Yet even in the annals of sanctity it is a rare case that perfection should be recognized by a hot-tempered husband and a domineering daughter-in-law. It is a triumph of love—for the mystic life is nothing else but the full flowering of charity—a charity that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things and endureth all things, and is finally made perfect in the Beatific Vision where both faith and hope are left behind.

A LETTER ON TEMPTATIONS AGAINST PURITY*

BY

FERDINAND VALENTINE, O.P.

Dear David,

You have asked whether unclean thoughts which seem to saturate your mind, even in time of prayer, are due to the devil. Before I can answer this question you will have to know something about the devil's method and scope. Not a pleasant subject, I warn you.

First of all the devil cannot directly control the human mind and will. He has no means of getting inside a man's soul; this is metaphysically impossible. Should you ever read Marlowe's story of Doctor Faustus, I hope you will bear this in mind: it may be good 'theatre' but it's bad theology. The most we can say about this and similar stories is, as one writer puts it, that they contain a certain symbolic truth, and may be looked upon as the dramatic expression of the possibility of final impenitence. But literally and historically these stories are false.

Let me repeat—the devil cannot directly control the human mind and will, but he can influence them indirectly through the imagination, and even the imagination he affects only indirectly through his power over the loco-motor activity of the body. In other words, he cannot impress upon our imagination something we have never previously experienced: as St Thomas says, he cannot make a man born blind see colour. He can only revive a past experience in the imagination through his power over our

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bodily organs.[1]

Now man being an organism, all his functions from the lowest to the highest are coordinated and interdependent. When one function is disturbed it reacts on the entire organism. It is a fact of common observation that emotional disturbances can produce physiological changes. We speak of people being speechless with terror or sick with disgust. The emotion of love increases the pulse rate, as in the case of St Philip Neri, whose heart beat was audible during prayer. Again, we speak of people being livid with rage and so on.

Similar reciprocity exists between the *imagination* and certain physiological activities. Digestive processes may interfere with sleep and produce the unpleasant imaginative experience called nightmare. Contrariwise, we are told, that those who habitually surrender to imaginative fears (worry and anxiety) often become chronic dyspeptics. There is also the intimate association between imagination and the physiological functions of sex. The devil's power to reproduce these thoughts and images is indirect, through his influence over our body. Clearly then, David, if the devil cannot produce images directly in the imagination, it follows that his power to tempt us is limited in large measure by our experience; that is, he cannot induce imaginative representations of things, events, sensations, which are not part of our experience; he cannot, in a word, recall to our minds that which we have not lived.[2] Nor must we think that his influence is confined to the visual imagination only. We ourselves can reproduce imaginatively every kind of sense-experience, visual, auditory, motor,

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1 St Thomas Aquinas teaches that angels, both good and bad, can propose intelligible truth to man under the similitudes of sensible things. This simply means that the angels can convey ideas to us by writing, speaking and by any kind of sign. St Thomas goes on to say that the power to reproduce these similitudes is due exclusively to the angels' power over the local-motion of corporeal things. (S.T. I, 110). By the last phrase is meant the angels' power to move material things from one place to another. And so, he concludes, both a good and a bad angel by their own natural power can move the human imagination.

If the power of angels is confined to the movement of material things, how can we conclude that they have, thereby, power also over the imagination?

'Corporeal nature', St Thomas says, 'obeys the angel as regards local-movement so that whatever can be caused by local-movement of bodies is subject to the natural power of the angels. Now it is manifest that imaginative apparitions are sometimes caused in us by the local-movement of animal spirits or humours'. By the 'movement of animal spirits or humours' he means that a disturbance or local movement (i.e., loco-motor activity) of glandular secretions, through angelic agency, can have a reflex influence on our imagination.

He repeats this a little further on: 'An angel changes the imagination, not indeed by the impression of an imaginative form in no way previously received from the senses (for he cannot make a man born blind imagine colour), but by the local-movement of . . . humours'. In other words, the devil cannot impress upon our imagination the picture of something we have never previously experienced. He can only revive a past experience in the imagination through his power over our bodily organs.

2 We have deliberately excluded all reference to Collective Unconsciousness.

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tactual, images of taste and of smell. The devil, too, has this power, but indirectly.

You will have noticed that I have said, 'The devil's power is limited *in large measure* by our experience'. He can also tempt us in other ways; as for example through others already under his influence, as in the case of our first parents: 'And Adam said: The woman thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the tree, and I did eat'. (*Genesis* 3:6-12.) Or—which is more to the point—in the case of the godless society in which we now live. But, even so, the most effective way of thwarting him is to live prudently, remembering that anything we do here and now can be dangerous in two ways: either in the present or the future. We should be on our guard against those actions which may later on be the cause of grievous temptation, although at the time they may not disturb us. The devil can choose our weakest moments for reviving memories of the past.

A well established law of psychology informs us that any experience, however fleeting, leaves behind it some impression which helps to fashion our characteristic mentality, and can never therefore be completely forgotten; it becomes part of a closely woven mental synthesis. In other words, all experience is stored and affects our mental outlook and character. We should never conclude because we cannot always recall ideas at will (as when we say 'we cannot remember') that these ideas are lost. We cannot find them, but they are there. How often we remember things through some association. Quite trivial apprehensions, like the outline of a tree or the sound of an old-time melody will suddenly stir up memories we thought long since forgotten. Every one of us is the outcome of a history, each event of which may be recoverable.

From this you will realise at once the tremendous possibilities of diabolic suggestion in our own times. We cannot all live like monks in a world within a world. To live we must make contacts, and contacts may contaminate. It behoves us to exercise the utmost vigilance over experience—what we read, what we listen to—to restrain inordinate curiosity. We may say: 'Oh, this or that leaves me quite cold. So it may; but it has, nevertheless, become part of ourselves—'every experience is stored'—and one day it will be recalled, perhaps at the devil's suggestion, at a moment of moral crisis. The past is never forgotten; what seems harmless now may be a source of grievous temptation later on.

Particularly is this true of the major crisis of adolescence; for suggestive and dangerous material passed on through film, radio, literature, evil example and so on may make little impression, say at the age of nine or ten, but it will be remembered several years later; and it is for the latter period we should prepare our children.

Let me offer you this word of advice, David: never willingly

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experience at your best what you know may be a source of serious temptation at your worst. Not a very literary maxim perhaps; but it is sound. There are, of course, many things we ought to know or find out as we grow up; but we should always guard against a morbid and sensual curiosity.

We cannot say that all these temptations are caused directly or entirely by the devil. Many of them have a purely biological origin in man's disordered, fallen nature. That is to say, thoughts and images are often associated with, and occasioned by, certain physical conditions which may be brought about either in the ordinary course of nature or by the influence of the devil, or by both.

Whilst we are on this subject, David, let us face the more practical issues. The devil can tempt us in two ways:

(A) EXTERIORLY.[3] First, through other people. He has power over others (that is *indirectly* as we have seen) both to shape their minds and souls; he can bring about an emotional crisis in them which may affect us through contact, and thus hasten a more intense, mutual build up, as, for example, when two ill-humoured people meet and fall out. We may corrupt one another by bad example, and also by evil suggestion—through books, films, conversation and so on.

Hence the importance of good companionship; that is, of like-minded people grouped together by a common interest. Gatherings of *Catholic* youth should for this reason be encouraged, especially at retreats of the right kind.[4]

Secondly through *things*. From the data given in this letter, it may interest you to speculate how far the devil can produce intelligible, external signs. For example: the planchette and other forms of automatic writing, clair-audience and perhaps clairvoyance, speech, noises—such as table-rapping—the mediumistic trance, the assumption of a human body or the likeness of a body (as presumably in the temptations of Christ), smell, buffeting, disease and so on.[5] I am not arguing that these manifestations are always due to the devil. But it is interesting to discover that all the so-called contacts with the other world which feature in the spiritistic seances are covered by the *a priori* conclusions of St Thomas.

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3 May I remind you once again that I am saying 'the devil can' and not 'the devil actually does'. Temptations as we have seen may have other sources, to wit, the world and the flesh. In any case the remedies suggested later on are valid.

4 You will notice I have underlined *Catholic*. Associations of *nominal* Catholics are sometimes far from being desirable.

5 Automatic writing may only be from the subconscious. Note how many literary men attribute their work to a secondary personality, e.g., Barrie and '*McConnachie*'. Clairvoyance and telepathy are now dignified in psychology by being called 'extra-sensory perception', and are being increasingly studied by psychologists of repute, especially at Cambridge. It is suggested that these are merely natural powers which people have in varying degrees.

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The devil influences us:

(B) INTERIORLY. He excites our feelings by his power over loco-motor activities, as we have seen. These feelings or emotions arouse, by autonomic action, associated images and thoughts from our stored experience; these react on the feelings and emotions, which again, in turn, make the images more vivid. This interaction or mutual causality, if not interrupted, gradually builds up a serious temptation inciting us to anger, revenge, impurity and so on. Those struggle most successfully against this build-up who tackle beginnings. This can be done in two ways:

(a) By cutting across the reciprocating activity I have described, by some fresh interest, thus swamping dangerous images by others at once less nocuous and more vivid. For this reason hobbies which offer an easy and compelling interest are helpful and sometimes necessary. The cardinal need, at the beginning of these temptations, is a congenial and satisfying distraction; something we can turn to wholeheartedly.[6]

(b) By the avoidance of anxiety and the relaxation of tension. I want to lay particular stress on this. In our struggle against interior temptations we should not fret or panic. This is one of the golden maxims of St Francis of Sales, as we shall see presently. Anxiety accelerates the emotional crisis, adding fuel to the fire. Even prayer and ejaculations may become so uncontrolled as to defeat their own purpose.

For this reason, too (amongst others), we should never frighten those who are tempted against purity. Sometimes, of course, the threat and fear of hell may move a hardened sinner; but it does nothing but harm to souls of goodwill who are struggling against bad habits for whose inception they are sometimes hardly responsible.

An ordered, peaceful, regular life, with encouragement to collaborate with God's holy will and to make the prayer of loving worship, can work wonders in overcoming temptations against purity. The *discipline of the alarm clock* too, that is prompt, instantaneous rising when called, will give young souls confidence; for remember, that is what they need most of all—confidence in the love and goodness of God, and in themselves.

[6] 'If we want to reject a thought, we should rather turn to another. This is not difficult, if we can distract ourselves with fascinating reading or outer activity. If neither is possible, we must turn to an attractive thought-complex, the best being some harmless reverie. Such thoughts should not be of abstract matters demanding close concentration, nor should they be too narrowly limited, otherwise the interest they provide is too fleeting and quickly exhausted and the thought to be suppressed perseveres. In fighting against thoughts, we ought particularly to guard against anxiety and excitement, as they act precisely in the same way as the just-mentioned defence-gestures. (That is a "No!", a "Begone!" possibly combined with an additional defensive in the form of a gesture.) For this reason, intense and long-continued prayer is not to be recommended at such times'. (Johannes Lindworsky, S.J., *Psychologie des Aszese*. trans. Emil Heiring. p. 39).

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Auto-suggestion can help. The following is the advice of an experienced doctor. In time of actual temptation against purity the person afflicted

> 'should be taught to lie back with muscles relaxed, breathe slowly and regularly, become as completely relaxed in mind and body as possible, and say to himself, "This temptation is getting less and less. I shall always turn away from it. I shall brush it aside. It is no part of me. I shall never succumb again". If that is said with complete conviction[7] the thing happens. One such treatment may be enough. If not, it should be repeated every night for a week or more'. (*Psychological Methods of Healing*, by William Brown, M.D., D.Sc., F.R.C.P. p. 155.)

The meaning of this simple exercise is not at once apparent and for this reason many who are asked to try it will accuse the author of undue optimism.

In that very excuse is seen the cause of the whole trouble. When human nature is confronted with a moral difficulty of this kind, it is immediately tempted to turn 'I will not' into 'I cannot', or retrospectively—'I just couldn't help myself'. A subjective unwillingness becomes an objective impossibility. 'After all', people will argue, 'how can one be responsible for something one cannot help?' and they begin to explain away their lapses, passing on the blame to upbringing, health, overwork and so on, proudly refusing to acknowledge their sin and face their shame. The first obvious step towards recovery is to admit responsibility and to seek Christ's forgiveness in the sacrament of penance.

The above exercise in auto-suggestion is a deliberate assault on this tendency to explain away our guilt; it does not seek to persuade us to do what is normally impossible and expect some kind of magical deliverance, but simply prevents us from believing that we cannot do what is quite certainly well within our capacity.

Dr Allers is of opinion that few temptations are irresistible. The only exceptions he allows are 'abnormal cases in which the will may really have become enfeebled, as for instance, in a man addicted to the drug habit. It is perhaps true that such a man cannot resist the temptation any more and has to yield to his craving for the poison. But even in these cases there is a remnant of freedom and a chance for recuperation. It is known that even an inveterate habit of this kind may give way under the pressure of some strong emotion; what emotional strain may produce, the will, guided by reason, ought to be able to accomplish. In fact, there are not a few cases in which a man found strength to overcome such a habit. . . The idea of irresistible temptations is

7 'With complete conviction'. Some psychologists do not believe that people can practice auto-suggestion convincingly by themselves, unless they *fully realise* the interdependence of mind and body.

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probably altogether wrong; great as the alluring force may be, it still needs the assent of the will for a man to give way to it. But we do, in fact, cede very often to temptations which we cannot, in good conscience, credit with an overwhelming power'. (*Self-Improvement*, by Rudolf Allers. pp. 180-1.)

'God is faithful', says St Paul, 'who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able.' (I *Cor.* 10:13.)

The importance of relaxation as an auxiliary in the spiritual life and particularly in time of temptation against purity can hardly be exaggerated. Contrary to the opinion prevailing in some quarters, tension of body is seldom the outward expression of an indomitable will; nor is muscular tension a suitable defence mechanism against the wiles of the evil one. In fact, experience teaches us the opposite. It is usually the man of quiet determination who wins through, and not the one who makes an outward show of obstinacy, with clenching of teeth and gripping of thumbs. The easiest action wins the race.

Many of us introduce unnecessary strain into our relationship with God, especially at time of prayer. Bodily posture can influence the mind. If we kneel upright, for example, we are more alert and less likely to sleep; and if we join our hands or extend our arms, we assist and express the will's surrender to God. But our prayer should never be *taut*, the body rigid, in an effort to carry the kingdom of heaven by brute force. This tension, far from banishing distractions, invites them, stimulating the imagination. And yet many of us are so accustomed to a sense of strain in our spiritual exercises that we grow uneasy when it is not there and begin to think we are not trying. It would surprise some religious to know that relaxation in the sense in which it is understood in this letter—namely, the *control of tension*—may even prevent them from becoming relaxed religious. How slowly do we learn never to be anxious, not even anxious to be good.

> 'Anxiety is the soul's greatest enemy', says St Francis of Sales, 'sin excepted. Just as internal disturbance and seditions ruin a commonwealth and incapacitate it from resisting external aggression, so when the heart is anxious and disquieted within itself, it loses the power to preserve those virtues which are already acquired and also the means of resisting the temptations of Satan, who does not fail (as we say) to fish in troubled water.
>
> 'Anxiety proceeds from an ill-regulated desire to be delivered from the evil we experience, or to acquire the good to which we aspire; nevertheless, nothing aggravates evil and hinders good so much as anxiety and perturbation.
>
> 'Therefore, if you earnestly desire to be delivered from some evil, or to attain to some good, above all things calm and tranquillise your mind, and compose your judgment and will; then quietly and gently pursue your aim, adopting suitable

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means with some method. When I say *quietly*, I do not mean *negligently*, but without hurry, care or disquietude; otherwise, instead of obtaining what you desire, you will spoil all, and be but the more embarrassed.' (*Devout Life*. Pt IV, Ch. 11.)

Perhaps it would be helpful to develop this theme, David. The sane advice we have quoted has an added significance in our own time. Life today is restless. The motor car, 'plane, telephone, radio and many other inventions and fruits of scientific enquiry add to the general pace of things, helping yet alluring, pretending to rid our lives of drudgery and at the same time increasing the demand upon our nervous energies.

To keep abreast of work many curtail their sleep, stimulate themselves, 'rationalise' life for immediate, maximum output. But for all that, in the midst of the whirl and whirr of an almost universal mechanisation, man remains unalterably organic, subject to the same laws of life as were his forefathers. The machine of its nature loves to move and to accelerate; but there is a limit to man's capacity to expend himself. He must take time to rest and recuperate, have courage patiently to sit back and watch the world go by. This the present generation finds difficult. The modern world never sleeps; for man, too, has said, 'Let there be light'. Life after dark is made so attractive. Day merges into day, and the divine rhythm is destroyed. All this has repercussions on man's spiritual life.

Can we wonder that many people are overwrought and exhausted? They seek rest and are unable to find it. How are they to free the human spirit from the dangers of imagination? Should they work still harder, hoping by sheer fatigue to conquer sleep; or should they fight desperately, tensing body and mind to withstand what they imagine to be the onslaught of hell?

The meaning of what I am saying will be quite clear to those souls who find themselves in this dilemma. What advice, then, shall we give them? They are trapped with a loathsome thing from which they would escape and which in some inexplicable way seems part of their disordered physical condition. They want God; they love purity.

I am not pretending that these pages hold the answer to all these problems, David, that would be foolish. There is, however, a line of advice and treatment, or at least of investigation, which undoubtedly helps us to grapple with them more confidently.

I have already suggested that the state of soul created by temptation can and should be tackled indirectly by turning the mind to some congenial and compelling interest. But clearly, of itself, this is not a sufficient answer. At best it is a palliative—an emergency measure in face of an actual assault. It is not enough merely to transfer and redirect the imagination in the hope of checking the build-up of an emotional crisis: *we must also reduce the fever of the physical and mental surge together with the*

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vividness of the accompanying images. How can this be done?

'Tests indicate', writes Edmund Jacobson, 'that when you imagine or recall or reflect upon anything, you tense your muscles somewhere, as if you were actually looking or speaking or doing something, but to a much slighter degree. If you relax *those particular tensions*, you cease to imagine or recall or reflect about the matter in question—for instance, a matter of worry. *Such relaxation may be accomplished no less successfully while you are active in your daily affairs than while you are lying down.*' (*You Must Relax.* Edmund Jacobson, M.D., Director of the Laboratory for Clinical Physiology, Chicago.)

This is a brief statement of the principle I am trying to put before you, David. As I reminded you at the beginning of this letter, man is an organism whose functions work interdependently. Just as there is a mutual relationship and reciprocity between the imagination, the emotions and biological processes, a similar interaction may be observed between the imagination, the emotions (such as worry, fear and pleasure) and muscular tensions. By learning, therefore, how to relax these muscular tensions in time of temptation against purity, we have gone a long way to overcoming it altogether,[8] *provided always we have*

[8] On this subject no contemporary psychologist or psychotherapist, in my opinion, speaks with the sane, measured and authentic voice of Jacobson as he explains his methods and lays before us his findings. There can be little doubt of the validity of his conclusions. Let me quote the following:

'Because of reflex connections, the nervous system cannot be quieted except in conjunction with the muscular system. In fact it becomes evident that the whole organism rests as the neuromuscular activity diminishes'. (*Progressive Relaxation.* p. xii.)

'To be excited and to be relaxed are physiological opposites'. (*Ibidem.* p. xv.)

'According to the present clinical and experimental experience up to date, if the patient is shown how to relax the voluntary system there tends later to follow a similar quiescence of the vegetative apparatus: Emotions tend to subside as he relaxes'. (p. 32).

'The subject learns to localise tensions when they occur during nervous irritability and excitement and to relax them away. It is a matter of nervous re-education. . . . Many have never observed the connection between tenseness and nervous excitement, or between relaxation and nervous calm'. (pp. 40, 41.)

'Present results indicate that an emotional state fails to exist in the presence of complete relaxation of the peripheral parts involved'. (e.g., œsophagus in fear, forehead and brow in anxiety.) (p. 218.)

In addition to showing us the interdependence of muscular tension and the emotions Jacobson has demonstrated scientifically that 'imagery diminishes with advancing relaxation of muscles'. The value of this in dealing with impure images is obvious; and although he stresses that visual images only disappear with complete *ocular* relaxation, the general muscular relaxation he advises, as well as the simpler and more convenient methods of others, sufficiently reduces the intensity of these images by dispersing the emotional condition that caused them.

The main feature of Jacobson's work is careful and untiring scientific inquiry. He puts before us observable scientific data and measurements:

'The results of electrical measurements agree with and confirm the findings that relaxation of specific muscular processes *ipso facto* does away with specific mental activities. Physiology thus provides a method which can be turned to clinical use where it is desired to control certain types of imagination or emotion, including worry and excessive mental activity'. (p. 345).

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the will to do so. That is what St Francis means when he writes: '*If you earnestly desire* to be delivered from some evil, or to attain some good, above all things calm and tranquillise your mind and compose your judgment and will; then gently pursue your aim, adopting suitable means with some method'.

Let me repeat once again; at the onset of temptation the mind should be distracted quietly from the dangerous thought and image. This should be followed *at once* by some method of reducing the vehemence of our emotional condition. Here to hand, then, is a very practical means—relaxation.

To relax is to relieve all muscular tension as completely as possible: a continual letting-go of activities in every part of the body.

> 'When we say that a person is "tense",' says Doctor Jacobson, 'we mean in popular terms that he is over-alert or highly strung.' (We note this in people who jump at a sudden surprise or in ourselves when we give a start as we are falling off to sleep.) 'When we say that a muscle is tense, we mean that it is contracting, its fibres are shortened. Such tensions make up much of the warp and woof of living. Walking, talking, breathing and all of our activities involve a series of complicated and finely shaded tensions of various muscles. To do away with all such tensions permanently would be to do away with living. This is not our purpose but at times we need to control them, and relaxation is a form of such control.' (*Progressive Relaxation*, p. 35.)

Notice very carefully, the form of control Jacobson advises is what he calls *Differential Relaxation*, which he defines as a 'minimum of tension in the muscles requisite for an act along with the relaxation of other muscles' (p. 83).

There is a world of difference between *holding oneself* quiet and relaxing. Many people come to the end of the day with overstrung nerves, expecting sleeplessness and worse. They toss and turn in an effort to find sleep through comfort. When told to relax, they try to keep still, which only aggravates the trouble.

The tension on the violin string enables it to vibrate; but when it has ceased to vibrate it is still taut. The one means of reducing the tension is by slackening the string in the usual way.

So with the human body, a means has to be discovered, not of keeping it still, but of *finding stillness and peace through the release of tension.* The approach to this state especially at night, is threefold:

(a) We should not try to overcome discomfort in an effort to find comfort, but we should seek a means for undergoing, that is, a *reason for accepting*, the discomfort. A dripping tap, for instance, may prevent us from sleeping; but it will disturb us only in so far as our minds give it a nuisance value. There is no reason why a regular, rhythmic noise should keep us awake. On

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the contrary, we should normally expect it to lull us to sleep, like camping by the sea. The reason for keeping awake is manufactured by our own minds. That is the trouble. There is no end to this process once we let ourselves go. What needs to be changed is not the drip but our attitude towards it. We may, for instance, consider each drop of water as an act of love of God. By doing this we make it *desirable*, that is, we discover a reason for accepting and welcoming it. We make a friend of the water.

The same may be said of all similar discomforts. Take another example which will carry us a step further. Many of us have spent uncomfortable nights under canvas. The ground was hard. We could no longer find sleep through comfort. But once we had readjusted our minds to accept the normal discomfort attaching to such conditions, how comfortably we slept and how refreshed we were in the morning. There is no mystery about this, other than that we had discovered the secret of relaxation. Those who seek complete comfort are rarely able completely to relax. Comfort tends to fixate and increase residual, muscular tension because it helps us to relieve the discomfort of such tension without fully relaxing it.

We begin to understand now why masters of the spiritual life encourage us to sleep hard. They are not here concerned with mortification as such, but rather with a healthy attitude towards sleep. We are much better able to relax when we have educated the mind to accept a certain degree of discomfort. The reason behind this acceptance is the Cross and the example of our Lord. who had not whereon to lay his head. The fruit of this relaxation is an ascendancy over the imagination.

> 'The fact is', writes Edmund Jacobson, 'that when you move about in bed, seeking comfort, it is you doing so; nothing compels you. You are led to it by your own desire and habits; that is all.
>
> 'Your mistake is that you are ever trying to become a little more comfortable, or to avoid discomfort.
>
> ' "That is natural", you reply.
>
> 'But I am reminded of the lesson of Jesus—the paradox that only by sacrificing your life can you save it. Only by sacrificing your comfort for the moment, when you lie awake, relaxing in the face of discomfort, can you eventually become comfortable and go to sleep. It is your persistent effort to better yourself that results in failure; your effort is tension.' (*You Can Sleep Well*. pp. 40-43.)

Elsewhere he says: 'When you feel like moving some particular member relax it instead, until the inclination to move disappears'. (*Progressive Relaxation*. p. 402.)

(b) We should prepare for sleep, deliberately. It requires considerable skill to bring a train into a railway terminus. How gradually and almost imperceptibly it comes to rest. At night we

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should slow down the tempo of our living, avoid disturbing anxieties and problems, exciting literature and turn to God with loving preoccupation.

(c) Sins against purity are often a kind of ritual of self-love. The soul has been thrown back upon itself through some form of isolation; it is in love with itself, talks to and seeks to possess itself. Communicability is the divinely appointed condition of life; but this type of soul is communicable to none but itself. That is the root of the trouble. A radical cure must first solve the problem of loneliness and isolation. This can be done best and most safely through the prayer of loving-worship and an awareness of God's indwelling. Worship begets peace; it is the true solvent of all tension and strain.

The best safeguard, therefore, against temptations to impurity is to foster the will-to-be-pure through the love of purity. This love cannot come through thought and meditation alone, but is the fruit of a certain contact with God in his Eucharistic presence and through the prayer of loving worship. 'O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.' (Ps. 33:9.)

But this simple prayer, alas, has little in common with a flurry of spiritual exercises squeezed in anyhow to make room for other urgent demands on our time. The truth is that much of the modern tension has invaded our spiritual life, in many cases destroying the attraction to prayer. The problem is exactly how to ease this tension.

There are two difficulties in setting down a satisfactory method of relaxation:

(a) Objectively the maximum results take time. Jacobson, for instance, writes: 'Many people can arrange for an hour of rest at noon'. That is part of the trouble—*they can't*. Other authorities, however, agree that there are great individual differences in the amount a person can or will release in any one period. The subject himself should therefore decide how long to relax. *However short a time is taken repetition is the key to success.* Relaxation faithfully repeated soon convinces us of the need for further relaxation.

(b) The second difficulty is that those who need relaxation most like it least.

> 'It is painful to see a man—thin and pale from the excessive nervous force he has used, and from a whole series of attacks of nervous prostration—speak with contempt of "this method of relaxation". It is not a "method" in any sense except that in which all laws of nature are methods. No one invented it, no one planned it; . . . to call it a new idea or method is as absurd as it would be, had we carried our tension so far as to forget sleep entirely, for someone to come with a "new method" of sleep in order to bring us into a normal state again!' (Cf. *Relaxation in Everyday Life.* Boome and Richardson, p. 27.)

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HOW TO RELAX

Exercises employed in the Speech Therapy Department of the Notre Dame Clinic, Glasgow

Relaxation exercises should be undertaken every night before going to sleep and for periods of a few minutes during the day.

(a) On returning from business at the end of the day: *Go to your room and have 'five minutes'*. Lie on your bed in as comfortable a position as possible—face upwards, eyes closed, feet slightly apart, arms by sides, a low pillow under the head—and 'let go' as if you were a rag doll. (As a sofa or bed may sag many people prefer to lie on the floor; some find a small pillow at the waistline helpful, but this is not necessary).

The object you have in mind is 'a continual letting go of activities in every part of the body' and therefore the key-words are: 'Let go—relax—do nothing—cease activity—use no effort'. After a few moments make a quiet review of the different parts of the body in turn—fingers, hands, arms, feet, etc.—letting go each part still further. As you become more relaxed your breathing will become easier and deeper.

You should now review very quietly the tensions in your head and face. Let the muscles of your neck relax, pay particular attention to your mouth, teeth, eyes, forehead, 'loosening-up' as much as possible, remembering to keep the eyes closed. Five minutes (or longer, according to the time at your disposal) from time to time during the day or even once a day will make the greatest difference to your poise. The same procedure should be gone through at night before going to sleep. If you are restless and want to move about resist the temptation and relax instead.

(b) The above exercises are for complete relaxation; but a fair amount of release may be achieved during the day at odd moments, e.g., coming home in the bus, let the seat bear your full weight and give your feet a rest. Relax each part of the body as much as a sitting position will allow. Is your mouth set in a hard, straight line? Are you biting your pipe? Are you frowning? Are your eyes screwed up? Is your tongue cleaving to the roof of your mouth? All this is waste of energy. (Why leave the damper out when you don't need the oven?) Watch yourself also at the bus-stop. Do you move from one foot to the other, clear your throat, look repeatedly at your watch and expend your vital force in a hundred other unnecessary ways?

> 'It is possible so to train your body that the daily output of nervous energy is reduced to a minimum and this without loss of efficiency. On the contrary, the result of eliminating surplus tension is to *increase* efficiency. The surplus tension only interferes with what you are trying to do. The moment you allow yourself to perform any action from a basis of muscular ease you will find that you are doing it better and with less fatigue.' (*Relaxation in Everyday Life*. Boome and Richardson, p. 20.)

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It is sometimes objected that methodical relaxation tends to make us self-regarding. A moment's thought will show how baseless is this fear. It is the self-centred life that makes people anxious and apprehensive. 'They have not called upon the Lord; then have they trembled for fear where there was no fear.' (*Ps.* 13:5; cf. also *Lev.* 26:36; *Proverbs* 10:29; 28:1; *Wisdom* 17:10.) On the other hand, the more we try to live for God's honour and glory the more we lean on him in loving trust. That surely is the lesson of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Your Father knoweth that you need all these things . . . be not solicitous . . . O ye of little faith'. (*Matt.* 5.) The saint, therefore, being of all people the most detached is the least likely to accumulate unnecessary tensions.

But we are not all saints; we cannot so easily translate our lives in terms of other-worldly values. We may strive after a sense of God's presence and seek to collaborate with him in all things: but how far we fall short of this ideal. For long stretches of the day we forget him. Worldly and selfish motives begin to dominate our minds, creeping in stealthily as though without the continual thought of him we gravitated in spite of ourselves to a lower level. At such times we feel the need of readjustment—coordination; we look forward to our prayer. But do we always find these things in our prayer and so win through to peace of mind and soul? Sometimes, of course, yes; but all too often we are conscious of waging a losing battle, as though the soul were dishevelled, breathless and never quite prepared for the struggle of tomorrow. What stands in the way? The very tensions of which we have been speaking—tensions due to the abnormal strain and stress of modern life. Relaxation in the Christian sense is stripping one's self of *self* for the presence of God; undoing the things that bind us to *self;* a deliberate self-readjustment for God. It is an essential part of the act of the presence of God. He reaches down and we reach up.

If Jacobson can write: 'Cultivation of the muscle-sense does not encourage morbid self-consciousness' (*Progressive Relaxation*, p. xvi), how little we need fear when through this method of relaxation we seek repose in God's abiding presence. It is my firm conviction that many of us may find ourselves morally at fault by not doing so, especially in time of temptation.

To conclude, I cannot resist the following quotation:

> 'One of the best and most easily available means of acquiring that initial loosening that leads to deeper relaxation is laughter' (Boome and Richardson. *loco cit.* p. 51).

Arnold Lunn in *The Good Gorilla* (p. 64) makes one of his characters says that 'Holy Church is represented out of all proportion among the ranks of the humorists', and goes on to show that this is one of the proofs of her sanctity!

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So let us place humour next to godliness and learn to laugh kindly at self as well as at others—including the devil.

There we must end, David. I am sorry this letter had to be so impersonal; but obviously the subject would permit of no other treatment.

God bless you.

FERDINAND VALENTINE, O.P.

P.S.—Cf. *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Bk. I, ch. 4), in which St John of the Cross speaks specifically of temptations against purity during prayer.

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REVIEWS

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF ST TERESA OF JESUS. Translated and Edited by Professor E. Allison Peers. (Sheed & Ward; 3 volumes; £3 3s. 0d.)

The only adverse criticism of any weight to be brought against this new edition of St Teresa's works is that it is as yet *not* complete. Professor Peers seems ready to postpone the translation of the *Letters* indefinitely; and he has reason for so doing as they were the latest to be edited in the Stanbrook edition and there is some hope of discovering further Teresan correspondence following the recent Spanish upheavals. However, the *Letters* would have given the final touches to the picture of the saint which emerges from the accurate and sensitive translation of her own words. No picture by brush or pen could bring St Teresa to life in the way that a translation, and in particular this outstanding work of scholarship, can do. Professor Peers has given us a scientific

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