

SINS, MORTAL AND VENIAL.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON VIRTUE AND VICE.

III. - ON MORTAL SIN.

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430. *What a Horror St. Louis had of Mortal Sin.* -

None of you is unaware, my young friends, that Louis IX. was one of the greatest kings that France has had. But what is most to be admired in his life is that sublime virtue which he knew so well how to practice, notwithstanding the bustle of government and the dangers of the court. One thing must also be admitted, that St. Louis was fortunate in having for a mother the pious Blanche of Castile, who applied herself in a very particular manner to impress deeply on his soul the principles of religion. Amongst the instructions she gave him, she often told him: "My son, you know and God also knows how much I love you; nevertheless, I would rather see you dead at my feet than know you to be guilty of one mortal sin."

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This great king remembered all his life these wise lessons of his mother. One day, I think it was on board the vessel that was taking him to the Holy Land, he asked the Sire de Joinville, his friend, his confidant, and his historian, whether he would rather be a leper or have committed a mortal sin. "By my faith, sire," said he simply and without hesitation, "I would much rather be guilty of thirty mortal sins than be covered with leprosy." - "Poor seneschal!" answered St. Louis, his eyes filling with tears of pity, "it is easily seen that you know not what it is to offend God!" Full of these sentiments till his last hour he did all he could to inspire them in the souls of his children. Thus, in the instruction he left as a will, to Philip the Bold, his eldest son, he especially recommended to him to avoid sin. "My son," said he, "beware of offending God, were you even to suffer the greatest torments in the world." Oh! how desirable it would be, children, if the sentiments of that pure and perfect soul were ours even in a small degree!

- *Life of St. Louis.*

431. *One Single Mortal Sin!* -

One mortal sin suffices to give death to the soul; alas! my very dear children, there are millions of the damned in hell who committed no more, or so many of our spiritual writers have come to believe. Listen: A young scholar named Hugh passed for a model of wisdom and piety; he frequented the sacraments and did so in an edifying manner. As he was going to church one Sunday morning, to perform his usual devotions, he had the misfortune to meet two of his comrades,

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who were not near as virtuous as himself. They invited him to breakfast with them in one of those houses which are the resort of idleness, and too often even the school of libertinism. He at first loudly protested against going in. They insisted, but he remained firm. They used some degree of violence; he at last went in like Alipus into the amphitheatre, that is to say, he went less than he was dragged in (see paragraph 504). They sat down to table; he drank at first by force; little by little he began to like it. His reason imperceptibly

abandoned him. In this unhappy state, he unfortunately committed what has to be objectively considered a mortal sin. One can argue that now without full consent, young Hugh was not guilty of the terrible sin, at least subjectively considered. But behold what followed! And see, dear friends, how terrible and awe-inspiring are the judgements of God, how impenetrable His ways! The unfortunate young man is surprised by death; he expired, as if stabbed to the heart, at the very moment when he had committed his sin. His two wretched companions, terrified by a death so tragic, renounced the world, retired into a most austere religious order, there to devote themselves to all the rigors of a penitential life, and to bewail to the end of their days a death so deplorable, the result of their perfidious counsels. Their hope was that the good and merciful God would shower his graces on this poor sinner whose final moments stood in such sharp contrast to the rest of his life. They recalled with hope the words of the Lord that it was not for them to judge or condemn, as no one could know what transpired in the hidden recesses of young Hugh's heart in his last dying moments. Perhaps the good Lord would accept their own repentant and reformed lives as partial expiation for such a great sin.

- DEBUSSI, *Nouv. Mois de Marie*, 52.

432. *The Prayer of a Child Twelve Years Old.* - "I would rather die than offend God mortally." -

It is such a painful thing to be in a state of mortal sin, dear children, that we should rather prefer death as once was asked for by a young person, scarcely twelve years old. She had made an excellent first communion; that year she had had the devotion to go to confession before the feast of the Blessed Sacrament. After her confession, the

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Missionary Father to whom she had gone said to her:

"My dear child, I think that, by God's mercy, you are pleasing to Him; but you are young, and this country is full of dangers for virtue. Who knows whether you may continue as you are, or whether you may not one day mortally offend the good God? I confess that thought makes me tremble for you."

-- "Fear not, Father," replied the young Mary, "I would rather die than offend God mortally."

-- "If that be so, my daughter, I advise you to ask the Blessed Virgin that she may obtain for you the grace to die rather than offend God mortally."

Instantly turning towards an image of the Blessed Virgin, that was in the Father's oratory, the child fell prostrate on the ground to honour the Mother of God; she prayed a moment, then said to the missionary:

- "Father, I hope my holy mother will hear me." She went away very glad, and the Father much edified.

Some days after, she got a little swelling in her cheek. The pious girl offered her small suffering to unite herself with her loving, suffering Saviour. The thought made her very happy. It was thought at first that such a trifling ailment could have no fatal effect; but it soon turned into a malignant cancer, which, in less than twenty days, eat away one whole cheek, one eye, the half of the nose, the half of the mouth and of the tongue.

She endured all this with angelic constancy, and died full of joy, persuaded that her death was the effect of the goodness of God, who vouch-safed to snatch her from the dangers of the world and secure her salvation.

She now longed to be with Our Lord and be filled with the joys of Paradise and the Beatific Vision. A little while before she expired, her aunt, struck with a virtue so extraordinary, took a notion to recommend herself to her prayers.

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The young Mary said nothing, but her aunt saw that she had obtained more than she at first wanted. In fact, that good woman began to lead a new life, and although she was of a strong robust constitution, she found herself longing for the joys of the eternal bliss of Heaven. She now desired to serve the good God in whatever way He chose. Unexpectedly, she died herself in the course of the year but met her death in great peace and tranquility as her co-operation with the ineffable Will of her Heavenly Father.

- REYRE *Anc. Chret.*, 244.

433. *I Have Lost the Grace of My God!* -

I heard a story told at a retreat, in 1858, of a young man named Eugene, who well understood the misfortune it is to be guilty of a mortal sin. This poor lad had not had, like you, my dear friends, the advantage of a good education; he was badly brought up, and had received no principles in his early years. After having lived badly for some time, he had the happiness of meeting a good confessor, who drew him out of that sad state and put him in the way of salvation. Eugene was faithful for several months; he courageously withstood all the bad example of some wicked comrades, who endeavoured to draw him again into sin. One day, however, after having again resisted courageously Eugene had the misfortune to give way, and he committed a grave fault. No sooner did he perceive that he had lost the grace of his God, than he began to weep and sob with his whole heart. "My God!" said he, "I have lost Your grace, - I am in a state of mortal sin! - If I remain in this state, I shall be eternally damned! But I will get out of it, and to that end I promise You, yes, I swear to go to confession to the first priest I meet." He arose like the prodigal child and went in search of a priest. An hour after Eugene

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had been to confession, received absolution for his sin, was reconciled to God, and had recovered the joy and happiness of a good conscience.

- G. S. G.

434. *The Adder-Catcher.* -

Of all the anecdotes I have read, dear friends, there is not one, perhaps, that has made more impression on my mind than the following which I read in that charming little book entitled: *Father Bonaventure's Stories and Parables*. A countryman was very expert in catching adders and other snakes which he sold to an apothecary in Paris to make theriac or snake antidotes and other remedies of that kind. One afternoon, his hunt was so successful that he caught a hundred and seventeen. In the evening when he returned home, he was so tired and exhausted that he could take no supper. He went up to his room, said his prayers and went immediately to bed. He had previously brought his adders alive into his room, as he was accustomed to do; he put them into a barrel and closed it up, but, perhaps, not carefully enough. In the night, whilst he was asleep, the adders made such a commotion that they forced their prison and escaped from the barrel. The heat of the bed naturally attracted them; they climbed into it, worked themselves in amongst the clothes, and surrounded the poor man without doing him any harm, or even awaking him. Being accustomed to sleep with his arms outside the coverlet, he was strangely surprised, when he awoke next morning, to see them all surrounded with adders. "I am a dead man!" cried he; "the adders have escaped!" He had the prudence

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not to stir, for he felt that they were around his neck, and all over his body. What a position! Still he did not lose his presence of mind; but after commending himself to God, he called the servant, taking care not to make the least motion. When the servant opened the door: "Do not come in," said he, "but go down to the kitchen; take the large Dutch oven, half fill it with milk, and warm it so as it will be barely tepid. Then bring it here and set it in the middle of the room, as gently and quietly as you can. Do not close the door, but go quickly, and lose not a moment." When the oven, thus prepared, was in the room, the adders, feeling the smell of the warm milk, began to let go their hold. First the peasant saw those of the arms and hands unwinding themselves and making their way towards the milk. He then felt those on the neck, then all the others that were concealed in the sheets and in the quilt, betaking themselves in the same direction. How glad he was then! He kept himself quiet, however, till he had given all the adders time to get out of his bed. Our man then rises very gently, and, seeing that they were glutted, and, as it were, stupefied with the milk, he takes them one by one with his nippers and cuts off their head for his own safety and for the apothecary's antidotes. Then, kneeling down, he thanked God with his whole heart for having delivered him from so great a danger. He goes down, then, and made every one shudder by relating his strange adventure. Sending his hundred and seventeen vipers' heads to the apothecary in Paris, he sends him word that he

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need count no more on him for procuring them in future, because he had given up the trade. In fact, from that day forth he went no more to the forest; he even got such a dislike for adders and vipers that he could not even hear their name mentioned without trembling in every limb. Behold, dear friends, the faithful image of a soul in mortal sin; it is, as it were, surrounded by demons whom it does not see, but whose terrible effects it feels. The very thought of that state ought to make us shudder.

- FATHER BONAVENTURE GIRAUDEAU, *Histoires et Parables*, (*Stories and Parables*).

IV. - ON VENIAL SIN.

435. *A Prophet Killed by a Lion.* -

Although venial sin sometimes appears so small a thing to us, dear friends, God and the saints do not consider it so; it is sin, therefore it is a great evil. So the Sacred Scriptures are filled with examples that prove this. It is related in the *third book of Kings* (it's called the *first book of Kings* in Hebrew-based Bibles) that God had sent to Jeroboam, King of Israel, a prophet who was truly a man of virtue; he had forbidden him either to eat or drink in the town to which he sent him, that is to say, Bethel. Jeroboam invited him to dine with him, but the prophet refused, in obedience to God's command. As he was going away, another old prophet, who dwelt in Bethel, ran after him and insisted so much that he prevailed on the man of God, notwithstanding all his objections, to go and take some refreshment in his house. To

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overcome his just resistance, he made him believe that he had been warned by an angel of the Lord to bring him home that they might dine together; it was thus that he deceived him. When they were sitting at table, the Lord foretold to the man of God by the very mouth of his seducer, that his corpse should not be borne to the sepulchre of his fathers, because he had not obeyed God. In fact, as he was returning home, he was met and killed by a lion, which nevertheless, remained near his dead body without touching it more. St. Gregory the Great remarks that the Lord so punished this man of God by a transient pain in the body to preserve his soul in eternity.

- *III. Kings*, (*I Kings*) Chap. 13.

436. *The Little Wine-Bibber.* -

Have you ever remarked, children, the stones that are placed under gutters? Although they are very hard, nevertheless the drops of water falling from above in time wear them away. So it is with small sins; they do not kill our body at a blow, but they gradually lead it on to greater crimes. St. Augustine himself relates that his pious mother had allowed herself in her early years to be drawn little by little into a passion for wine. In fact, when her parents, trusting to her sobriety, sent her, according to custom, to fetch wine from the cellar, she could not prevent herself, after having filled the bottle or pitcher, from putting her lips to the edge, to swallow a few drops, not more, because the delicacy of her constitution forbade it. It was not as yet in her a decided. passion for that

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treacherous liquor, but she obeyed one of those inordinate motions which the child cannot overcome, and which are the consequence of our evil nature. But as he who despises small things falls by degrees into greater, it soon happened that, adding some drops to what she had taken the day before, she at last contracted the habit of taking wine, and of drinking it with avidity almost by the cupful. A servant, who usually accompanied her to the cellar, being vexed with her one day, reproached her openly with that shameful vice, calling her a *wine-bibber*. This was a cruel sting for St. Monica, who was still very young; she regarded with horror the shameful habit she had contracted, and laboured so hard to correct herself of it that she soon lost it entirely.

- ST. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, Book IX., Chapter 8.

437. *The Two Sins of St. Louis Gonzaga.* -

I remember having assisted, my very dear friends, at a retreat, in the course of which the preacher, to show us that holiness does not precisely consist in never sinning, since the Holy Scripture says that *the just man falls seven times a day*, amused himself by seeking out the sins committed by some great saints. He told us, amongst others, that St. Louis (or Aloysius) Gonzaga, when very young, one day took from his father's soldiers a little powder to load the little cannons with which he was playing. This he had taken the opportunity of doing while the soldiers were asleep. Another day he heard them make use of some of those oaths and bad words, which military men do not always scruple,

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as they should; the poor child began to repeat them without clearly understanding their drift. His preceptor and teacher-guardian having explained to him that these words were bad and not fit to be used, and having also reminded him of the little theft of which we have just spoken the young Louis de Gonzaga not only corrected himself immediately, but even deplored those faults all his life. They were for him a continual object of repentance, so much so that, every day, he asked pardon of God for them with his whole heart. Behold, my good little friends, the talent of the Saints; they knew how to turn to their spiritual profit even the very faults that escaped their weakness.

- G. S. G.

438. *A Nest of Eggs.* -

Venial sin is far from being a trifle, my good friends! Who amongst you, if any one offered you a bottle of poison, would drink one drop, then another, then a third, saying: "Oh! that is no great matter, it is but a trifle"? Hear the story of a child of your own age. Auguste Ferron de la Sigonniere, a pupil of the Little Seminary of St. Anne of Auray, in the department of Morbihan, in France, showed on all occasions the liveliest horror of even the smallest faults. On the Holy Saturday of the year 1828, a few days before his death, having gone, notwithstanding his extreme weakness, to visit the poor with his professor and some students of his class, they found in the country a nest in which there were some eggs.

The young pupils hastened to take it and divide it amongst them; several proposed to eat those fresh eggs. But some one made the remark that eggs

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were forbidden (which was then the case) during the three last days of Holy Week. Auguste immediately throws away his, saying that he would not for all the gold in the world violate in any way whatever the law of the Church. Thereupon one of the pupils asked if it was no more than a venial sin to infringe on the abstinence from eggs. "And if it was only a venial sin," answered Auguste warmly, "I would rather die instantaneously than commit it." Admirable sentiments, dear friends, oh! how happy I would be to see you share them!

- *Souvenirs des Petits Seminaires*, 416