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BY

THE REV. O. COHAUSZ, S.J.

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TRUE PEACE

BY

THE REV. O. COHAUSZ, S.J.

Translated by ISABEL GARAHAN.

ONE DAY IN FLORENCE a man might have been seen turning hurriedly from the crowded streets into the cloisters of a monastery where he walked up and down restlessly, eagerly drinking in the peace of the silent sanctuary. Presently a monk approached, his countenance lighted by supernatural joy, and asked, smiling :

“What are you seeking, friend?”

“I? I am seeking peace,” was the reply of Dante, the famous author of the *Divine Comedy*.

“I am seeking peace!” Is not this the cry that goes up from all our hearts? For we all desire peace, and shall continue to seek it as long as we live. So earnest is this desire of our hearts that we know no better wish for our dear dead on their last journey than “*Requiescat in pace!*” “May he rest in peace!”

We all feel only too clearly that without inner peace we can find no true happiness or joy in life. For what use is all the wealth, pleasure and success the world can give if our hearts remain empty or oppressed? In our spiritual life also inner peace is profoundly important. Where peace reigns joy will be felt in all that is good, the eye will be keen, the heart attentive to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and God, Who is God of peace, enters into such a soul.

Yet few possess true inner peace, especially in these days. Why is this?

I.—A RIGHT AIM IN OUR LIVES

IT IS DUE, first of all, to the want of a right aim in our lives. Only too numerous are those who do not even know why they are placed in the world. They live, accepting what the day brings; and, if asked to what end is their life, they have no answer to give.

But peace is rest in order; and order, without some great aim towards which all is directed, would be impossible. Without a goal our life must be vague, uncertain seeking, groping for we know not what.

An Aim in Life There are others who have an aim, it is true, but a false one, i.e., the amassing of wealth with a view to securing a care-free life, pleasures and all that the world can give, believing these can bring them peace. But did not Dante possess all these—talent, wealth, fame and the favour of princes! And yet Dante, possessing the world, flies from the world.

“I am seeking peace!” is the cry reiterated in thousands of hearts to-day. And this is an era of so much progress and civilization!

But it is useless to seek peace where it does not exist. Do the things of the world bring peace, or do they not rather bring worry and torment? Pleasures, far from imparting peace, only awaken the desire for more, and ever more pleasures, until finally we

Things of this Life become no better than slaves—the slaves of pleasure, of Mammon, of success.

Dante, the worldling, flies instinctively to the silent abode of men who have consecrated their lives to God. Where God dwells, there is peace. With peace and joy on his countenance, the monk approaches the favourite of Fortune. Not that the monastery is free from cares and trials. These are everywhere, for “we walk by faith and not by sight” (II Cor. v, 7). Our life here on earth is only the road that leads to our Home. But the life of the religious, being devoted entirely to God, contains much peace even amid trials and struggles.

Man’s whole life is a struggle which will only end when he finds his true Home. It is like the mountain stream which

rushes down to the plain, past the village and through the valley, ever restless, ever seeking, until at last it flows into the sea, its true home. So **The Finite Seeking The Infinite** we, too, are ever restless until we find our true aim which is God. We came from Him, a spirit as He is a Spirit, the finite seeking the Infinite. Thus it is only when we have God as our aim that we attain peace.

Man’s mind strives after knowledge and truth. It desires to penetrate all mysteries, to lift the last veil and behold the full light, the ultimate cause of all, the infinite Spirit Who contains within Himself all that is to be known, the solution of all problems. “The light shineth in darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John i, 5), that is, God, the Father of Light, the Spirit which inflames all spirits, and from Whom all wisdom proceeds, Who is Himself infinite Wisdom.

Man’s will is directed towards profound lasting happiness which will completely satisfy his soul. But such happiness will not be found in the transient things of the world, but in God alone.

The heart of man desires to love and to be loved. But it can be fully satisfied only with the love of a Being Who understands perfectly, Who loves with a pure love that reaches beyond the grave—a love that **Love** knows no diminution or wavering and delights always. But such love is found only in God, Who is Himself love.

Man cries out for salvation from evil, above all in the next life. He yearns for justice and the fulfilment of his lawful desires. But from whom can he obtain these? From God alone Who is “Lord of Heaven and earth and under the earth.”

Man’s soul thirsts for joy, for pure, unalloyed joy which will quench all thirst for ever. But such joy is not found in this world where happiness is distributed so capriciously and mingled with so much sorrow. Pure, satisfying joy is found in God alone, Who is Himself Joy. The young African, Augustine, in his search for peace, knocked at all

the doors of the world, never ceasing in his quest until he at last found God, when he cried out joyfully :

“Our hearts were created for Thee, O my God ; they will find no peace until they rest in Thee !”

This desire of our hearts will be fully satisfied only when we possess God for all eternity, when our souls are merged in the Divine Being for ever. “The souls of the just are in the hand of God. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die . . . but they are in peace” (III Wisd. i, 3).

May we not then hope to attain peace during our life here on earth ? As long as we are on earth we shall never possess the perfect, unchanging peace of our true Home. But we

**A
Traveller's
Peace**

can enjoy the peace of the traveller who knows he is on the right road, for whom all doubt and uncertainty, all groping and searching have come to an end. After long wandering in error, he is now travelling towards the true goal and knowing this, he is at peace. Glad hope fills his breast, and, although he does not yet possess God, yet he is happy in directing his course towards Him Who is the ultimate End of all his striving, the all-high Lord to Whom he consecrates his life and all his works, exclaiming with the psalmist :

“It is good for me to adhere to my God, to put my hope in the Lord God . . . the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever” (Psalm lxxii, 28, 26).

2.—INORDINATE DESIRES

AS LONG AS WE LIVE we shall continue to have desires. He alone who possesses all he needs for his well-being has no desires, a privilege which belongs essentially only to God and the blessed in Heaven. But we with our imperfection and material limitation lack much of that which constitutes our happiness and our means of livelihood. Therefore, it is both natural and necessary that we should desire these things ; for if we had no such desires, we should make no effort, and therefore we should never attain them.

But the desire to escape from our oppressive state and to perfect ourselves rouses us from our indifference and in-

activity and incites us to develop our faculties, lends wings to our powers of invention and draws out the ability and will that are latent in us, and thus helps us to make spiritual and material progress. Without desire there can be no development, no progress in civilization, no sanctification. A world without desires would be no better than an arctic region, still and silent, it is true, but without movement, progress, life. Hence Christ's aim, to awaken desire in us—desire for the Kingdom of God, for virtue, for eternal happiness.

But however good desires may be in themselves, they can become harmful if they are directed towards that which is unattainable or dangerous, useless or destructive. or when the aim is to obtain too quickly or in too great degree even things good and beneficial in themselves. These evils are only too common in the present day. How few are content with what they have or what they can obtain ! Most wish for a different position in life, or for more money, or more success. They would like to have what others have, and are unhappy if this is denied them. Hence so much envy and contention. A tendency of the present day which is far from salutary is, by advertisements and attractive displays in shop windows, to stimulate in the public the desire to purchase what they cannot afford.

In our spiritual life also inordinate desires are noticeable, the constant wish for more. “If I were in So-and-so's place I should get on better !” Those who live in the world long for the cloister, and the religious perhaps thinks he could do more good outside the silent monastery. The contemplative thinks he might achieve more in the active calling, while the active religious perhaps wishes for the contemplative calling.

It must not be thought that all such desires are harmful, however. The mistake consists in aiming at the unattainable, at that which is not according to God's will. For such desires disturb the soul, robbing it of all peace ; they are like the hidden volcanic fire of the cankering worm. Nay, more, they lead to wickedness and even crime. Have not all immoral disorders—thefts, sins against the sixth commandment, violence, wars, revolutions—proceeded from

inordinate desires? "From whence are wars and contentions among you? . . . You covet and have not" (James iv, 1, 2).

Therefore it is part of the wisdom of life to regulate our desires. First of all, we should get rid of those which are unattainable and make up our minds that much lies beyond our reach. Longing for these will not bring

Illusion us a step nearer to obtaining them; on the contrary, it only wounds and tortures the soul. On the other hand, if we sincerely renounce all that is unattainable, our hearts will be joyous and free. Often what we strive after is vain and illusory, and if we succeeded in obtaining our wish, we should soon become disillusioned. Often, too, what has been denied is by Providence, and might, had we obtained it, have hindered our progress in some way. Again, although we lack what others have, we possess much that has been denied them. The violet has not the size of the hazel tree, but in form and colour it is far more beautiful. Hence the foolishness of continually wishing we were in the place of others: "If only I were So-and-so!" Where there is question of extraordinary virtue, others can encourage us by their example; but to desire the character, position, success of others is meaningless, and neither alters nor improves our own state. Each has good qualities of his own. The oak and the beech tree, the lion and the eagle are beautiful; but beautiful also are the lilac and the rose-tree, the nightingale and the squirrel. So, instead of ever watching others and wishing we were like them, each should rather develop his own character and perfect himself in his calling, confident that he will attain to what is best for him, and, what is yet more important, that he is doing God's will. To desire something different from what we have is usually the result of perverted self-love rather than of true love of God.

It is the same with regard to mistakes we have made, losses suffered, or other misfortunes. No regrets can alter the past. St. Paul did not brood over the past, but rather,

Forgetting the Past as he says, "forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernatural vocation of God in Jesus" (Phill. iii, 13, 14).

Even when our desires are lawful and good, we should exercise moderation and be resigned if all does not turn out according to our wishes. For we shall only be at peace when our wishes are such as can be realized. The more numerous our wants the more expense is incurred in satisfying them. When this is not possible the result is misery and discontent, from which the world suffers to-day with its ever-increasing wants which it is unable to satisfy. The way to peace, then, is to keep our desires within bounds. What peace was in the stable at Bethlehem! What peace in the countenance of St. Francis of Assisi! And this notwithstanding poverty and privation. For there the law was observed: Be content with what the Lord has given you. Do not ask the extraordinary. So you will attain peace.

3.—AFFLICTIONS

FURTHER OBSTACLES in the way of inner peace are sorrow and afflictions. These come to all of us, in one form or other, at times so overwhelming as to crush even the strongest.

Sorrow Yet often people only add to their sorrow by brooding over their troubles, by ever comparing their present life of privations with their former prosperity and continually reverting to their former happiness. Thus all peace is driven forth from their hearts, and they sit lamenting like Jeremiah among the ruins of Jerusalem.

Undoubtedly their troubles are hard to bear. But their former happiness will not be restored by constantly reverting to the past, or by nursing their grief. Mourning will not bring back the dead; it only destroys our fresh outlook on life and embitters our whole existence. We should consider how others have had the same sad experience as ourselves. But they made the sacrifice which God asked, wiped away their tears and began afresh. Thousands have been overtaken by the same sad fate as you have suffered, and they are happy and contented again notwithstanding their altered circumstances, whereas you are overwhelmed

by grief. Now, grief is not caused by the affliction alone, for if this were the case, then all those who shared your fate would share your state of misery also. Rather it is the constant stirring up of the old sorrow that drives peace from your heart. But new life stretches out before you. You should strive to become reconciled to the altered conditions. Make the sacrifice wholeheartedly which God has asked of you, laying your grief before His altar, even as Abraham laid his son on the altar of sacrifice. Then, rising up from your grief and mourning, start life afresh, throwing yourself into your work. So your heart will be filled with new peace and unexpected inner happiness, as was the case of Tobias, Elizabeth of Thuringen, and many other saints.

But there is all this present sorrow! you say. It is certainly hard to bear. But often we make our sorrow harder than it is. For it is not the things themselves that cause us pain, but the impression which they

The Cause of Grief

make on our minds. Thus, for instance, we hear that a dear friend has met with an accident and we are overwhelmed with grief at the news. Then presently he whom we believed dead arrives alive and well. There was no visible cause for our grief; yet we suffered so much pain! Again, we see numerous instances in which one person is entirely crushed by a large financial loss, whereas another who suffered the same misfortune proceeds on his way with courage and fresh hope. Thus since it is not the affliction itself, but our attitude of mind towards it, that causes us pain, clearly we must alter our attitude, refraining from all complaint or deliberate rebellion against the adversities which have come upon us. For this only makes our sorrow harder to bear, adds to the torture in our hearts and may lead us to injustice and despair. "But now put you all away: anger, indignation, malice, blasphemy . . . put ye on . . . the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience: bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if any have a complaint against another" (Coll. iii, 8, 12).

But how can we acquire this attitude towards the afflictions that beset us? First of all, by considering that nobody

escapes suffering in this life, and therefore we are not victims of injustice. Again, by not expecting to be relieved from our troubles by outer conditions.

Suffering Inevitable

"If thou fling away one cross, without doubt thou wilt find another, and perhaps a heavier," Thomas à Kempis says rightly. "Dispose and order all things according as thou wilt, and as it seems best to thee; and thou wilt still find something to suffer. For either thou shalt feel pain in the body, or sustain in thy soul tribulation of spirit. Sometimes thou shalt be left by God, other times thou shalt be afflicted by thy neighbour; and, what is more, thou shalt often be a trouble to thyself. The cross, therefore, is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee. Thou canst not escape it; whithersoever thou runnest: for whithersoever thou goest, thou carriest thyself with thee; and everywhere thou shalt find the cross" (*Imit. of Christ*, Bk. II, ch. 12).

We shall never escape the cross. Rebelling against it only makes it heavier to bear, and therefore we have no choice but to submit. But this submission to the inevitable should not be apathetic; it should rather be a religious act. We should not suffer all merely because we cannot avoid it, but because it is God's will or because God permits it, because we are willing to suffer all and to sacrifice all to God our Lord through love of Him. We should have the spirit which was manifested by Christ on Mount Olivet when He said, "The chalice which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii, 11).

Therefore we should look upon all suffering as a chalice offered us by our Father in Heaven, and accept it willingly, i.e., not only without resistance, but manifesting our willing-

Submission to

God's Will

ness to drink the bitter chalice, abandoning ourselves to God and to His dispensations for us. Whether this be done like Christ on Mount Olivet when He said, "Not My will but Thine be done"; or, in the words used by the people, "Lord, Thy will be done though it hurt! Lord, Thy will be done though I do not understand! Lord, Thy will be done wherever I go and wherever I am!" This is true submission to God, true love of God, the essence of all holiness, the culmination of the spiritual life. Such

resignation proceeds from a deeply rooted faith, in one who is no time server, seeking God for his own selfish ends, but an entirely submissive servant who remains faithful to the Lord even under the hardest trials.

The aim of all holiness is the union of the soul with God, a state which presupposes entire abandonment to God. This most of all helps us in our trials and afflictions. For if all were according to our wishes in this life, we

Use of Adversity should forget too easily the invisible God and the everlasting banquet which He has prepared for us. Has not Christ reminded us of this when He said, "How hard it is for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!" If we were entirely free from sorrow, we should so easily become arrogant, egoistical, proud! Perhaps finally leaving God out of our lives altogether. Or even though we remained faithful to God, our virtues would fail to thrive and we should not attain the detachment from the world and from ourselves which is so necessary for entire abandonment to the holy will of God. But sorrow comes to shake us out of our satiety and indifference, to detach us from this world and to remind us of our eternal home; it inspires us to seek the higher spiritual things and breaks, one after another, the bonds which chain us to this world; it mortifies our self-will and pride, and gives us the opportunity of practising humility, patience, confidence in God and increasing in all the virtues daily, of achieving true supernatural heroism, becoming more and more like Christ and rejoicing with Him for ever in His glory. "In the Cross is salvation: in the Cross is life, in the Cross is protection from thy enemies. In the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness: in the Cross is strength of mind: in the Cross is joy of spirit. In the Cross is the height of virtue: in the Cross is the perfection of sanctity" (*Imit.* ii, 12). Therefore, Thomas à Kempis rightly speaks of the "Royal road of the Cross." Kings—Christ and the saints—go this way, which leads to the royalty of true greatness and real happiness. "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (*Rom.* viii, 18).

Hence it is that God guides us along the way of sorrow and affliction and often sends the hardest trials to His most

faithful followers. Hence the mistake of rebelling against afflictions which are unavoidable, or even

The Way to Peace accepting them unwillingly. To manifest our readiness to "drink the bitter chalice,"

thanking God, and abandoning ourselves to His holy providence—this alone will lead to blessings and profound peace. "As long as suffering seems grievous to thee, and thou seekest to fly from it, so long will it be ill with thee, and the tribulation from which thou fliest will everywhere follow thee. If thou set thyself to what thou overgreatest; that is, to suffer and die to thyself, it will quickly do better with thee, and thou shalt find peace" (*Imit.* ii, 12).

4.—DISCONTENT

A MODERN TENDENCY which interferes with the peace of many is that of being discontented with everything. There are people who could not be content under any circumstances.

Always Dissatisfied As soon as they rise in the morning, they complain of having had a bad night. Then they look out of the window, and, lo! "what miserable weather!" is their comment.

Breakfast is not to their taste, the children are too noisy, the husband or wife appears to be in bad humour, and nagging follows. The day's work is found fault with; so, too, employees, colleagues, their home, their business, their small income, big expenses, the state of the country, the Church, life, the world! Nothing meets with their approval.

They are not even satisfied with themselves, with their calling, their success. Their eyes are ever fixed on others. If only they had the profession, the house, family, popularity of So-and-so, they would be satisfied with life, they think! But as it is—!

It is the same with the spiritual life. They are discontented because of constantly recurring faults, friction with others, the small progress they make, their temper. Everything they do is wrong.

A certain amount of discontent is good. For the one who is always perfectly satisfied with everything, and especially

with himself, is apt to deceive himself with regard to his own defects and those of others. He considers it superfluous to strive to make progress, and so he remains always at the same stage of imperfection, and moreover shows little inclination to co-operate in the general progress or work of the world. Why should he trouble himself since all is in the most beautiful order?

In such a case only discontent with oneself has a salutary effect. But in all other cases it can only be harmful, causing us to overlook all that is good and beautiful, to torment ourselves continually, making our own and others' lives hard by bitterness and continual criticism. We destroy the peace of others and fill them also with bitterness and the spirit of rebellion, thus leading them into sins against truth, justice and charity.

Now, how can we best rid ourselves of discontent? Certainly not in the way that is adopted by a great many persons, i.e., by altering the outer conditions of our life. Nor by never-ending regrets and looking back, "If I only had . . ." and "If only I were . . ." It is noticeable that such regrets are common to people in all states of life, each believing his neighbour to be happier than himself. A proof that discontent is everywhere, even in the most cultured homes, and that consequently contentment is not obtained by altering the outer conditions. Ammon was heir to a throne under the most brilliant conditions, yet he pined away because he might not have as his a woman he loved. Achab possessed a kingdom and the power of obtaining all the pleasures of the world, yet he was overcome by grief because Nabod refused him his vineyard.

Discontent lies in our own hearts. There it must be stifled. Otherwise altering the outer conditions will avail nothing. Saul, raised to the royal throne, was consumed by discontent, and the poor shepherd boy,

Where David, sang joyous songs at his hearth. He
Discontent who nourishes discontent in his heart will
Is fail to find peace even though he obtain a
kingdom, but he who is satisfied with his
position and with the world, with what he is, and what he
has, will find true peace. Therefore, the secret of obtaining

inner peace is to cultivate the virtue of contentment. We can do this, first of all, by not expecting too much from the world or our fellow-men. They are not perfect. But, then, may we expect perfection from them? There is One only Who is perfect, Who is faultless—God. Whereas all creatures are essentially imperfect and onesided. Moreover, each possesses a quite definite individuality which is limited. Therefore, to expect perfection from any creature, is not this to expect him to be as God? Again, we are ourselves full of faults and defects. What right then have we to blame others for being no better than we ourselves? Again, we are discontented with the world and our fellow-men because they are not as we would wish them to be. But have we a right to expect this?

We have come into a world which was there long before us, and in which we have only the right of hospitality. How can we, who have just arrived here and shall soon pass out,

Adapt expect that the Master of the house should
Ourselves rearrange all things according to our wishes?
Moreover, would this be possible since each
of the millions of people who inhabit the
world would put forward his own wishes? Would it not be
more just to adapt ourselves, i.e., accommodate our wishes
to the existing order of the world and God's plan? For God
perceives the whole, whereas we perceive only a little
transitory part.

Our character, physical and intellectual powers, success, the measure of grace we have received, our road of sanctification—none of these will be altered one tittle by discontent.

God Gives Therefore, it is only arrogance to want to
what is have all that others have. Should we not
Necessary rather be satisfied with what God has
decreed for us? The swallow has not the
strength of the eagle; but it has its own
advantages. God has assigned to the plants and animals
different kinds of development, thus providing magnificent
variety and usefulness. So it is with us regarding the
different talents, graces, callings we receive, each his own,
which we can use and with which we should be satisfied.
Thus the world would be a marvellous work in which each
fulfilled his end.

Everything depends on this last. For we are all created to possess God for ever and to prepare ourselves for this by serving Him faithfully and increasing in grace and virtue. But we can do this in poverty as well as in wealth, in sickness as in health, with the talents we possess as well as with different talents. These have been assigned to us by Divine Providence. Then why should we continually desire what is different? If each worked in the place to which God has called him, he would attain to all that he should. With this he should be content. If we foster contentment in our hearts, we shall find peace. If we do not, then no success, however great, can help us to obtain what we seek. For he who has become accustomed to find fault with everything, will feel unhappy even under the most favourable conditions.

5.—ENDLESS CRITICISM

MANY NEVER ATTAIN PEACE because they drive it away from their hearts by everlasting criticism of their surroundings—may, of the whole world. Instead of being satisfied with what divine revelation has taught regarding the world and mankind, this life and the next, they would fain lift the veil that conceals so many things. Why is the world thus, and not thus? they ask. Why did not God

Criticism give to everyone an equal share of the world's goods?
of Why does He create people who, He knows, will be lost for all eternity? Why did God permit original sin? Why do so many children come into the world burdened by inherited vices? Why does not God hinder violence and injustice? Ever why? And, then, how? How can there be One God in three Persons? How can we exist in Eternity? These and other such questions revolve continually in their brain without any satisfactory answer being arrived at. Their hearts are tormented by constant restlessness. Similarly they brood over their own disposition, faults and spiritual slackness.

It is right to consider matters relating to the world and to ourselves. But it should not take the form of the criticism above described. We should not desire to know

and understand all things. We are much too small for that. But surely God gave us intellects that we should think? This is true, but the intellect He gave us is a human one, and hence limited, even as He gave us eyes to see and ears to hear. But with our human eyes we cannot penetrate all the secrets of the universe, nor with our human ears can we catch all the sounds of the whole creation, especially the next world. The human eye and ear are limited; so, too, is the human mind which, moreover, is further limited in this life by its union with the senses. Then how can we expect to obtain insight into all things? Is not this to claim divine knowledge? And is this not boundless megalomania? Does not true wisdom consist in being first of all clear about the limitations of our powers?

Because our understanding is limited all extravagant criticism and worrying our brains leads us nowhere. For there are abysses which can never be bridged by the human understanding. And he who with his limited intellect wants to understand all things is like Icarus who, with wings of wax, endeavoured to fly to the sun and ended by falling into the sea. A punishment which his presumption deserved. Was it not by such curiosity, too, that the fall of the human race came about? Were it not better wisdom to accept what revelation teaches and go forward steadily towards our goal? "Seek not the things that are too high for thee, and search not into things above thy ability: but the things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always. For it is not necessary for thee to see with thy eyes those things that are hid. . . . The suspicion of them hath deceived many, and hath detained their minds in vanity" (Eccl. iii, 22). This is true also of the spiritual life. It is futile to brood over the state of our souls, as to whether God is satisfied with us, or whether we are making progress. Rather let us travel along the path which God has pointed out, day by day courageously and in faith.

6.—HYPERSENSITIVENESS

THE EQUILIBRIUM of many persons is all too easily disturbed by a certain exaggerated sensitiveness. Sensitive as the

needle of a balance, the slightest touch causes them to waver. A cross look, a word of rebuke, an **Undue** unfavourable remark, want of consideration, **Sensitiveness** unpleasant news, the slightest noise in the house or in the street—at once it seems the end of all things, or they fall into a state of despair.

Persons possessing such strained susceptibility should set a guard on eye, ear, imagination, so as to exclude as far as possible such disturbing impressions. We cause a great deal of discontent in our hearts by admitting much that disturbs us. But why trouble ourselves with so much that does not concern us? It is not for nothing that the word, "Enclosure" stands on the doors of the monastery. Leave outside what is useless to you. And if, notwithstanding all precautions, many unpleasant things find an entrance into your inner life, do not allow them to occupy your attention, but as far as possible direct your mind away from them. If you give them your attention, on the other hand, from a small cloud they will grow into a storm. Therefore, it is best to give no heed to them, however much your heart urges you to admit them. Refrain from brooding over the injustice or ill-treatment you have received at the hands of others, act as if nothing had occurred and proceed on your way. Why should we allow ourselves to be held back by every trivial occurrence?

Again, we should not take ourselves or our little concerns as all important, everyday disturbances as tragedies. People talk about you, you say. But, as Thomas à Kempis says, "What are words but words? They fly through the air, but hurt not a stone" (*Imit.* iii, 46). Others do not like you? **The One Thing That Matters** Are you any worse for that? What matters is that God should be satisfied with you. Or you have a little quarrel, perhaps? But, after a storm comes a calm. You suffer persecution? The psalmist says, "My heart is troubled . . . my friends and my neighbours have drawn near, and stood against me . . . they that sought evils to me, spoke vain things. . . . But I, as a deaf man, heard not: and as a dumb man not opening his mouth. . . . For in Thee, O Lord, have I hoped" (Ps. xxxvii, 11).

Those who are spoiled fear every breath of wind, every little shower of rain. But the hardened man buttons up his coat more securely and sets forth bravely through storm and rain. For the sensitive salvation consists in his growing hardened. Let us consider what Christ suffered and how courageously He endured all, a Lamb led to the slaughter.

How was this possible for Our Lord? It was possible because from the beginning He disposed Himself to sacrifice, because He gave Himself entirely to His divinely appointed task and forgot Himself in it.

7.—THE EGOIST AND THE SELF-CENTRED

WE ARE ALL PRONE to think ourselves too important to make self the centre of our whole life and endeavour. We want what we like, our comfort, enjoyment, success. Our judgments are formed accordingly, and consequently we suffer from restriction and opposition. But we should realize that we live ultimately, not for ourselves, but for God, that we have to fulfil the task which He has appointed us in this life, and that this only matters; not that all should go well with us in the meantime, or that we should enjoy ourselves. Christ never asked Himself whether things would go well with Him in His life; rather, His words were ever:

Living for God "I have come to do not My will, but the will of Him Who sent Me." This alone was His thought always—to do the will of His Father. He set store by this alone, forgetting Self and sacrificing Himself entirely to the business of His Father. Therefore, He was always contented, and, when looking back over His life for the last time, He found His most glorious consolation in the consciousness of this: "Father . . . I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" (John xvii, 1, 4). This is why He went forth to His death courageously and sure of victory.

The great mistake we make is that, contrary to the way of Christ, instead of losing ourselves in our task, we ever push our little self into the foreground in all things, ever

speculating what we ourselves shall get out of everything. Hence the discontent which is ever with us. The remedy is clear: to give ourselves to the task to which God has appointed us, forgetting ourselves in this and seeking our satisfaction only in doing God's will. Then we cannot be seriously disturbed by any occurrence. "He who wants to save his life (himself) will lose it; but he that loses his life for My sake will find it."

8.—ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD

WE HAVE NOW DISCUSSED many causes of our lack of inner peace. The chief cause still remains to be considered—estrangement from God. This takes various forms, the first of which is sin.

"There is no peace to the wicked" (Isaias xlvi, 2). This is only too true. Peace is rest in order and, as we have seen above, order in man's life consists in his life being directed towards God. How, then, can he find peace

Sin who leaves God out of his life and turns his heart to other things? Surely his soul must waver unsteadily as the magnetic needle which has lost its pole. Or he is like the orphaned child who has lost its mother, its last protector, and feels lonely and unhappy among strangers. Again, order exists only where all is accomplished according to law. There is order in the heavens because all the stars are focussed about one centre according to a law of gravitation. Similarly order and peace reign in the human body only as long as the laws of health are observed. If these are broken, we become ill. Now, sin is a violation of the laws by which God wishes order to be maintained in the soul of man as well as in human society. What wonder if when we deliberately violate these laws our soul loses its equilibrium and we disturb also the peace of others. Hence the divine reproach: "Oh, that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments: thy peace had been as a river . . . thy name should not have perished, nor have been destroyed from before My face" (Isaias xlvi, 18 . . .)

But sin implies not only loss of God, but also a certain

voluntary break with God and deliberate rebellion against God. But this always brings the consciousness of having trespassed, and therefore made God our

Conscience enemy. Fear and remorse follow, and, try how we may to stifle our conscience, it will make its voice heard, and the feeling that everything is not in order weighs on our soul and we are unhappy. Added to this is the thought of judgment. Then the passions by which we are drawn into sin. This is followed by satiety, which is succeeded by remorse and yet a further relapse into sin. It is like the sea in a storm which hurls its foaming waves against the shore, whence they are flung back again, continuing thus unceasingly. So it is with the sinner. "But the wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest, and the waves thereof cast up dirt and mire. There is no peace to the wicked" (Is. lvii, 20). The only way of attaining peace, therefore, is to put an end to our sins and live a life of peace with God.

But there are many who are disturbed by no present sin, but by past sin and guilt. Although all is in order because all has been forgiven by a good confession, yet they are overwhelmed by endless misery. But Christ **The Past** expressly says: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (John xx, 23).

Words which God Himself has pronounced, and, therefore, infallible. All past sins, however numerous or grievous they may have been, are completely effaced after a good confession. "Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor the effeminate, nor liars with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor railers, shall possess the Kingdom of God. And such some of you were; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified" (1 Cor. vi, 9 . . .). Thus the Apostle spoke to the newly converted pagans. But what is said here regarding baptism is also true of every good confession by which every sin committed up to that time is effaced. All forgotten by the Lord God. "Thou hast delivered my soul that it should not perish, Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back" (Is. xxxviii, 17). "The Lord is compassionate and merciful. . . . He hath not dealt with us according to

our sins. . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our iniquities from us" (Ps. cii, 8 . . .). This is done by one good confession. "Say but the word and my soul shall be healed."

Why, then, rake up the old transgressions again and again? Why want to confess them repeatedly? Is this not a want of trust in the Word of God? You say, "But I cannot be sure." You want to feel ease of

Want of Trust mind. That is, you wish first to feel and then to believe that all has been forgiven.

Is this real faith? Is not faith a simple belief in the Word of God, whether we feel or not? Then cease all worrying and put your trust in the words of absolution, "*Ego te absolvo.*" Return thanks to God and rejoice at being restored to the state of grace. Did Mary Magdalen torment herself about whether the past was forgiven? Did not Our Lord say: "Thy faith hath made thee safe. Go in peace" (Luke vii, 50).

"But I go on committing new sins! How can I be at peace with God?" you say. If you love sin, if you will not give it up, then with you also, "There is no peace to the wicked!" Hence the only way to attain

Good Will peace is to break with sin decisively. But there are too many who, while detesting all sins and fighting against them, yet repeatedly relapse into many faults. What is to be done? Are they to give way to discouragement or fear of God? No, for God makes allowances for such frailty. He knows we are poor weak creatures, and, as long as He sees we have the good will and are endeavouring to improve, He is satisfied. Even as a good father acts towards his children; he punishes them for their faults certainly, but, as long as these are faults of frailty and they have the good will to give them up, he does not withdraw his affection. "As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him: for He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. cii, 13 . . .). Hence, let us struggle, repent and rise up again, but always with confidence in God.

Others are disturbed by a different kind of estrangement from God. They seek God with their whole heart, in prayer and by a virtuous life. They desire to be completely united to God in ardent love and joy. Sometimes

Desolation they succeed. Then they felt the nearness of God and were borne up by His consolation, their hearts full of rejoicing. But the time came when the sun of summer had suddenly set in their souls and bleak winter entered in. Prayer no longer helped; they had no taste for spiritual exercises, felt no more joy in what was good, no consolation. It seemed as though God had abandoned them. Desolation was in their hearts. In addition, the old temptation and inclination to all that was evil returned. They sought God, calling to Him, but there was no answer. Only comfortless night. If God's grace has been forfeited by gross infidelity, it must be regained by new fidelity. But such a state can arise without any infidelity. All who strive earnestly, even the most holy, suffer such desolation, God desiring that they should learn from experience that their former state of happiness was a gift from God and not merited by their own virtuousness. For in this lay danger of considering themselves better than others. And so by such bitter desolation we realize again how miserable we should ourselves be if we were not continually borne up by God's grace.

But the chief reason for our suffering is that we may grow in genuine, solid virtue. To love and serve God faithfully when He lavishes His sweetness on us would be easy for the most egoistical; but to remain faithful when He withholds His favour is a proof of unselfish fidelity and love. If notwithstanding the feeling that we are forsaken, we continue courageously to seek and serve God as before, we do not fall back as we may think, but rather we make great progress. The magnificent blossoms have fallen from the tree, it is true, but the fruit has begun to grow and will continue to ripen day by day. From time to time God will return perceptibly and refresh the soul anew.

But to possess God always here on earth, as many would wish, is impossible, because we are still abiding in the land

of exile. "For in this also we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from Heaven . . . do groan, being burthened . . . knowing that, while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, and not by sight" (II Cor. v, 2 . . .). Therefore,

**Patience
and
Resignation**

all violent efforts to approach perceptibility nearer to God, to recover our former refreshing fervour, were as futile as to wish the summer sun to return and shed its warm rays on the cold winter ground. No, we must wait in patience, bearing our cross with resignation as long as God wills, and abandoning ourselves entirely to God. As Thomas à Kempis expresses it: "Lord, Thy care over me is greater than all the care I can take of myself. . . . For it cannot but be good, whatever Thou shalt do by me. If Thou wilt have me to be in darkness, be Thou blessed; and if Thou wilt have me to be in light, be Thou again blessed; if Thou vouchsafe to comfort me, be Thou blessed; and if it be Thy will I should be afflicted, be Thou always equally blessed. . . . I will receive with indifference from Thy hand good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow; and will give Thee thanks for all that happens to me. . . . Cast me not off for ever, nor blot me out of the book of life; and what tribulation soever befalleth me shall not hurt me" (*Imit.* iii, 17 . . .).

To sum up briefly all that has been said: Since peace is rest in order, and right order consists in man directing his life entirely to God and accommodating himself to God's law, so he alone will find peace—as far as peace is possible in this life—who seeks God with his whole soul and with all confidence, obeys God's law and abandons himself to the dispensations of His Providence.

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