

# ON GLUTTONY, ANGER, AND SLOTH.

## CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

### CHAPTER XIX.

## THE CAPITAL SINS.

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### V. - ON GLUTTONY AND SOBRIETY.

457. *What Happens When You Have Drank?* -

The pagans, themselves, my very dear children, had a horror of drunkenness. There is no more curious example of this than the young Cyrus. It is Xenophon who, in his book of the *Cyropedia*, relates the singular impression made on that young man by the sight of several drunken persons.

He had obtained from King Astyages, his grandfather, permission to offer him to drink at table, promising that he would acquit himself with as good a grace as the prince's cup-bearer.

"I am pleased with you, my son," said Astyages to him on the morrow, "no one could serve better, only as you wish to imitate Sacas, my cup-bearer, why did you not taste the wine before you poured it out for us?"

-- "Oh!" answered the young prince with much simplicity, "that was because I was afraid there was poison in that liquor; for at the banquet you gave to the great lords of the court, on

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the anniversary of your birth, I saw clearly that Sacas had poisoned you."

-- "How so?"

-- "Why, I perceived that as soon as a little of that liquor was drank, it turned the heads of all the guests. I saw you doing things that you would not pardon in children, crying out all at once without hearing one another, then singing all together in the most ridiculous way; and when one of you sang a *solo*, you swore, before you had even heard him, that he sang admirably well. Each of you boasted of his strength, but when you came to rise from table, far from being able to make a single step in advance, you could not even keep yourselves firm on your feet. In a word, you seemed to have forgotten, you, that you were a king, and they, that they were your subjects."

-- "Tell me, then," said Astyages, "does not the same thing sometimes happen to your father?"

-- "Never," answered Cyrus.

-- "What happens to him, then, when he has drank?"

-- "When he has drank, he is no longer thirsty, and that is all."

Admirable conversation, is it not, dear friends? Let us turn it to account, to avoid, not only the shameful excesses of wine, but all other passions, which tend but to degrade and brutalize us.

- ROLLIN, *Ancient History*, II., 146.

458. *The Bunch of Grapes in a Desert.* -

Of all the examples of penance and mortification found in the admirable *Lives of the Fathers of the Desert*, I think there are few, my friends, so remarkable as that which I am about to relate.

A celebrated solitary of Alexandria, St. Macarius, one day received a present of a

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magnificent bunch of grapes. Instead of eating it, he hastened to carry it to one of his brethren, who dwelt in the same desert, thinking that, as he was weaker than he, he had also more need of being refreshed by that beneficent fruit. The brother thanked him much for it, and appeared touched by this mark of attention; but, scarce had Macarius gone forth from his cell, when he hastened with it to another solitary, in order to give him an agreeable surprise. The grapes had not yet reached their final destination, for they passed on to a fourth religious, and successively to several others, so that they went through almost every cell in the desert. Finally, the last to whom it was given, not knowing that it had already passed through the hands of Macarius, had a wish to offer it to him, and in fact brought it to him, pressing him very urgently to eat it. Macarius, who had at once recognized the bunch of grapes, learning, after some inquiries, how much it had travelled, thanked the Lord in the depth of his heart for the grace he had given his brethren, of knowing thus how to profit by every occasion they met to practise penance, and also charity one towards the other. He was so touched by this admirable trait that he preferred to let the grapes wither, rather than lose the merit he had had in depriving himself of them.

- Pere MARIN, *Vies des Peres des Deserts.* (*Lives of the Fathers of the Desert.*)

459. *The Fury of a Drunkard of Hippo.* -

Nothing shows better the horrors to which drunkenness may lead, my friends, than what happened in Africa in the

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time of St. Augustine. A young man of Hippo, named Cyril, was extremely addicted to wine; he even spent great part of his time in the taverns with his profligate companions. One day, when he had given himself up to all the excesses of that ignoble passion, he returned home, and, urged on by a blind fury, he threw himself on one of his sisters and stabbed her. Hearing her cries the father ran, but the son, more furious still, imbrued his hands in the blood of him who had given him life and slew him. He also poignarded another of his sisters who tried to defend her father and save him from the hands of that raving madman, or, rather, that execrable monster as he had now become under the influence of the demon of drink. St. Augustine, soon apprised of these atrocities, and, although he had already preached twice that day, assembled his people and a third time ascended the pulpit, to make known to his hearers the crimes just committed by that miserable drunkard, who, many now thought, ought never to have seen the light. At the recital of what had happened, the whole assembly uttered cries of horror, and piteous groans. They could not understand how a man could be led to commit so many and such barbarous crimes. St. Augustine profited by the occasion to show the excesses to which an unhappy life may lead if it is accompanied by a blind escape into the inebriation of drunkenness.

Let us instruct ourselves in his school, dear friends, and tremble for fear of ever abandoning ourselves to the shameful excesses of gluttony or drunkenness.

- NOEL, *Cat. de Rodez*, IV, 113.

480. *Tragical Death of the Emperor Zeno.* -

Of all

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the deaths of which I ever heard, the most frightful was that of Zeno, Emperor of Constantinople. That prince dishonoured his dignity by a shameful inclination to drunkenness. The disorderly life he led brought on a disease, which, every time he became intoxicated, assumed proportions more and more terrific and frightening. On the night of the 9th April, 491; having risen from table, drunk as usual, he had an attack of epilepsy, so violent that he fell back apparently lifeless. The officers of his palace took him for dead and immediately informed his wife, the Empress Ariana. Happy to have got rid in a natural way of a husband

who had become a burden to her, but also anxious to have control of the real power of the Empire as queen-regent, at the dawn of day she caused his body to be secretly conveyed to the royal vault. She placed guards there and forbade them expressly to let any one in or even to open the door, if they came to hear any noise within, suspecting the deleterious effects of the stupefying alcohol. Scarcely twenty-four hours had passed when the guards heard cries and groans in the interior of the tomb. It was Zeno, who was thought dead, coming to himself again. As soon as he found that he was in the imperial vaults, he began to utter lamentable cries. But his tears and cries touched no one, the door remained closed, for it is likely that the guards had been bribed by the Empress. When the vault was entered some time after, it was found that the Emperor had, in despair, torn his right arm with his teeth, and that he had eaten one of his boots, till death came to put an end to his torments. It is thus, dear friends, that, our passions, if we do not endeavour

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to combat them, will work our eternal ruin, after having already caused us many miseries and sorrows in this life.

- LEBEAU, *Histoire du Bas Empire (Byzantine)*, III.

461. *Sobriety of a King of Sicily and Arragon.* -

The Spartans, and, in general, all the peoples of Greece, were renowned for their sobriety. It is to be remarked, my friends, that the simple and frugal life is almost always accompanied by valour and wisdom, whilst what is called the pleasures of the table usually denote a common intelligence. Here is one proof amongst a thousand: Napoleon the Great breakfasted in ten minutes and dined in twenty.

Alfonso, king of Sicily and Arragon, was asked why he did not drink wine, and why, when he chanced to take it, he put so much water in it.

"That is not the custom with kings," the speaker added, "nor those who surround them."

- "I know that well," he replied, "but they are, doubtless, unaware that wine eclipses wisdom, and that that treacherous liquor, taken without moderation, extinguishes that fire of the mind, that energy of the soul, which maintain the dignity of a king, and render him worthy of bearing the name."

- "Drunkenness," said he to another lord, who had put the same question to him, "drunkenness is the mother of fury, of impurity and many other vices, all of which should be banished from the heart and the palace of princes."

One day Alfonso encamped on the banks of a river, a short distance from the enemy; night was approaching; the army, destitute of provisions, had taken nothing since the

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morning. He himself was as hungry as his men. Then one of his officers brought him a piece of bread, a large black radish and a little cheese. Under existing circumstances that would have been a delicious repast.

"I thank you much," said the prince to the officer, "but I will wait till after the victory, for I cannot fare better than my brave soldiers."

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Educ.*, I., 4.

462. *A Glutton Cured by His Own Enemy.* -

The good cheer which gluttons seek with so much eagerness is, alas! for them a source of disease and infirmity, unknown to sober and temperate persons. I am going, my friends, to quote a somewhat singular example of this. A man of high birth, who dwelt, I think, in Tuscany, suffered horribly from a species of gout, which tortured his legs and feet. Having become the enemy of a countryman of his by some offence he had given him, the latter vowed vengeance against him. On a fine morning in spring, as our invalid's pains were somewhat less than usual, he took a fancy to make a little excursion in the neighbourhood. But, at the moment when he least expected it, he saw disguised men approaching, who laid hold of him roughly, dragged him away, and shut him up in a small chamber at the top of a very high tower. There, for three or four years, he received no other nourishment than dry bread and water. When his parents and friends, after searching everywhere, at length discovered the place of his retreat, they hastened to set him free. They found

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him in perfect health; not a trace remained of his former malady; his enemy, by making him observe a strict regimen, had been his best physician. A new proof, dear friends, that so-called good living is more fatal to the body than penance and mortification.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat Hist.*, II., 379.

## VI. - ON ANGER AND MEEKNESS.

463. *The Portrait of a Furious Man.* -

It is not only religion, my friends, that condemns in us the excesses of the passions; reason, good sense, medicine itself, have but one voice to tell us how wrong it is, physically and morally, when one gives way to their vicious inclinations. Galen, one of the most celebrated physicians of antiquity, relates that while still young, he one day saw a man running hastily to open a door with a key he held in his hand. As he could not manage to do it, because that, by his haste and roughness, he had got the key embarrassed in the lock, he fell into such a fury, that he began to bite the key with his teeth, and wanted to kick the door open. He then began to blaspheme, foaming at the mouth, his eyes were so inflamed with rage that they seemed ready to start from their sockets. "That sight," added the celebrated physician who relates the fact, "that sight gave me so great a horror of anger, and so great a dread of falling into such a state, that I have never since allowed myself to be angry at anything." - Let us be no less wise than a pagan, my

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friends, we who have under our eyes such numerous examples of mildness and patience.

- RODRIGUEZ, *Christian Perfection*, III., 62.

464. *The Good and Bad Woman of Alexandria.* -

Not only, dear friends, must we never allow ourselves to be angry, but we must bear patiently with those who have an ill-temper; that is truly virtue. A pious lady of Alexandria had requested St. Athanasius to give her a poor widow, whom she might feed and support, and so have an opportunity of exercising charity. The holy patriarch ordered one to be chosen from amongst those whom the Church took care of on account of their infirmities and their poverty. Next day the lady received into her house one of those widows; but she did not suit her, just because she was modest, mild, and full of gratitude for the kind cares bestowed upon her. Then the lady went back to the holy prelate, and told him that he had not given her such a person as she required.

The Saint entered into her thought, and promised to serve her to her liking. He accepted the sum of money offered to support the first widow and then he caused search to be made for another widow less amiable than the first, and the historian who relates the fact says that it was not hard to find her. This woman was talkative, ill-tempered, impertinent, and so wicked even that she only returned insults for the services rendered her.

Every day she ceased not to complain of her charitable benefactress, and abuse her in every way; sometimes she had even the wickedness to strike her. But, behold the heroism of virtue. After a certain time

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the lady had occasion to see St. Athanasius, and she thanked him for having granted her what she desired, "Oh! Father," said she, "how much you have served me! The widow you have given me to support at least exercises my patience and humility, whereas the former one was so mild and so grateful that I lost all the merit of my good works."

- LASSAUSE, *Explic. du Cat. de l'Empire*, 373.

465. *The Sun is Near Setting.* -

The Saints are men like others, dear friends; they may, therefore, commit faults; but how well they know how to repair them! It is said in St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: *Let not the sun go down on your anger.* It was according to this precept that the Saint of whom I am going to tell you, comported himself.

St. John the Almoner, patriarch of Alexandria, who died in 616, had a contest one day with the Senator Nicetas.

The subject of their dispute was that Nicetas wished to have places in the markets disposed of for the profit of the public treasury, whereas St. John the Almoner would have the revenues employed for the relief of the poor.

They had a great dispute thereon in private, and separated at eleven o'clock in mutual displeasure. The holy patriarch, having ever before his eyes the precept by which God forbids anger was sorry for this accident; and, to remedy the evil, he sent at five o'clock an arch-priest, accompanied by an ecclesiastic, to tell the senator from him: *The sun is near setting.* Nicetas was so struck by this, that, melting into tears, he went immediately to the holy

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patriarch, who said to him:

"Welcome, O true child of the Church! for having so promptly obeyed the voice of your Mother!" They knelt down, one before the other, mutually embraced, and having arisen, sat down together. Then St. John the Almoner said to the senator:

"I assure you if I had only perceived that you were very angry, I would not have failed to go and see you."

-- "I protest to you, Father, that I will never again listen to those who would engage me in disputes and contentions."

-- "Believe me, my son and my brother, if we allow ourselves to be persuaded by such persons, we shall render ourselves guilty of many sins." He added that, in order to prevent himself from being surprised into anger, he had resolved within himself to take time to decide, and had found himself in the right. Nicetas heard these words with respect, with the intention of profiting by them and thus separated in peace from the holy patriarch.

- LEONTIUS, *Life of St. John the Almoner.*

466. *Must One be a Lion to the Wicked?* -

The world has singular maxims; but, dear friends, those maxims are contrary to the Gospel; therefore, they must not be followed, for it is by the Gospel that we shall be judged. It was thus that the saints did. St. Elzear who flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, entered, after the death of his father, into possession of the earldom of Ariano, situated in the kingdom of Naples.

The people, who were devoted to the house of Arragon, in Spain, and opposed to the French, refused to recognize him, because he was originally

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from Provence, in the south of France. For three years, during which the insurrection lasted, the saint opposed it only by meekness and patience, although his friends urged him to make himself obeyed by force.

Prince Uarento, his relation, one day said to him: "Leave me the care of chastising those rebels; I will have some of them hanged, and I promise you that will tame down the others. One must be a lamb towards the good but as a lion in regard to the wicked."

-- "I am of quite a different opinion," answered the count, "I will not commence my reign by hanging and slaughtering my subjects; I like better to grant them favours. There is no glory for a lion in devouring a lamb, but what is truly remarkable is to see the lamb prevail over the lion, that is to say, mildness overcoming wrath. With God's grace, you shall soon see that prodigy."

And this was what did, in fact, come to pass. The inhabitants of the earldom of Ariano, confounded and subdued by the gentleness of their new prince, submitted of themselves, and invited the saint to take quiet possession of his heritage. They loved and honoured him always as a father, because he had known how to win their hearts by his patience and meekness.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, I., 487.

467. *The Epaulettes Torn Off in Anger.* -

"The soft word turns away wrath, but the harsh word excites fury," the Scripture says. In fact, dear friends, saying offensive words to any one in anger is throwing oil on the fire; we should, on the contrary, speak to him mildly and calmly, in order to

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soothe him. In the first days of the Restoration of the Monarchy, in France, in 1814, the Duke de Berry, son of Charles X., a prince of a violent and impetuous disposition, was so angry with a lieutenant-colonel, in the middle of a review, that he publicly tore off his epaulettes and threw them on the ground. This brave officer, deeply mortified could not even demand satisfaction from the prince for this insult; he begged an audience of the king in order to lodge his complaint. Louis XVIII., desirous of repairing the fault of his nephew, who, in the person of a superior officer, might alienate the whole army, received the outraged officer very kindly.

Having heard his complaint, he told him with charming grace: "Make your mind easy, sir! - if my nephew took off your lieutenant-colonel's epaulettes, it was because he knew that they ought to be replaced by those of a full colonel; this very day it is being attended to." And accordingly, my friends, that same day our officer received the brevet of his new grade. You will admit that the Duke de Berry's folly could not be repaired more pleasingly or more skilfully.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Educ.*, I., 96.

## VII. - ON IDLENESS AND WORK.

468. *A Solitary Who Does Not Want to Work.* -

My friends, he that does not work should not eat, as St. Paul justly said to the Thessalonians: people should work, as far as they can, to earn their living. Persons who want to do nothing would deserve to be treated as was a solitary of whom mention is made in the *Lives of the Fathers*

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*of the Desert.* This solitary having gone to Abbot Sylvanus, who dwelt on Mount Sinai, and seeing the brethren at work, said to them:

"Why do you labour thus for perishable food? Did not Mary choose the better part?"

The holy old man, having heard the solitary's remarks, said to Zachary, his disciple:

"Give that good brother a book to entertain him, and take him to a cell where there is nothing to eat."

The hour of nones being come, that is to say, three o'clock in the afternoon, the strange solitary looked to see if the abbot would not have him summoned to dinner; and when that hour was passed, he went to the abbot and said to him:

"Father, have the brethren not eaten to-day?"

- "Yes," replied the holy man.

"And how did it happen," said the solitary, "that you did not send for me?"

-- "Because," said the abbot, "you, who are a spiritual man, have chosen the better part: you spend whole days reading, and have no need of perishable food; whereas we, who are carnal, cannot do without eating, and are, therefore, obliged to work."

These words having made known to the solitary what his fault was, he was sorry for it, and asked pardon of the holy abbot, who told him:

"I am very glad you have found out that Mary cannot do without Martha, and that so labour must always be joined to prayer and contemplation, since we have a body and a soul, each of which requires nourishment."

- Pere MARIN, *Vie des Peres des Deserts.* (*Lives of the Fathers of the Desert.*)

469. *Alfred the Great's Candles.* -

It is not only in lowly conditions of society that labour is a duty, and

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even a want: it is so, children, even on the throne.

If you read the history of Charlemagne, of St. Louis, of Louis XIV., of Napoleon, you would see how active, how laborious, were those powerful monarchs.

Listen: Alfred the Great, one of the most celebrated kings of England, and even one of the greatest princes who has honoured the throne, had labour so much at heart, that he divided his time so as to find some to apply to all: to business, to study, to prayer. He divided the twenty-four hours of the day into three equal parts: one for the cares of the kingdom, the other for sleep, meals, reading and recreation, and the third for prayer and study. As clocks were then unknown, he took six candles, each of which burned for four hours, and his attendants warned him by turns when one of his six candles was consumed. in this manner he let two burn to make the eight hours consecrated to each thing. It was in the flower of his age and at the highest point of his glory that he made a vow to keep faithfully this distribution of his time, and he never failed therein.

This great prince died in the year 900, regretted by his people as a father, as a legislator, and as a hero. Never had prince more affability for his subjects, nor more valour against their enemies; and, perhaps, there never was a more striking proof of what religion can do, on kings and peoples, for the glory and prosperity of states.

Henry Spelman, a historian, transported with a sort of enthusiasm, paints him thus -  
"O Alfred the wonder and astonishment of all ages! If we reflect

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on his piety, we shall think that he lived always in a cloister; if we think of his warlike exploits, we shall judge that he never quitted the camp; if we recall to mind his knowledge and his writings, we shall suppose that he passed his whole life in academic shades; if we consider the wisdom of his government, and the laws he promulgated, we shall be persuaded that these objects were his only study." Behold, children, what people arrive at by employing their time well. The day is no longer for the learned man than for the ignorant; the whole difference comes from the manner in which one and the other employs it.

- FELLER, *Biographie Universelle*, I., 193.

470. *A Malady Which People do Not Dare to Make Known.* -

Idleness is a real disease, my very dear children, and, strange to say, it is, perhaps, the one that people dare least confess having. I have this fact from an unhappy man who had himself experienced it. It was in Ghent, one of the principal cities of Belgium. Some of the members of the municipal council were walking, engaged in conversation, in front of the magnificent City Hall, where they were to hold their sitting. All at once there appears before them a poor wretch who had nothing but rags on his body, and whose thin face was the picture of misery. He approaches, holding out his hand. "Gentlemen," said he, "have compassion on a poor wretch who is utterly destitute. I am stricken with a shameful malady, which has reduced my limbs to the impossibility of working. Take pity on me, I beseech

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you!" When the councillors had thrown some small pieces of money into his cap, without saying anything, he retired and went to parade his misery in other streets. Meanwhile one of those gentlemen who had been observing him with some degree of attention, and had seen that his limbs were well formed felt curious to know what the pretended malady was that prevented him from working. He called his servant and told him to follow him some distance, and then to ask him what was the disease from which he said he had been so long suffering. The servant did as he was told; when he put the question to him - "Ah!" replied the beggar, "the disease that troubles me is not one of those that the doctors can cure: it is called *laziness*. You understand that having that I really cannot work, and so am obliged to beg my bread from door to door." A good lesson for us, my friends; let us try to profit by it.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 348.

471. *The Reading of an Idle Woman.* -

People sometimes sin by idleness, dear children, even when they seem to be busy. Thus, he who would amuse himself in reading frivolous books, silly newspapers, or employ the time destined for matters of duty in giving himself up to works of pleasure, he, I say, would sin by idleness. Speaking of reading, here is a story I recently read; it is a lady who speaks, and relates the affair herself:

"We had for neighbours, some years ago," said she, "a young couple, the husband a good workman, and his wife, no less tidy,

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active, and laborious. In the morning she was seen busy about her household affairs, then employed in sewing, or something else, but never idle; hence there was always on her face the expression of contentment, and on her lips the smile of good humour. Work, gaiety, health, are generally found together. But one day our young neighbour was not heard to laugh or sing as much as usual; then not at all; she even became quite silent, gloomy and melancholy. Her housework, done in haste, had no longer the air of neatness it formerly had. From the kitchen escaped frequently that peculiar odour which announces that the meat is burning or the soup boiling over into the fire. Yet the mistress of the house was still to be seen in her accustomed place; only she no longer used her needle, as before; no, but she had in her hands, - guess what? A book! a book which appeared to absorb her whole attention. And, as you may well think, the volume was not a serious or useful book, a historical or moral book, nor any of the classics of good literature. For such, people are not apt to forget eating and drinking. What the poor woman read, or rather devoured with such avidity, was, doubtless, a romance, I know not which, but I think the best of them is nothing worth!" (thus the lady declaims). "But one morning the husband went out. Returning home some hours after, he found the door closed. He knocks, he calls, no answer. Becoming uneasy he knocks louder, still obstinate silence. Then, by a violent effort, he breaks the lock, and in the farther room, whence there escaped a strong smell of charcoal,

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he finds his poor wife stretched on the bed a corpse! - This unhappy woman, having become idle and listless by reading silly books, grew disgusted with life, and suffocated herself. She was scarcely twenty-seven years old!"

- And yet some will say, dear friends, that the passions do not injure our health our life, our happiness!

- Abbe MULLOIS, *Mois de Marie de tout le Monde*, 78.