

ON CONFESSION AND INDULGENCES.

CATHOLIC ANECDOTES

CHAPTER X.

PENANCE.

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III. - ON CONFESSION.

601. *Sudden Death of a Shepherd After Confession.* -

The greatest misfortune that can befall a sinner on earth, my very dear friends, is to die suddenly.

Hence it is that we should always make our confession as if it were to be the last of our life. It is related in the life of St. Louis, king of France, that God often gave him the grace of being able to penetrate the secret of hearts. One day, whilst passing through one of the provinces of his kingdom, I know not which, he came to a shepherd who was grazing his flock. He approaches him with his usual kindness, looks at him with interest, puts some questions to him, and at length says: "My son, I know the bad state of your conscience; it is three years since you made a sincere confession; I beg of you, if you value your soul, to delay no longer in returning to God; let me take you back to the fold of the Good Shepherd, for death is already at your door.

God is willing to forgive you all your sins." The shepherd, all amazed, shuddered at these words; he made a strict examination of his conscience, and confessed his sins with sincere contrition, having earnestly besought the Lord to give him that grace. But behold, dear friends, what need he had to do so: three days after he died a sudden death, in the very field where he was feeding his flock.

- SCHMID et BELET *Cat. Hist.*, III., 171.

602. *Story of St. John Nepomucene.* -

Speaking of

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the secrecy of confession, I know a very beautiful story which I will tell you.

The Empress Jane, a princess adorned with all virtues, had chosen for her director the learned St. John Nepomucene, Canon of Prague, in Bohemia. Wenceslaus, husband of the Empress, was so jealous that he put an evil construction on the most innocent actions of his pious spouse. He allowed these injurious suspicions to take such root in his mind that at last he came to believe her guilty. To make himself sure, one day when she had been to confession he went to the canon, her director, and questioned him to know whether his suspicions were well founded, based on what had been said in confession. The Saint told him that he could not tell him one way or the other, for that the seal of confession being inviolable, any knowledge acquired in confession was the same as if it were not. The Emperor, much annoyed, kept a gloomy silence. Some days after he caused the Saint to be brought before him, and by turns employed persuasions, promises, and caresses to induce him to reveal the Empress' confession; you may well suppose, dear friends, that all was in vain. Wenceslaus then treated him with the greatest inhumanity, but still with no better success; he could

draw nothing from that virtuous priest. At last he threatened him with death if he did not do as he desired. "You may put me to death," answers St. John Nepomucene, "but you shall not make me speak." Wenceslaus, in a rage, orders him to be thrown into the river Moldau, which flowed beneath the walls of his palace.

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The holy martyr was speedily stifled under the water. Some pious persons carried off his body, and laid it in a tomb, where it wrought many miracles. This happened in the year 1388. On opening his tomb 331 years after, that is to say, on the 14th of April, 1719, his body was found fleshless, but his tongue was as fresh and as well preserved as though he were dead but a few hours. It is still kept with much respect in the Cathedral of Prague, where an observant traveller saw the tongue still miraculously fresh and whole in 1769.

- FELLER, *Biographies, Universal*, V.

603. *Apparition of a Damned Soul.* -

You are not ignorant, very dear friends, that a single grave or mortal, as it is called, sin, wilfully concealed in confession, can be pardoned neither in this world nor the other; we must absolutely reveal all the mortal sins we can remember, if we would recover the grace of God. (A mortal sin is something very seriously wrong, committed with full knowledge and full consent. Some moral theologians would immediately point out that a sin we genuinely cannot remember is most unlikely be a mortal sin, for how could it fulfil all three conditions and yet be forgotten. For so many unfortunate souls retain the memory of the mortal sin that cut off the life of grace in their souls but had then become habituated to 'living in sin' and would find it extremely difficult to recall each individual occasion of serious sin. For such persons, upon repentance, they should avoid scruples and entrust themselves to a wise and prudent confessor.) I have read some terrible instances of this; here is one that you will never forget. It is told to us by none less than St. Antoninus of Florence in the fifteenth century. A young female person of eighteen, who lived in Florence, in Italy, had the misfortune to fall into temptation, and commit a very great sin. No sooner had she done so than she found herself covered with confusion and torn with remorse. The remorse was God's actual grace urging her to be authentically reconciled with the Loving Lord she had so grievously offended. "Oh!" said she to herself, "how shall I have the courage to declare that sin to my confessor? What will he think of me? What will he say to me?" She went, nevertheless, to confession, but dared not confess that sin; she got absolution, and had the misfortune to receive Communion in that state. This horrible sacrilege increased still more her remorse and trouble; again the remorse was God's actual grace calling her to be genuinely reconciled. She

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was, as it were, in a hell, tormented day and night by the reproaches of her conscience, and by the well-founded fear of being lost forever. In the hope of quieting her conscience, she gave herself up to tears and groans, to continual prayer, to the most rigorous fasts, and the hardest privations, but all was in vain if she refused to follow the God-given means of reconciliation: the remembrance of her first crime and her sacrileges harassed and pursued her incessantly. Her soul was, as it were, in an abyss of sorrow and bitterness. In the height of her interior anguish, a thought came into her mind to go into a convent and make a general confession, in which it would be easy for her to declare her sin.

She did so, and commenced the confession she had proposed making; but, still enslaved by false shame, she related the hidden sin in such a deliberately garbled, confused way, that her confessor did not understand it, and yet she continued to receive Communion in that sad state. Her trouble became so great that life appeared insupportable to her. To relieve her heart, tormented as it was, she redoubled her prayers, mortifications and good works, to such an extent that the nuns of the convent took her for a saint, and elected her for their superior, in place of one who had been carried off by death. Become superior, this wretched hypocrite continued to lead outwardly a penitential and exemplary life, embittered still by the reproaches of her conscience. To moderate her horrible fears a little, she at length made a firm resolution to confess her sin in her last illness, which came sooner than she expected. Then

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she immediately undertook a general confession, with the good intention of confessing the sin she had always concealed; but shame restrained her more strongly than ever, and she did not accuse herself of it. She still

consoled herself with the thought that she would declare it a few moments before her death. Alas! my dear friends, she had neither the time nor the power. The fever rose so high that she became delirious, and so died. Some days after, the religious of the monastery, being in prayer for the repose of the soul of this pretended saint, she appeared to them in a hideous form and told them: "My dear sisters, pray not for me, it is useless - I am damned!" -- "How?" cried an old religious more dead than alive; "you are damned, after leading such a holy and penitential life! Is it possible?" -- "Alas! yes, I am damned for having all my life concealed in confession a mortal sin which I committed at the age of eighteen years." Having said these frightful words, she disappeared, leaving behind her an intolerable stench, the visible sign of the sad state in which she was. This story, which is so well adapted to make us reflect, is related by St. Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, who wrote in the fifteenth century.

- Abbe FAVRE, *le Ciel Ouvert, (Heaven is Open)* 45.

604. *A Peasant's General Confession.* -

Nothing is so useful as a good general confession, my dear children: when it is well made, it makes us perfectly easy as to the state of our conscience. Some one came

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one day to ask St. Vincent de Paul to repair to Gannet situated a short distance from Folleville, in the department of the Oise, in Northern France, which was then his usual place of abode. Vincent set out without delay, when he knew that he was wanted to prepare for death a worthy peasant dangerously ill. Whether through ignorance, or neglect, this poor man had his conscience loaded with several mortal sins, which a false shame had always prevented him from revealing; and yet he flattered himself that he was to be saved all the same. The Saint having commenced to hear him, thought he could urge him to make a general confession. The sick man, encouraged by the mildness with which his new director treated him, made an effort, prepared himself carefully, and at length declared his secret miseries, which he had never had courage to reveal to any one. This sincerity, so necessary at the last moment, was followed by an inexpressible consolation. The penitent found himself unburdened of an enormous weight, which had for many years oppressed him. The most remarkable circumstance was that he passed from one extreme to the other, and during the three last days he yet lived, he repeated several times a sort of public confession of his faults, which he had always been ashamed to confess at the sacred tribunal. The Countess de Joigny, whose farmer he was, having gone to see him, according to her custom heard this: "Ah! Madam," cried he, as soon as he perceived her, "I was damned, if I had not been induced to make a general confession, on

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account of several great sins which I could never bring myself to confess. I am very grateful to Father Vincent, whom you kindly sent to prepare me." It was thus that, by a good general confession, he set his conscience in order, recovered the peace of his soul, and died in the best dispositions.

- ABELLY, *Vie de Saint Vincent de Paul. (Life of St Vincent de Paul.)*

605. *The Tribulations of a Belgian Fleming.* -

Here is one of the most curious examples I know on confessions wherein people try to conceal some mortal sin. The story is rather long, but still I think it will not tire you.

A rich Fleming, born in Belgium, had the misfortune to commit a grave fault. Recovered from the temporary infatuation of the shameful passion which had kept him in thrall, he became so confused that he preferred death and eternal damnation to the shame of confessing it. Nevertheless his conscience tormented him incessantly. One day, in passing through Anvers, he heard a preacher saying that one is not obliged to confess sins which they have forgotten. He then tried every means to bury his in oblivion. With that view, he gives himself up to the vehemence of his passion, he heaps sins on sins, thinking thereby to lose sight of the first and most shameful fault. You will easily understand that it was quite the contrary. This crime presented itself unceasingly to his mind. He went travelling through different countries of Europe, thinking to divert his mind from this harassing, ever-present thought. But the variety of objects which he saw could not alleviate

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or lessen his torments; it was impossible for him to fly from himself. He afterwards applied himself to the study of mathematics, and to linear drawing, fancying that he might find some diversion for his thoughts in the close attention required for those sciences. All was useless, and our Fleming still found himself with the accursed sin fresh in his mind.

What is he to do? He hopes to be able to efface his crime by the most austere practices of penance, without being obliged to confess. He, accordingly, puts on haircloth, uses the discipline severely, gives himself up to fasting, pours abundant alms into the lap of the poor; but the wound in his soul became all the deeper, and festered the more, the more he did to close it. In his impotence to calm his remorse, he takes the frightful resolution of hanging himself; to put an end to his unhappy life, and gets into a carriage to go home, in order to execute, in his own house, the horrible purpose he had formed. God, who still watched over this unfortunate, ordained it so that he met on the way a religious of his acquaintance. After exchanging salutations, he offers the Father a seat in his carriage. They entered into conversation, and, amongst other things, chanced to speak of confession. This was putting the finger on the wound. So, applying to himself the monk's remarks, he asks him, with a troubled countenance, why he talks to him in that way.

The Father answers that it is the custom in his Order to speak to every one of the affair of salvation, with or without

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occasion. "And for myself," added he laughing, "I willingly offer you my services."

-- "I thank you," answers our Fleming drily, "you are but losing your time talking so to a man who has no wish to confess. If you can assist me without confession, indeed, I will thankfully accept your offer."

The monk then suspects the bad state of that soul, and makes up his mind to act with all possible circumspection. He speaks to the heart of the unfortunate man, who confesses to him that, as a last resource, he has made up his mind to hang himself because he can no longer bear the remorse of his conscience.

"Nevertheless," he added, "I am ready, Father, to endure all, to suffer all, to get rid of my torment, provided I can be dispensed from confession."

The monk promises to assist him effectually, provided he will follow his advice for only a few days. On arriving at his house, he persuades him to invite some of his friends to supper, and then exhorts him to pass the night quietly. Next morning, he presents him with certain points of meditation to excite strongly his confidence in the infinite mercy of God. The following day, he gives him an examination of conscience, advising him to note the sins he knew he had committed, not to confess them, but to make an act of contrition over each. That being done, the Father invites him to take a walk in a neighbouring forest, and there he asks him if he has examined each article well. "Now, my friend," said he, in a careless way, "in order to enable you to get a more perfect knowledge

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of yourself, I am going to read you some of the faults contained in my little book of examination. Now listen!" He then takes the book, rapidly turns the pages, and reads from time to time some of the most enormous sins. All at once he falls on that which had caused his penitent such long and cutting remorse and anxiety.

"There it is!" cries the Fleming, "there it is, Father, that accursed fault which has occasioned all my misery!"

-- "How! it is only that, my friend!" said the Father surprised; "why my little book contains many more enormous ones, and I can absolve you, if you will, of a thousand others still greater. But now that you have confessed your first great sin, it will not cost you much to tell the others that may recur to your mind." At these words the unhappy sinner throws himself on his knees, freely opens his heart, and, after having been sufficiently excited to contrition by these touching reflections, he receives absolution. He experienced so much joy, that he often repeated to whoever would hear him: "Oh! from how much anguish has confession delivered me! O confession! what tranquillity, what joy you confer on the soul when well made!"

- Abbe FAVRE, *le Ciel Ouvert*, (*Heaven is Open*) 45.

606. *Confession Praised by a Protestant Physician.* -

The celebrated physician Tissot was giving, at Lausanne, the assistance of his art to a young foreign lady,

whose disease soon assumed an alarming character. Being made aware of her dangerous state, and tormented by the regret of leaving life so soon,

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she becomes violently agitated, and almost falls into despair. The physician judged that this new shock would shorten still more her term of life; he warned her, according to his custom, that there was no time to lose in administering the helps of religion. A Catholic priest is called in; the patient receives, as the only remaining good, the words of consolation that fall from his mouth. She becomes composed, occupies herself with God and her eternal interests, receives the last sacraments in an edifying manner, and, next morning, the physician found her in a state of peace and tranquillity that astonished him.

He remarked that the fever had abated, and all the symptoms were changed for the better; very soon the disease disappeared. M. Tissot, Protestant though he was, loved to relate this anecdote; he even exclaimed with admiration: "Behold the power of confession amongst Catholics!"

- GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, p. 408.

607. *One Must Confess to Believe.* -

Do you know, children, what is the reason there are so many unbelievers? It is simply because of the fear of confession. Any one who confesses well doubts nothing in religion. A lieutenant-general, full of esteem for an officer, who was as distinguished for his piety as for his talents and his valour, had made him acquainted with his doubts in religion. The officer had urged him to obtain instruction on an object so important.

Overcome by his solicitations, the lieutenant-general determines to confer, several times, with two ecclesiastics

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of great merit, but notwithstanding the solidity of their reasoning, he could not be convinced.

His friend, the officer, making then a last effort pressed him to apply to a virtuous priest, who was his ordinary confessor. The lieutenant-general goes to see him.

"Reverend Father," said he, "I come to consult you on some doubts in regard to religion; I think it right to tell you that I have already conferred with Fathers So-and-So; but nothing came of it."

- "Sir," replies the minister of the Lord, "what could I tell you more than you have already heard from two such eminent priests? What arguments could I adduce more forcible than those they have employed to convince you? I have but one resource; deign to try it; go into my oratory, let us pray the Lord that He may enlighten your mind, that He may touch your heart, and begin by making your confession." - "I, sir! why I hardly believe in God." - "You believe in Him, sir, and in religion, too, more than you think. Kneel down, make the sign of the cross, I will repeat the *Confiteor* with you, and also question you." After many marks of astonishment, very natural under the circumstances, after many repetitions of his doubts, and even of his incredulity, after many difficulties and disputes, our lieutenant-general at last obeyed, and answers candidly the different questions put to him.

The period of his first wanderings was ascertained; then some particulars of the subsequent irregularities were drawn out. Insensibly, the heart of that man opened, his voice began to change,

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some tears escaped from his eyes in spite of all he could do. The priest, perceiving his trouble, ceased his questions, and, giving himself up to all the ardour of his zeal, he exhorted him with feeling and fervour to repent, and the result was what might be expected. "O, Father!" at length said the penitent, in a voice choked with sobs, "you have taken the only means of reaching my heart. I am an unhappy man whom passion has led astray; I brought my judge to the depth of my conscience, I stifled its voice, and I chose rather to believe nothing than be forced to live well. To-morrow I will come back to you again, and continue my confession."

He did so with sentiments of the liveliest compunction. and died some years after, in all the exercises of penance, and a truly Christian life.

- DEBUSSI, *Nouveau Mois de Marie*, 143.

608. *A Veteran who Wanted to go to the Emperor.* -

We like to see persons in high station giving themselves the example; that is why we take pleasure in telling you anecdotes of the Great Napoleon. An old soldier was going to die; he obstinately rejected the succours of religion, and had even repulsed two chaplains. The Abbe Larocque, who relates the fact, having been apprised by one of the Sisters of Charity, went to the patient's bedside, and began to chat with him in military fashion: "Well! comrade, how goes it?" -- "It goes that I am going to Mont Parnasse," (one of the three great cemeteries of Paris.) -- "Bah! and is the haversack ready! is the musket all

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right? Are you fit to pass the good God's inspection?" -- "See here now, father, don't speak like that. I have already made two others walk off. You are a brave man, and have served, so I wouldn't wish to give you any trouble." -- "So you don't want make your confession. Well! then, we'll say no more about it; let us talk of something else. Did you serve the Emperor?"

-- "Faith, I think I did, for I lost a leg in his service." -- "Do you know what became of him?"

-- "He died in St. Helena." -- "Do you know how to read?" -- "No." -- "So much the worse, for I was going to bring you a book in which you would see that the Emperor, before he died, received the last sacraments and went to confession." -- "Ah, bah!" -- "Would you be very glad to see the Emperor again?" -- "Oh, yes, I'd willingly give my other leg to see him, and ten francs besides that I have in my purse."

-- "Well! comrade, if you want to see the Emperor again, there is question neither of leg nor money; you need only go to confession." -- "I don't understand." -- "If you wish to see the Emperor again, you must follow him the way he went. Where are you from?" -- "From the neighbourhood of Toulouse."

-- "Well! if the Emperor and you set out from Paris, he for Strasbourg and you for Toulouse, would you meet on the way?" -- "Ah! now, you're making game of me. How the d---l could I meet him? We'd be turning our backs on each other."

-- "Of course you would. Then, if you don't go to confession, you shall never see him again, for you

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won't follow the road he took." -- "Let us see, now! What's that you're saying? Maybe it's only fudge."

-- "No, my friend, no."

-- "Well! hear my confession, that I may see the Emperor and the good God, too." The intention, it must be owned, was not the most perfect ; but it was so easy to purify it. The old veteran with the wooden leg made a good confession, received the last sacraments, and could see the Emperor in the other world, with the certainty of leaving him no more.

- *Recomp. Hebdom.*, LXXXVIII., 5

IV. - ON SATISFACTION AND INDULGENCES.

609. *Story of Nicephorus and Sapricius.* -

We must satisfy God and our neighbour for the injury done them; without that, dear friends, there is no pardon to be hoped for, even though all the other conditions were fulfilled. The most necessary and the most natural of all satisfactions is reconciliation with enemies. Hear on this subject one of the most terrible stories with which I am acquainted. There was in Antioch a Christian named Nicephorus, a layman, who was the particular friend of a priest named Sapricius. They lived together in perfect harmony; it was in the time of the Emperors Valerian and Gallian, in the third century. After having long maintained that marvellous and edifying friendship, it happened, by I know not what misfortune, that it relaxed, and they came to an open rupture. This enmity lasted a considerable time, but at length Nicephorus entered

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into himself, and, touched by what the Apostle St. John says, that he who hates his brother is a species of murderer, he addressed himself to the friends of Sapricius to bring about a reconciliation between them, but it was useless. He then went himself, and, throwing himself at the feet of Sapricius, besought him for the Lord's sake to pardon him; but that implacable man had the misfortune of listening too much to his resentment, and remained still inflexible. Valerian's persecution had been sometime raging against the Christians; the priest Sapricius was taken by the persecutors, who addressed themselves to priests rather than lay people. He

displayed a heroic courage and firmness in his answers, and in the cruel torture he was made to undergo. As he was found immovable, he was sentenced to have his head cut off, and he was immediately led to execution. Nicephorus had no sooner heard of it than he ran to prostrate himself at his feet, calling him martyr of Jesus Christ, and earnestly beseeching him to pardon him; but Sapricius did not even deign to answer him. Nicephorus ran by another street, to meet him again before he left the city of Antioch; he begged his pardon with tears, and said all that his piety and humility could suggest. He followed him thus to the place of torture, so that the executioners, surprised at these importunities said they had never seen such folly. "This man," said they, "is going to be executed in a moment, and you kill yourself asking his pardon." - "You know

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not," answered Nicephorus, "what I ask of this confessor of Jesus Christ, but God knows it well." He still continued to solicit his pardon; but the heart of Sapricius was already hardened, and in such a deplorable disposition, he dared to ascend the scaffold where his sacrifice was to be offered, notwithstanding the prohibition made by Christ to present oneself at the altar without being reconciled to their brother. Wherefore it was that God soon made known that he rejected this sacrifice of a man who had the hatred of his neighbour in his heart; for, when Sapricius was on the scaffold, and the executioner told him to kneel down that he might cut off his head, the presence of death struck him with horror, he asked for pardon of the empire, and dared to say that he was willing to sacrifice to the gods, in conformity with the Emperor's edict. Nicephorus, touched with grief at this apostasy, declared that he was himself a Christian, and would not sacrifice to idols. The judge, being informed of it, condemned him to have his head cut off on the instant, which was executed. Thus it was that Nicephorus received the crown of martyrdom whereof Sapricius had rendered himself unworthy, because he had obstinately refused to forgive his brother.
- GODESCARD, *Vie des Saints, 9th Fevrier. (Lives of the Saints: 9th February.)*

610. *A Bishop Beaten with Rods.* -

It is related that St. Paul abridged the penance which had been imposed on a Christian of Corinth, because he had remarked in him a sincere and lasting repentance of his crime.
This, my friends, is what is called *indulgence*. (See 2 Cor 2:6-10.)

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The successors of the Apostles imitated the example of St. Paul, remitting to sinners a part of their penance, when they gave proof of much fervour and testified a lively repentance. The historian, of the fourth century, Eusebius, relates that a bishop, named Natalis, had the misfortune of allowing himself to be seduced by two artful heretics, named Asclepiodotes and Theodotus. They had persuaded him to allow himself to be ordained bishop of their sect for a pension of one hundred and fifty Roman pennies, that is to say about a hundred and twenty francs of French money, which they were to pay him per month. But God, who is so good to His children, would not allow this poor bishop to perish outside the Church, he who had confessed the faith before tyrants and shared in the sufferings of the martyrs. He sent him several visions, to induce him to leave these heretics; but, at length, seeing that Natalis still resisted, because he was restrained by interest and by the vanity of seeing himself in the first place, he permitted that angels should show themselves visibly to him for a whole night, and that they should strike him with rods, just as was done to Heliodorus of old in the temple of Jerusalem. Next day Natalis clothed himself in sackcloth, covered his head with ashes, and shed a torrent of tears.

He afterwards went to throw himself at the feet of Pope Zepherinus, (who died in 217) and feared not, in his fervour, to prostrate himself, not only before the clergy, but also before the simple laity. The whole Church was touched by this act of humility. At length, after

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some time, by persevering in earnest supplication, especially after he had shown the marks of the blows he had received, Natalis obtained the favour of being readmitted to Communion. Thus was abridged, by indulgence, the time he should have had to remain in public penance, according to the usage of the Church of that time.

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 226.

611. *The Restitution of a Plunderer.* -

The twelfth century was witness, my dear friends, of one of the finest examples of conversion and restitution. A powerful lord, who lived in the neighbourhood of Narbonne, (in the department of the Aude, in modern France,) had committed many acts of depredation and pillage on all the adjoining villages. Suddenly the grace of God touched him, and Ponce de Lazare, as he was called, struck with fear of the judgements of God, resolved to do penance as publicly as his crimes had been committed. He, therefore, immediately changed his conduct. His former friends, who had been the unhappy promoters and accomplices of his evil deeds, went to him to express their astonishment. Thereupon he spoke to them in a tone so persuasive that he prevailed upon six of them to embrace the same kind of life as that which he proposed for himself. The first thing he did was to make restitution to every one from whom he had taken anything, restoring exactly the very things they claimed: wheat, fruits, flocks of sheep, cows, oxen, etc., etc. In this way, every one departed well content. When Ponce saw that no one

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asked him for anything more, he espied in the crowd a peasant who had claimed nothing: "And you, friend," said he, "why do you ask nothing?" -- "Oh! as for me, my lord," replied the peasant, "very far from doing me any injury, you always protected me against my enemies; so you owe me nothing." -- "You do not remember, then, having once lost a flock of sheep by night; well! it was I who had them taken away." -- "I willingly give them to your lordship," replied the peasant, who scarcely remembered that loss, so long repaired.

But Ponce, who wished to have nothing wherewith to reproach himself, obliged him to receive a flock equal in number and in value. After these works of satisfaction, this generous penitent distributed the rest of his wealth amongst the poor, and set out barefoot on a pilgrimage with his six companions; then he retired to a solitude, where he lived holily the rest of his days. He merited being placed by the Church amongst the number of the Saints, for she honours his memory on the 17th of June.

- GODESCARD, *Vies des Saints.* (*Lives of the Saints.*)

612. *The Alms of a King During the Jubilee.* -

When the Church announces a jubilee, she usually prescribes five sorts of good works to do to gain it: Confession, Communion, fasting, visiting churches, and, finally, alms proportioned to the means of each. I have somewhere read that the pious Charles II., King of Spain, being still very young, omitted nothing that was requisite to gain the jubilee of the year

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1675. One day, when making the prescribed stations on foot, he met on his way a poor man, who asked him for alms. Charles II. threw him a diamond cross which he wore on his breast, and no one noticed this extravagant liberality of the prince. When he was in church his officers perceived that he no longer had his royal cross; the idea immediately struck them that he had been robbed of it. The poor man who had received it, and who followed at a little distance, instantly cried: "There is the King's cross. His Majesty gave it to me." Charles admitted the fact. It was considered improper to leave the poor man this cross, because it made part of the crown jewels; but it was decided in council that, in whatever way the King made his gifts, they were to be held sacred. Consequently, the cross having been valued at about 36,000 francs, that sum was given to the poor man, who, as you may well think, went away blessing a prince so Christian and so generous.

- FILASSIER, *Dict. d'Educ.*

613. *Contrition is Better than an Indulgence.* -

A jubilee or a plenary indulgence is something very precious, dear friends; nevertheless, contrition for sin is better still, as the following example goes to prove. An officer of Pope Innocent XII., I think, was particularly esteemed and cherished by that pious Pontiff. In around 1695, he fell ill, and was soon in great danger of death. It was then that he showed how much he was filled with the liveliest sentiments of religion. Word was immediately brought to the

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Holy Father, who was much afflicted by the loss he was going to sustain, and, at the same time, much edified by the holy dispositions in which he was told this officer of his palace was. He sent one of the prelates of his court to visit him, charging him specially to give him a plenary indulgence of all his sins. The patient, who was a well-instructed man, and knew that, without contrition, indulgences, however precious they be, produce no effect in souls, answered this prelate: "My Lord, I pray you express to his Holiness my lively and sincere gratitude for his charity towards me; but my gratitude would be still greater if the Holy Father had the goodness to beg of God for me the grace of perfect contrition for my sins." The prelate returns to the Pope and tells him what had passed. Innocent XII., more and more edified, passed into his oratory and besought the Lord to grant the dying man the most perfect sentiments of contrition. Some hours after, the officer breathed his last in the best possible dispositions.

- LASSAUSSE, *Cat. de l'Empire*, 572.

614. *A Gold Ring Worn as a Penance.* -

There is no alternative, my dear friends, we must make satisfaction for our sins in this world or in the other. Do not imitate him about whom I am going to tell you, who had great trouble in finding a penance that suited him. He was a man of noble rank, but unhappily a great sinner.

At length, around 1780, touched by grace, he felt some desire to be converted; but as he was too well known in France, he went to Rome, with the

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intention of making his confession to the Sovereign Pontiff himself. Pope Pius VI., I think it was, actually heard his confession, and was even edified by the exactness with which the penitent acquitted himself of that sacred duty, with the lively repentance and excellent dispositions he manifested; and yet when it came to the imposing of penance, the foreign nobleman would accept none of those which the Pope gave him. None was to his liking. He was too weak to fast, he said; he had not time to read or pray much; to retire into solitude to devote himself to pious meditations, or even to make a pilgrimage to some venerated shrine, all that, his occupations did not permit. To watch, to give himself the discipline, to lie on the ground, oh! his health would suffer too much. But, my friends, amongst all these obstacles, the greatest, although he did not acknowledge it was this: he fancied that such penitential practices did not suit a man of his condition.

The Pope, in his wisdom, then gave him, for his whole penance, a gold ring, on which were engraved the Latin words *Memento Mori*, which means, "Remember that you shall die." He imposed it on him to wear this ring on his finger, and to read, at least once a day, the words engraved upon it. The nobleman went away, well pleased to have so light a penance. Nevertheless, it was soon to be followed by others much more serious. The daily sight of that ring penetrated him so with the thought of death, that he ceased not to say within himself: "Alas! since I am condemned to

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die, what have I to do here below except to prepare for a good death? What does it profit me to spare my health which death will soon take from me altogether? What use is it to pamper my body and take such care of it since it is to rot in the ground?" When he had made these reflections for some time no penance appeared too painful to him. He thenceforward accepted all those that were imposed upon him, and persevered till death in those happy dispositions. Say, what would have become of him, dear friends, if he had not at length begun to understand his position?

- SCHMID et BELET, *Cat. Hist.*, III., 188.

615. *For the Little Sins of an African Chasseur Soldier.* -

Nothing is so beautiful, children, as the religious sentiment, acting in concert with the bravery and frankness of a soldier; and France, you know, counts thousands of such men: the war in the East, (I'm referring to the Crimean War,) and that of Italy, (the ones fought in 1870 and in 1848 are the ones of which I am thinking,) give us numberless proofs of this. Four or five years ago a venerable clergyman was crossing the Mediterranean in a steamboat. A poor blind man was sitting on the deck of the boat, silently munching a piece of dry bread; no one took any notice of him. He was all at once approached by an African chasseur going home on leave. "Old man," said he, "you seem to fare but poorly; here, take a share of the contents of

my flask; it will do you good, and do me no harm." And the soldier sits down beside the poor man, and enlivens the meal by relating some incidents of his African campaigns in Morocco and Algeria. Soon the passengers formed a circle round the two joyous mess-mates.

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The last drop of wine had been swallowed by the blind man, when the chasseur cries out: "That is not the end of it, old fellow! to-morrow I must moisten your dry bread for you again." And at the same time he unceremoniously takes off the blind man's dirty hat, and goes round the boat with it, even waking up those who were asleep, presenting his improvised begging-box to each, saying with an accent not easily imitated: *For a poor blind man!* When he came to the priest who relates the fact, the latter shook hands with him and said: "That is right, my worthy fellow!" - "Ah! Reverend Father, it is for satisfaction for my little sins, for I gave the big ones to Father Parabere, who was our chaplain there below," pointing to the southern skies, and so saying he escaped into the admiring and astonished crowd, and went to pour into the blind man's capacious pocket the fruits of his collection.

- *Recomp. Hebdom.*

616. *Help Me to Perform My Penance.* -

The best of all penances, my friends, is to remove, as far as one can, the occasions that make us fall into sin. A man in Paris, who is still living, and, therefore, not to be named, was remarkable for his wealth and his learning, but he was a very bad Christian. He was the owner of a magnificent library, the contents of which, however, were not very edifying.

His wife and daughter were much grieved at this but they dared not say anything about it. All they could do was to leave in his way an interesting book entitled, I think, *The Messenger of Charity*; he read it, was

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touched, and even shed some tears. Ashamed, so to say, and even angry because he had been made to weep, he said testily to himself: "Bah! that is all very fine; paper refuses nothing. The author is not sincere."

Thereupon he takes his hat and cane, and goes to the Abbe Mullois, author of that book, with the fixed intention of provoking him to anger, in order to make him contradict his own words. Happily the author remained calm, and the man of learning blustered away at pleasure. Still they parted good friends. The sincere and upright heart of this distinguished man had been struck; he returned some days after. He was much disturbed; it was plain that his soul was troubled, and that good and evil were there struggling for the mastery. Abbe Mullois, guessing what was going on, comes right to the point by proposing to him to go to confession. At these words the gentleman starts, and in great agitation takes some turns round the room. "I go to confession! what a thing to say to me!" And he strikes the table. "Go to confession! go to confession! and St. Bartholomew and that dreadful massacre done on his feast-day! and St. Dominic! and the Inquisition! and my library! and Voltaire's Works!" At last, as it were, tired out, he falls on his knees. The priest seizes the opportunity; he draws near, and the confession begins. After the lapse of a quarter of an hour, this careless sinner, who is now a generous Christian, rises from his knees, joy in his soul, and his eyes moist with tears. He cannot express his feelings except by a look and a warm shake

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of the hands. On reaching home, he hastens to tell his wife and daughter what he had just done. They can scarce believe him. "Come!" said his wife, "do not jest on such a subject. If you were serious it would be too much happiness." -- "In proof that I am serious, and have been to confession, I tell you I am just going to commence my penance and will ask you to assist me."

-- "But," answered his wife, "supposing it were true, you know you must perform your penance yourself, and not give a share of it to others." -- "Of course, I know that, but there is enough for us three, and even for the servants. Have a fire made in the middle of the yard." Whilst this was being done, he goes up to his library with his wife and daughter; they take down all the bad books and have the servants carry them to the fire. The bonfire that was made of them, my dear friends, must have caused joy in heaven as well as on earth.

- MULLOIS, *Mois de Marie de tout le Monde*, 60.