

ragged nerves must be doped with cigarettes one after another. We can get immersed in spiritual noise and bustle, and our nerves demand this and that sedative to quieten them. Carthusians and Cistercians do not find any need to dope their nerves with nicotine! Yet they have nerves, and are men as we are. All well-formed religious have this in common: all have a stillness and silence about them: each can say: 'My house is now at rest'.

We in the world, whether clerical or lay, deeply need formation in spiritual silence as an antidote to the noise of modern life. Those of us fortunate enough to live in the countryside know how nature has this note of silence and contemplation, just as the city is concentrated din. Exposition is comparatively of the modern world, this world of the age of noise, and it may well be for many souls their one effective means for growing strong and spiritually healthy. The adoring soul may not be conscious of any particular experience when in the Hidden Presence, but the influence of our Lord is at work all the time, and there is taking place what we may call spiritual reconditioning, just as after a holiday we usually realize the good it has done us when we come back to our normal conditions.

So, Exposition is a liturgy of silence in a world of rush and noise; the heavenly silence before the trumpets can sound with full resonance; the silence which causes the altar of prayer to blaze up and kindle the incense of our worship and prayer. The silent soul before the silent Host is learning how to master the language of heaven.



### THE NATURE OF ACCIDIE<sup>1</sup>

JOHN CASSIAN (A.D. 360-448)

**W**HEN the vice of Accidie has got hold of an unhappy man's mind, it breeds detestation of the place of his habitation, weariness of his cell, and makes him spurn and despise the brethren who live with him, or near him, as all neglectful and unspiritual. For every task to be done within the

<sup>1</sup> A synopsis made by Charles Williamson from W. B. Trevelyan's translation of Cassian's *Institutes*—A Master of the Desert. Readings from John Cassian; with kind permission of the publisher, The Faith Press Ltd.

confines of his dwelling, it makes him slow and indolent. It will not let him either rest in his cell or give himself to reading. Oft-times will he groan that he had dwelt there so long, and made no progress in good nor acquired any spiritual fruit, so long as he is bound in that fellowship. He depicts the fellowship of the brethren elsewhere as sweet and full of spiritual converse. On the other hand, all that he has near about him is hard and difficult, and he says that not only is there no edification in the brethren among whom he dwells, but also that the very necessities of life can only be there obtained with immense toil. Lastly, he tells us that if he remain where he is, his salvation will be impossible; he must leave his cell; if he remain in it both he and it will perish together; he must take himself off as speedily as possible. Then the fifth or the sixth hour inflicts him with weariness of body, and such appetite for food that he seems as if he had just come from a long journey or was worn out with terrific toil, or as if he had not taken food after a two or three days' fast. Then, again, he looks anxiously about him and sighs to think that none of the brethren ever pay him a visit. Time after time he goes out and comes in again, he keeps looking at the sun as though it were too tardily going to its setting. Thus, as if beset by an unreasonable confusion of mind, he is, as it were, filled with a dark mist, and rendered useless and unprofitable for every spiritual exercise. It is as though he thinks that no other remedy can be found for such distress save a visit from one of the brethren, and to go and see the sick, be they near or far. It is, he would say, a higher duty to apply oneself to pious work of this sort than to remain in the cell without spiritual fruit, and without progress in perfection.

#### THE WRONG REMEDY

Thus the unhappy soul, attacked by such devices of its enemies, is driven along until wearied out by the spirit of accidie as by some most powerful battering ram, it learns to fall into slumber or breaks forth from the cell and acquires the habit of seeking relief from these attacks by visiting one of the brethren, being rendered shortly afterwards still weaker by the remedy that helps it for the present. Thus the soldier of Christ becomes a fugitive and a deserter; he 'entangleth himself in the affairs of this life' (2 Tim. 2. 4), never to gain the approval of him to whom he is engaged.

Whenever, indeed, accidie in any manner begins to get the better of a man, it either makes him stay idle in his cell, or drives him out therefrom, inconstant henceforth, and a gadder about, useless for any work; it makes him wander into the cells of the brethren one after another, or about the monasteries with no other end in view than to find somewhere, on any pretext, an opportunity of obtaining a meal. For the mind of the idler cannot occupy itself with any other thoughts than of food, and eating, until it find somewhere or other companionship in a man or woman in whom is equal lukewarmness, and gets mixed up in their affairs and private business, and so becomes, step by step, caught to such a degree in a net of harmful occupations, that, as though enveloped in a serpent's coils, the man can never free himself any more, so as to attain the perfection to which he was vowed.

#### RESISTANCE NOT FLIGHT, AS THE CURE

At the beginning of my sojourn in the desert, when I told Abbot Moses,—the holiest man of them all,—that on the previous day I had been most seriously smitten with the disease of accidie, and that I could not get rid of it save by an immediate visit to Abbot Paul, he said to me, 'Nay, thou hast not got rid of this disease, but hast thou rather shown thyself its subject and slave. Henceforth the adversary will the more hardly attack thee as a deserter and runaway whom he has observed conquered in the fight and at once taking to his heels, unless in future when battle is joined thou art ready not to quit thy cell, or to turn to slumber, in order to escape the blast of his attack for a brief moment, but to learn rather to sustain his onslaught and to fight through to triumph'. Thus it is proved by experience that the fight with accidie is not to be escaped by refusal to face it, but can only be successful by resistance.

All the evils of this sickness are aptly summed up in one verse by David, when he says 'My soul hath slumbered through heaviness' (Ps. 118. 28 LXX.), that is to say, from accidie. He says well that it is the soul, not the body, that has slumbered. Truly, indeed, does the soul slumber, which has been wounded by the dart of this disturbing malady, from all contemplation of virtue and from all insight into spiritual things.

And so, let the true athlete of Christ, who desires to fight well

in the battle for perfection, hasten to cast out this disease from the hidden places of his soul, and let him so fight against this most wicked spirit of accidie, both on the one side and on the other, that he fall not smitten down by the dart of sleep, not yet driven out from his monastery precinct, abscond like a deserter—albeit under some specious pretext of pious excuse.

#### THE TRUE REMEDY

The blessed Apostle, as a true physician of the soul, seeing this disease which arises from the spirit of accidie either spreading itself even in his day, or else knowing by revelation of the Holy Ghost that it would soon show itself abroad, does all he can to forestall it with the salutary remedies of his precepts. For, in his Epistle to the Thessalonians, first, as some wise and accomplished physician soothing the infirmity of his patients with words of tender and gentle balm, and beginning with expressions of love and praise until such remedies have soothed the deadly wound and made it more susceptible of potent medicaments, he goes on to say, 'But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another' (I Thess. 4. 9, 10). And at length with difficulty he breaks out into that which he was trying to express: 'Study to be quiet'. Having said the first precept, he then delivers a second, 'and to do your won business', then a third, 'and to work with your hands even as we charged you', and then follow the reasons, 'that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing.' Regard well this delay, how he interposes so many preliminaries before he brings the thought of his heart to birth: 'Study to be quiet'—that is to say, Abide in your cells and be not disturbed with the variety of gossips which arises from the projects and tales of the idle, and ye shall not involve others also in a like disturbance. And, Do your own business, not by your inquisitiveness into worldly affairs, and by prying out the way of life of this man or that, giving your diligence not to the amendment of your own conduct, or to the pursuit of virtue, but to carping at the brethren. This precept he gives in order that they may heed the warning given above. 'Work with your hands as we have charged you.' Idleness is the reason, he clearly tells us, why those things come to pass which he has blamed above. For no one can be either restless, or busied

in other men's affairs, save one who is not content to be diligent in the work of his own hands. He mentions also another malady which takes its rise from this very idleness, that is, when they walk not honourably saying, 'That ye may walk honestly towards them that are without.'

Lastly, those very persons whom the Apostle in his First Epistle had treated with gentle blandishments of words, now, as they had made no progress under these milder remedies in his Second Epistle, he tries to heal with certain sharper and more caustic medicaments. No longer does he preface soothing or mild phrases no longer those tender or kindly words like 'We beseech you, brethren', but now, 'We adjure you, brethren, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly' (2 Thess. 3. 6, 7). In the one place he beseeches, here he adjures. There he shows the affection of kindness, here the severity of one who adjures or threatens. 'We adjure you, brethren'—because when we first besought you, you despised to hear; at least now be obedient to our adjuration. An adjuration not in simple word alone, but together with a dread calling upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, lest perchance an adjuration of merely human words, so to say, might be once more condemned, or its observation not held of any great moment. But, as a most expert surgeon, who with lighter remedies can bring no healing to a gangrened limb, he assays to cure the disease by the use of the knife of the spirit, and tells them to 'withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which they have received of us'. Thus he commands them to sever themselves from those who refuse their proper tasks, and that such should be cut off as members corrupted with the festering vice of idleness, lest this disease of sloth like some deadly contagion may spread its corruption even to the healthy portions of the body. And when he comes to speak of those who refuse to work with their hands, and to eat their bread in quietness—those from whom he bids withdraw—hearken what reproaches he hurls against them from the first. Huge and tremendous is the blame he heaps upon them, when he charges them with refusal to observe what is both present in their memory and what they have learned not only by word of instruction but have also received through the speaking example of deed.

*(To be concluded)*