

ABSTINENCE FROM MEAT.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XVII.

SIXTH COMMANDMENT OF THE CHURCH.

Fridays and Ember-days Flesh You shall not Taste.

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413. *It is not Food that gives Health.* -

Persons who have not the happiness of having religion, never fail to find a thousand pretexts for dispensing with the laws of abstinence; they especially plead their health and imagine that abstaining from meat is injurious to them. But, my friends, it is not the food in itself that gives or preserves health, it is the Blessing that God bestows upon it. I find a proof of this in the story of Daniel and his companions. Nabuchodonozor, (or Nebuchadnezzar, as it is sometimes spelt), king of Babylon, having destroyed the city of Jerusalem and carried all the Jews into captivity, ordered one of his officers, named Malazar, to take from amongst the children of Israel, and the race of kings and princes, young men who united beauty to wisdom and knowledge, that they might dwell in the king's palace, and they were to be taught the language of the Chaldeans. Nabuchodonozor ordered, moreover, that they should be served every

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day with the meats that were set before him and the wine he drank himself, so that having been nourished for three years in this way, they might afterwards present themselves and dwell in the prince's presence. There were four of them there who were children of Juda, namely: Daniel, Ananias, Misael, and Azarias, who were called Balthazar, Sidrach, Misach, and Abednego. Now Daniel made a firm resolve in his heart not to defile himself by eating or drinking what came from the king's table. He went about it so well that he obtained that favour of Malazar, who had been charged with the care of their food. That officer tried them for ten days, in order to see whether, giving them only vegetables to eat and water to drink, as they requested, they would not become thinner. The ten days being past, they appeared much better and in better condition than the young people who eat the king's meats. Malazar then kept for himself the meats and the wine allowed for them, and served them only with vegetables. Now God gave those young people the science and the knowledge of all books and of all wisdom, and He bestowed on Daniel in particular the understanding of all visions and of all dreams. After such great advantages from temperance, who would not prize that virtue which is favoured by God with gifts so great?

- *Daniel*, Chap. 1.

414. *Reflections of a Physician on Friday.* -

Never forget, children, that the greatest enemy of virtue and duty is human respect; people do not dare to

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act differently from others, and hence it is that when they have neither firmness, nor resolution, they allow themselves to be drawn into this weakness. Happily every one is not, so. A celebrated physician, who was, at the same time, a great naturalist, was invited to dine at M. Buffon's. There were at dinner some philosophers, still more famous for the incredulity they made show of, than for their knowledge of mathematics or *belles lettres*. It was on Friday, and the host, who had, perhaps, forgotten that it was, at that time, a day of

abstinence, had only meat soup served in the first course. The Christian doctor took none, and was determined to wait for the desert, even, sooner than violate the rules of abstinence. Most of the guests perceived this, and many of them knew the cause. Amongst these was Diderot, unhappily so well known for his hatred to religion. He first put this question to the doctor: "Doctor, why do you not eat?" and he immediately added with a mocking smile: "Is it because to-day is Friday, and that you see nothing here you can eat? Now, do you really think that flesh meat is not so good on some days as on others?" -- "Yes, Sir," answered the physician; "yes, I am satisfied that flesh meat is injurious, every day on which the Church has seen fit to prohibit its use; I am a physician and a Christian, and am, therefore, more capable of judging than others who are, perhaps, neither one nor the other." This modest and courageous answer produced its effect. Buffon called his butler, and told him in a low voice

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to remove the dishes, and to serve no meats in the second course. It was done accordingly, and Diderot was not the last to applaud it, for we cannot help admiring a generous, upright man, even when his conduct is a reproach to ours.

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 293.

415. *What goes into the Mouth Defiles not the Soul.* -

I have sometimes heard, and, perhaps, you may have heard yourselves, too, children, persons pretending to justify the violation of the holy law of abstinence, saying in a tone of levity: "What use is it to impose such privations on one's self? What goes into the month defiles not the soul." Well! it is a king of France, Louis XVI. himself, who is about to answer them. From the time of Louis XV., a prince who was generally rather unscrupulous, it had been customary at the court of Versailles to serve both fish and flesh on days of abstinence, when there was a grand hunt. The pious king Louis XVI. had no sooner come to the throne than he hastened to reform this scandalous abuse. An old officer was heard to complain, and did not fail to quote the saying of Our Lord Himself (Mt. 15:11) that - *What goes into the mouth does not defile the soul.*

He thought himself dispensed by this famous axiom from following the rule which the Church imposes on all her children at that time. "No, Sir," replied the king, vehemently, "it is not precisely eating the meat that defiles the soul and renders it guilty, but it is the revolt against a lawful authority, and the violation of one of its formal precepts; it then remains to ascertain

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whether Christ gave to His Church the power of giving commandments to her children, and whether He ordered the latter to obey them. The catechism assures us that He did; and since you read the Gospel you ought to know that Our Lord somewhere (Mt. 18:17) says: *Whosoever hears not the Church, let him be unto you as the heathen and the publican.* Now, Sir, I am of opinion that neither you, nor any one here present, would wish to be considered in that light." These words, coming from the mouth of a prince, and a prince who practised so well what he said, produced all the effect that might be expected. There was no talk of eating meat even after the chase on days of abstinence.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Educ.*, I, 5.

416. *A New Communicant's Friday.* -

In the town of Avignon in France there was a child who was about to make his first communion. The parents of this child were not very religious; like many others now-a-days, they did not observe the laws of the Church, and, what is unhappily too common, every one in the house followed their bad example. The child's confessor explaining to him the danger there was for him in following an example so pernicious, and the real sin he committed thereby, forbade him to imitate his parents and ordered him to observe the abstinence prescribed by the Church. When the following Friday came the pious child, docile to the advice of his confessor, refused to eat meat. The father was angry with him, and said: "See that you obey me and do as I do myself."

-- "Father," said the sweet child

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mildly, "give me whatever orders you please; in all that is not contrary to the law of God, I will always obey you; but if I obeyed you in this, I should have to violate that law, and I cannot do it." The father became furious; he began to swear at his son and threaten him, but the child still answered with the same mildness: "Father, you order me to do what the Church forbids, I cannot obey you." Then the father's fury was at its height, he ordered his son to go to his room, not to leave it, and to eat or drink nothing but dry bread and water. The child instantly obeyed. Soon after, the father was obliged to go out on business. The mother, who had no more piety than the father, but loved her son very tenderly, took the opportunity to go in haste to the child's room with some little delicacies for him to eat. "My dear," said she, "your father is gone out, so I have brought you something to eat."

-- "Thank you, mamma," the child replied, "but my father forbids me to take anything but bread and water; his prohibition is not contrary to the law of God, and I will obey him; mamma, I cannot accept what you have been so kind as to bring me." These words of the child made a lively impression on the mother. Her heart was torn; she went away in tears, and hastened to tell her husband what had passed. The father could not withstand the sight of this so wise and Christian conduct on the part of his son; his harshness was overcome. He sent for the child and, with tears in his eyes, clasped him in his arms, saying:

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"My son, not only will we not force you to eat meat on Fridays, but from this day forth we will give you no more the bad example we have heretofore given you; we will abstain from meat ourselves on days when the use of it is forbidden." The father kept his word, and ever after the whole family observed the laws of the Church. Beloved children there is an example you ought to imitate, if your parents were so unhappy as to require of you things contrary to the law of God.

- *Etrennes a la Jeunesse Chret., Annees 1852-63.*

417. *Abstinence of a Little Mulatto.* -

You are very young, my little friends, but there are little children, perhaps, still younger than you who might serve you as models. Here is a proof of this: On account of the excessive heat which reigns under the torrid zone, many children of the Christian School of St. Denis, in the Isle of Bourbon or Reunion, take their midday meal under the banana trees and the noble date tree that shade the yard of the establishment. For most of the children this was their first meal of the day, though more recently the Brothers began issuing an earlier morning meal to enable their students to be more alert and refreshed at their lessons. Some years ago, on a day of abstinence, a very young child of the infant class, named Ernest Laviron, gave a fine example of fidelity to the laws of the Church. He had received, as usual, his large plate of rice, for there are few besides the Europeans who use bread at their meals; for the other inhabitants, boiled rice takes its place. So Ernest receives his plate of rice, over a part of which was poured some curry sauce; but this sauce was prepared with grease, and the child had heard in the Reflection which the Brother made in the morning

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prayer, as is usual in the Christian Schools, that it was a day of abstinence. He sends away his breakfast, then, without touching it, thinking, poor child, that he could not eat his rice because the curry sauce was over the top of it. About three o'clock in the afternoon Ernest goes up to the Brother; he found himself growing very weak, "Ah! dear Brother," said he, in his simple language, "the heart of me is weak." As the Brother was but lately arrived in the colony, he did not understand what he meant, and asked him to explain himself; then he said: "Me has not eaten since yesterday, and me have the heart weak." -- "How! it is three o'clock, and you have eaten nothing! Did they, then, bring you no breakfast, my child?" -- "Yes, but as my rice was mixed with fat, me sent it all to the house; you said in the Reflection that to-day, a Friday Ember-day, one must not eat meat." The Brother admired the fidelity of the dear child, who might easily have put the sauce to one side and eaten his rice, as he then made him understand, but, through delicacy of conscience, he had preferred to remain fasting, rather than expose himself to transgress the commandment - "Fridays and Ember-days flesh you shall not taste." The Brother got him something to eat, and the good Ernest went gaily back to his class.

- *Recomp. Hebdom.*, No. XXXIX, p. 12.