear the same relation to every other member as, for example, my hands and my feet, members of my physical body, bear to each other; and that all are partakers of the one life which flows through the whole Body and which constitutes it what it is. The effect of all this he sets forth in a brief saying: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." [9] When my hand is diseased my whole body is sick; and when health and strength return to it again, my whole body rejoices in that healing.

If we keep this principle in mind, the tempter will be powerless to discourage us in the conflict. Rather will our hearts be ever full of high hope, which will carry us rejoicing through the darkest hour of the conflict.

Think of our share in every prayer and good work that is being offered to God anywhere to-day in all the world. Think of the Eucharists in which we share. As the sun follows its course, and looks with each revolving day upon a million altars whose fires ring the world, it looks upon nothing in which I have not my part. Think how many times this day the cry has sounded forth, "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church Militant!" With each exhortation there ascended to God a prayer for me, that my soul might be strong, that I might be victor in the end. The great Sacrifice of the Altar is

lifted up, and it is for me; and whatever grace comes to those far-off souls of priest and people through their faithful performance of that duty, comes also to me. No grace can enter their souls without flowing on to mine; they could not be lifted up to a higher and godlier plane of life without drawing me up with them.

Little do we dream of the power of the unknown prayers of God's people. This very day Satan may have planned some deadly snare in which to entrap my feet; and the snare, it may be, was broken and swept from my path through the power of a simple prayer for tempted souls, offered this morning by a little child half-way round the world.

Picture a man walking on a dark night along a lonely mountain trail. A deadly viper lies across his path. He steps across the venomous thing; it coils and strikes,—just a moment too late! The traveller passes on, never to know the danger he was in. So with us in our journey through life. We may never know the hidden dangers; we may never know the grace that came through the prayer or good works of some far-off soul, that saved us. But what courage does the thought infuse! I had thought myself alone on this far outpost of temptation. I knew not how my soul could be reinforced by my comrades in the strife. But the help came. I was made strong; and that which might have been a grievous and hurtful battle was to me an easy victory.

Such is the power of intercession,—here a heart lifted up to God, yonder a soul made strong; here a spirit wrestling with Him, yonder a crown of victory won.

"The weary ones had rest, the sick had joy that day
And wondered how.

The ploughman, singing at his work, had prayed,
'God help them now.'

"Alone in foreign lands, they wondered how
Their feeble word had power.

At home the Christians, two or three, had met
To pray an hour.

"So we are always wondering, wondering long
Because we do not see

Some one, unknown perhaps, and far away,
On bended knee."

II. The Church's Treasury of Grace

Since, then, no soul in the Church of God, whether in this world or beyond, can increase in grace without that same grace flowing also into my soul and helping me, the recollection of the Communion

of Saints and the vast treasury of spiritual power upon which I can continually draw must be a never-failing source of hope and courage.

I may be far from the state of spiritual perfection that constitutes what the Church calls a Saint, but no gift of grace is ever laid hold upon by a Saint in which I do not have a share. The gifts of God, in whatever form they may come, and upon whomsoever they may be directly bestowed, are "for the edifying of the Body of Christ,"[[10](#)] for the enriching of every member thereof.

Nor do these graces operate but for a little time, and then lose their activity. Once the grace of God is set in operation, it goes on forever. The sanctity of the Saints moves on through the ages. The Church to-day is strong with the strength which long labour and faithfulness won for the Apostles and Prophets, the Confessors, the Martyrs, the Virgins. The grace bestowed upon St. John in his earthly life still holds its place in the Body of Christ, and so long as I am in that Body that very grace which was given to him helps me, and is a part of the defence of my soul in the hour of battle, if I will only rise up to use what God is offering me.

More wonderful than this, however, is the relation of the Saints in glory to my soul. Not only am I helped by the grace they received in their earthly pilgrimage, but every access of glory given them in their heavenly life is a like increase of grace to every member of the same Body of which I am a part, and so an added help to me.

Thus wondrously does the law of divine grace work. When the Saints on earth go on from strength to strength, their strength flows into me; when the Saints in heaven pass, in their unceasing progress, from glory to glory, I again am made the beneficiary of what is given them.

All this, however, operates on one condition. Am I keeping the channels open through which the life and strength of the Body flow into the members? If I bind fast a member of my body with a cord the circulation ceases, and strength and life begin to ebb in that member. If I permit myself, a member of the Body of Christ, to be bound with a cord of sin, the circulation of the divine life and grace is cut off from me, and grace begins to fail, strength is reduced, and spiritual death will ensue, unless by penitence I cut the cord and let the life-blood flow freely once again.

Prayer and faithfulness in the use of what I already have will keep the channels open. Every cry of my soul to God, every effort to do His will, every resistance of the Evil One, produces a stronger, more vigorous circulation in the Body, that makes my strength greater, my life richer, with the communication of all that the Body of Christ possesses for the edifying of its members.

III. God's Interest in Our Victory

There is among men to-day a wide-spread notion of Christianity that bases everything upon a spirit of utter selfishness. It tells me to think always of my own soul; that if I find a reasonable assurance that this soul of mine will in the end "be saved," I need give no thought to further service of God. In short it is a strange and monstrous belief that teaches me to look out for myself, to serve God for just what I can get out of Him, to drive as shrewd a bargain with Him as I can, and win heaven on as cheap terms as is in any way possible. It is a Christianity, falsely so called, that leaves out of consideration the most important fact of all, namely, that God has an infinite interest in me and my victory, because His first relation to me is that of a tender, loving Father whose heart yearns over me, who loves me with an everlasting love.[[11](#)]

When I think of this, I can understand how strong an encouragement I can draw from the

consideration of His interest in the issue of the battle to which He calls me. My victory involves the destiny of my soul, but the destiny of my soul involves the eternal honour of God.

(1) Our Lord has gone to prepare a place for me. This place is awaiting me, a place in the heavenly choirs among those whose eternal occupation is to serve God day and night in His temple. What that service is in its nature and detail I know not. But one thing I know; that so deeply is it bound up with the divine interest and honour, that God counted it worth while to sacrifice the life of His eternal Son, amid the torments of the Cross, in order to win me for that service. There is the place awaiting me; the heavenly ranks are not full; the heavenly task is not yet done: a rift is in the heavenly praises, a hand wanting in the work, until I come thither to have my part among those who are counted worthy of the eternal rest of Paradise, but who nevertheless rest not day nor night from His perfect service.

When I think of all this, I see that my relation to God cannot be a selfish one. God has infinitely more at stake than I have; my victory is infinitely more to His interest than it is to mine, just because He is so infinitely greater than His creature. Seeing that this is so, we can understand how mightily He will strive to give us the victory. No matter what undreamed of gifts of grace are needed, He stands ready to bestow them. Having given such infinite hostages already to make sure of us, nothing can be too great with which to equip us if it be necessary to our victory; for the victory is bound up in the bundle of life with the everlasting honour of the Godhead. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things."[[12](#)]

(2) Time and again in Holy Scripture does the Holy Ghost lead the inspired authors to call upon God for help and deliverance "for His Name's sake." The expression is so common that we pass it over too often, as though it were a mere adjuration which, like many that find their way into human speech, has no real significance. But the Holy Spirit never uses language in this meaningless fashion, and a few moments' consideration will show us how definite and deep a meaning there is in this expression used so constantly in Holy Writ.

It means nothing less than that our pardon, our deliverance, or whatever it is that is being asked "for His Name's sake," involves the honour of the Divine Name. God's Name is dishonoured among men whenever a Christian sins. A simple illustration will show us how this is. A son leaves the paternal roof; he goes out into the world and disgraces himself. How quickly do men say, "This man did not have the proper, honest training; his parents must have been indeed careless of his bringing-up, since he has turned out so badly." Here we find the father's good name being spoken against because of the sins of the son. Is not the like thing being constantly said of our Heavenly Father because of the sins of His children? A Christian is guilty of some dishonest, or mean, or selfish act. He is known to the world as a Christian man, and how often have we heard it said, "Well, if he is what you call a Christian, I do not care to be one." Thus is God's Name dishonoured and blasphemed among men, through the sins of His children. He and the power of His Gospel are held to be of small account because those who confess Him fail to be faithful to Him. Well did the Spirit inspire the holy men of old to pray for deliverance for the sake of His Holy Name, that it might not, through their failure, be brought into disrepute.

So in the time of temptation the Psalmist cries, "Save me, O God, for Thy Name's sake;"[[13](#)] and when he fails, his prayer is "For Thy Name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity."[[14](#)] Realizing his sins, he asks for forgiveness, but with no selfish motive. He thought not of his own salvation alone. It was the honour of his Father's Name that he had at heart, and so he asked for pardon lest his sins should give the enemy occasion to blaspheme.

Nor is it only for deliverance that the Psalmist prays. His sins being forgiven, he knows that he

cannot walk in the paths of righteousness save through the divine guiding, and that if his feet wander from the way, again will that Name be dishonoured. And so he cries, "For Thy Name's sake, lead me and guide me";[[15](#)] and again desiring more and more of the divine life of the Spirit, he cries, "Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy Name's sake."[[16](#)]

The lesson for our encouragement is clear. So jealous is God of His own Name, so deeply dishonoured is that Name whenever we sin, that the Spirit again and again, in teaching us to pray against the devil, tells us to plead with God on this very basis. When His Name is involved God will rise in His might, and come to our help with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm. Even if His mighty love were not a motive force, we can trust Him to care for His own good Name, to do His utmost to save us, since the fall of one who is called by His Name will lay His honour in the dust.

(3) Again, consider what is the meaning of each particular defeat to God. Every baptized soul is a point on the far-flung battle line of the Church Militant; every baptized soul is His soldier, made in His image and sealed with His Sign of adoption, and set to defend a definite point in the front of God's army. Is it nothing to Him that such a soul be beaten down by the foe? Is it nothing to Him that His divine image be marred and denied with the marks of the Fiend, and that he who bears it be dragged away a captive of hell?

Unless all revelation concerning His love be false, even the smallest defeat in the battle is to God something at which the imagination staggers when it seeks to grasp it. What would a loving earthly father think to see his beloved child torn from his bosom, and carried away into the power of a savage enemy, consigned to untold and eternal woe? Would he take it philosophically, dismissing the whole affair from his mind after a time, justifying himself that this dread calamity came by the child's fault, and was the result of its own disobedience? And is our heavenly Father less loving, less tender, of His children, than an earthly father? True, suffering in any human sense, cannot touch the Godhead, but there must be some awful and mysterious thing which human thought can never fathom, and which we dare not seek to understand, that enters, as it were, into the Godhead when souls fail and are lost; or else the Holy Spirit could never have inspired the Apostle to reveal concerning the risen, ascended, and glorified God-Incarnate, that in our surrender to Satan there is a crucifying of Him afresh.[[17](#)]

Where then have we warrant for discouragement? When Satan sets the battle in array against my soul, I am not alone. The call to arms rings through all heaven. The Lord Christ Himself goes forth to war in the unconquerable might of His Sacred Humanity. Angels and archangels, and all the glorious company of heaven, spring forward to action. The great multitude which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues, that stand before the throne and before the Lamb, war for me in the might of their ceaseless intercession; and as the vast and splendid front of the armies of the living God sweep on to the conflict, my soul is caught up in the mighty movement and advance, and their spirit becomes my spirit, as we go forth, conquering and to conquer, in God's behalf and mine.

[1] St. Matt. xi, 29-30.

[2] St. John xiv, 1 and 27.

[3] St. John xiv, 13; xv, 7 and 16; xvi, 23 and 24.

[4] St. John xiv, 16.

[5] St. John xv, 16.

[6] St. John xvi, 20, 22, and 24.

[7] St. John xvi, 33.

[8] "Now ye are the Body of Christ, and members in particular."—1 Cor. xii, 27. See also Rom. xii, 5; Eph. i, 23; iv, 12; and v, 23

and 30; Col. i, 24.

[9] 1 Cor. xii, 26.

[10] Eph. iv, 12.

[11] Jer. xxxi, 3.

[12] Rom. viii, 32.

[13] Ps. liv, 1.

[14] Ps. xxv, 11.

[15] Ps. xxxi, 3.

[16] Ps. cxliii, 11.

[17] Heb. vi, 6.