

PART III

EXERCISES IN THE ART OF HEARING
CONFESSIONS

INTRODUCTION

THE first point which has to be settled by any priest who is going to hear confessions is the point of view from which he is going to consider his office and his part in the confession. There are two contrasted points of view which have found expression in the past. Stated in their extreme forms, the first point of view looks on the confessor as a spiritual judge who has to enforce a code of law and judge infringements of the code; and the second looks on the confessor as a physician of souls who has to diagnose what is wrong with the spiritual life of the penitent and prescribe for its restoration to health. These Exercises are written with a bias towards the second point of view, as having the support of Christ's example and as proving in practice the more beneficial.

This point of view lays on the priest as his first duty the endeavour to find out what main cause or causes led to the wrongdoing confessed by the penitent. His second duty is to discover treatment which will help to remove or cure these causes. His third duty is to put this treatment into language suitable for the penitent.

(a) The first duty, that of diagnosis, demands from the priest sympathy and understanding. In spirit the priest must not sit above the penitent, but kneel by his side and see life through his eyes. He must trust for his diagnosis to that intuition which is the special grace given by the Holy Spirit to a humble and sincere confessor, to the experience of his own life, and to clear and

false
discipline?

absolution?

unbiased thought and deduction. This diagnosis will result in one or two outstanding probabilities. His next step is to test these probabilities by careful questions in order to confirm or disprove them.

(b) Having ascertained the main points of his diagnosis, the confessor will rapidly formulate the line of treatment. In this he has to balance what is ultimately desirable against what is at present possible. He must be prepared by the latter consideration to advance along the desired lines in so far as there is reasonable hope of success. He must remember that the hindrance which is suffered by a penitent through discouragement, due to the inability to carry out in practice the treatment suggested, might do lasting harm. In fixing the treatment he must use common sense, the sense of what the average man or woman would consider to be practical and possible, the sense which weighs both difficulties and possibilities in a fair scale. He must concentrate on the main point or points important for the health of the soul.

(c) The confessor must then proceed to give the treatment. It is well to remember that there is a great difference between the pulpit and the confessional, and that the technique of the sermon is to be avoided in giving spiritual direction. The penitent desires to see his position clearly, to find a practical method of dealing with his sins, and to be stimulated and encouraged to try it. The priest must, especially, adapt his language to the mind of the penitent, avoid padding, and keep to the point. There should be less appeal to the emotions than to clear sight and courage. A month later the penitent will remember, at the most, half a dozen sentences. The priest must see that the important points of his treatment can be summarized in that space. Violence and scolding are useless for direction, the former always and the latter nearly

always; whereas patience and readiness to consider any difficulties the penitent finds in the treatment are necessary requisites.

The Exercises are, of course, all fictional, but they represent the most common types of problems with which the confessor is faced.

To make the best use of these Exercises it is advisable to begin by reading through the confession, and then to jot down on paper what answers seem most suitable to the questions which follow them. Only after doing this should the Suggested Answer (which does not claim to be the best or only right answer) be read and compared with what has been written down.

II

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE HEARING OF A
CONFESSION

PLACE

A CONFESSION should always, save in the case of sickness, be heard in church and never in a vestry or private room; but an exception should be made in the case of a deaf person, whose confession should be heard in the vestry. The priest should, if possible, be seated facing the opposite way to the penitent. The penitent should kneel, but a seat should be provided for the use of infirm or delicate people.

FORM

The priest should begin by blessing the penitent. A suitable form of blessing is to say: 'The blessing of God be on thy lips.' The confession should begin with the invocation, followed by whatever form is used in the particular church. A printed or typed copy of this form should be placed on the desk for the use of ignorant or forgetful people. After the confession the direction should be given and the penance suggested. The priest, remaining seated, will then give the absolution, which may be followed by prayer and a blessing. If absolution has to be postponed, there should always be prayer before the penitent leaves. If further instruction about prayer or the devotional life is required, it may be given after the absolution.

THE PENITENT

by virtue of his or her presence at confession may be held to be sincere. The priest is concerned only with the confession, and must dismiss from his mind any statements made to him about the penitent. The penitent should be encouraged by means of questions to see for himself the true nature of the sins confessed, in place of receiving a dogmatic decision about them. Penitents should not be encouraged to adopt too personal an attitude to the confessor or to substitute his decisions for the use of their own thought and free will. If for the sake of clearness any other person has to be mentioned in a confession, the person should not be named or identified. Any conversation outside the confessional by a penitent on the subject of the confession should be sternly discouraged.

PENANCES

are small acts of gratitude done by the penitent as a practical thanksgiving for absolution. They should, if possible, have some direct relation to the direction given. Practical penances are the most useful. Penances in the form of collects or psalms are apt to become formal, and in this class of penance it is best to suggest meditations on suitable subjects, or a fixed number of intercessions or thanksgivings. The period within which the penance is to be accomplished should be fixed, and should not be too long. The penitent should always be asked whether the penance is possible and acceptable. If the penance is not carried out for any cause other than a weak memory or illness, the confessor should at the next confession dwell on the seriousness of the offence, on the ground that penances are gifts to God and are sacred duties.

SUITABLE PRAYERS

Before Absolution

The first Collect in the Communion Service.
 The Collect for Trinity XXIV.
 The Collect for Ash Wednesday.

After Absolution

The first Collect in the Visitation of the Sick.
 The Collect for the Second Sunday in Lent.
 The Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany.

A Prayer for the Use of the Priest before Hearing a Confession

Almighty Father, be pleased to use me, in whatsoever way Thou seest best, to help this soul. In Thy mercy use all my mistakes; and grant that Thy Holy Spirit may enable me to be gentle, patient, sincere, and humble in all I say. And above all, grant that this soul may leave this church with Thy message rather than mine; for Jesu's sake. Amen.

III

EXERCISE I

Penitent A man, aged 23.

Last Confession. Six months ago.

Facts noted before Confession. A strong and heavily built young man with rather thick lips, low forehead, and rough hands, but a straightforward look.

Confession.

1. Constant swearing and bad language.
2. Twice sinned sexually with a woman in a serious degree.
3. Violent temper which once led to knocking down a man.
4. Has not said any prayers for three months because he felt it would be hypocritical to do so.

In answer to questions the penitent stated that he had good and Christian parents, but had been very badly treated at school; that he worked in a garage, was unmarried, and lived in lodgings. He had one free day a week, but only one Sunday a month off. Since childhood he had always said short prayers morning and evening, which his mother had taught him. Since his confirmation he had gone to confession at intervals and to Communion about once a month, but he was afraid to do so now. He had met the woman at a friend's house.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of the cause of his sins and the main hindrances in his spiritual life.

2. What treatment would you prescribe?
3. Give verbatim the first part of your direction.
4. State what penance and Rule of Prayer you would suggest for him.

Suggested Answer to Exercise I

(These answers are put forward not as the best or only right ones, but as possible answers with which you may compare your own.)

1. DIAGNOSIS

From the first glance at the man it seems likely that he is not intellectually developed, that he has strong passions, and that most of his difficulties arise from lack of control. The confession shows this to be the case. The anger and the sexual failures stand out as the most serious sins. The former may well have had its origin in his treatment at school. The desire for a new start, and the reason he gives for giving up prayer and Holy Communion, show that there is a real foundation in his spiritual life upon which to build, but his education in prayer is probably elementary and his fear of God is greater than his desire to love Him. He will understand only the simplest language.

2. TREATMENT

The treatment must be directed to strengthening his will and his use of control as a proof of repentance and an offering to God. The chief problem is to find out just how far this can be attempted. If too much is suggested he will probably fail, and his failure may lead to the disuse of confession and a serious set-back in his religion; for he has not enough patience at present to persist in anything but the simplest efforts. The director must recognize

that he is faced with an emergency in this man's life. Unless some means is found of getting him to resist temptation the man is in danger of finding himself in the police court for violence, or in a paternity case. Steps must be taken to stop at once these and the worse dangers to his soul. It would be well to deal first with the sexual sin, since this is likely to provide his strongest temptation at the moment. If he wants to prove to God that he is really sorry for his sin and for leading another to sin, he must make up his mind, however hard it is, that he will not see the woman alone again for six months. The reason for this is that owing to past association, the force of suggestion would probably be too strong for either of them to resist temptation if they met alone. The reason for fixing six months is that with his simple mind he is more likely to keep something concrete and within reach of his vision than a longer period, and he will be more likely to return to confession. It may not be possible without drawing public attention to the matter to stop all meeting in company with others, but it is possible to stop meeting alone. It should be stressed that this promise is an offering which he is making to God of his own free will, as a sign of the reality of his repentance; for any suggestion of a command might, in view of the experience of his school days, raise in him a feeling of revolt. Meanwhile he should be encouraged to join any possible club or social function in order to provide wider social contacts.

Side by side with the treatment of the sexual sin there must be the building up of control and the beginning of discipline. He should be urged to make some reparation to the man whom he attacked. He will probably find an apology easy, for his is not a nature to retain resentment, but it should be suggested that he should go

further and try to do the man some definite act of kindness in order to show God that he is sorry. Endeavour to build up his control in some small ways, such as by getting him to adopt some small and easy rule of fining himself in cigarettes for each blasphemous expression he uses. Do not attempt any more than this to begin with, but if at his next confession he has been able to make some real effort in this way, try to increase his self-discipline.

Dwell a great deal on the effect of absolution as a fresh start and a chance of freedom, for this will help him. Teach him the word of Christ: 'I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' Christ has sought him out and forgiven him. Teach him that his sins are rather a reason for more prayer than for giving it up, and that to go on praying in spite of them is one way of showing his repentance. It is only when we do not mean what we are saying that it is hypocritical to pray. Put this as briefly and strikingly as possible, for this penitent will soon get tired of anything like a sermon; he requires maxims which will stick in his mind, short and vivid sayings which he can remember.

3. DIRECTION

'My brother: the real difficulty in your life is that the brakes are not working properly. You have no way of pulling yourself up in time. Unless you get them into working order you will soon have a smash, and you will emerge badly damaged in body and soul. This will mean serious loss for you and for God. You will lose all real happiness, and God will lose your answer to His love. I am sure your common sense makes you anxious to find a way out of this danger. You have got to learn to control yourself. There are three ways in which you

must do this: by breaking with past sin and showing repentance for it, by building up control in a small but steady way, by using prayer regularly. I will now talk to you shortly about each of these three ways.'

4. PENANCE

(The penitent must be taught that Penance means a small thankoffering in action, to show God his gratitude for absolution.) To put threepence in the alms box for each time he swears on a Sunday, for the next four weeks.

RULE OF PRAYER

Give the penitent a simple manual and ask him to use some of it morning and evening.

Tell him to go to Communion on one Sunday each month.

EXERCISE II

Penitent. A woman, aged 30.

Last Confession. Three months ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Pale face, twitching fingers, and breathlessness.

Confession

Lack of any feeling of love for God.

Wandering thoughts in Church services.

Prayer Rule broken on 35 days.

Doubts about God.

Ten untruths, mostly excuses.

Resentment.

The penitent stated that her mother had died when she was a child, and that she had always lived at home with her father, who had been very strict and was rather fussy and particular. She went out to work in a laundry from

8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and then did the house work, and was always very tired at night. Her interest in prayer and religion had greatly decreased. She had been timid as a child, but was able to be decided when necessary.

Questions on Direction

1. State four questions you would ask to elucidate this Confession.
2. Give your diagnosis of what is wrong with this woman's life.
3. What treatment would you prescribe?
4. What penance would you suggest?

Suggested Answer to Exercise II

1. QUESTIONS

- (i) How much time do you get to yourself in the week?
- (ii) What is your Rule of Prayer?
- (iii) Give some examples of your untruths.
- (iv) What most often causes you to feel resentment?

2. DIAGNOSIS

The first thing that is clear is that the woman is suffering from overstrain and overwork. This would weaken her power of concentration in prayer and lessen her interest in religion. The fact that the wandering thoughts are during Church services, where more assistance is given to concentration and attention than in private prayer, is suggestive of this. The unusually frequent breaking of the Rule of Prayer is probably due to the same cause or to starting with a too ambitious Rule.

Secondly, it seems likely that her home conditions and the fact that in her childhood there had been a fear of her

father were an original cause of the doubts about God and the lack of love for God. The ten untruths, mostly excuses, confirm this. In all probability there is a great deal of suppressed fear in her nature and in her religion; and this may have led to a childish confusion between God and her father which hindered the growth of her love for God. One fruit of fear is nearly always a feeling of resentment and revolt. It is not likely that she is suffering from scruples, since she is able to reach decisions when they seem necessary.

3. TREATMENT

(a) The first thing to do is to try to lessen the overstrain. This must be done carefully, since it is probably due mainly to her father, and it would be all too easy in such a nature to turn the resentment against him. Suggest that she should tell her father that she is getting too tired and is afraid that if she cannot find a way of getting more rest she will not be able to carry out her duty of caring for him. Warn her to be very quiet in the way in which she speaks to him, and not to argue about it or speak vehemently, but simply say she must go to bed earlier and have an afternoon to herself each Saturday. Tell her that God has given her the duty of helping her father, and that she must not waste her strength if she is to be used by God in doing it. Before speaking to her father she must ask God to teach her what to say. Investigate the Rule of Prayer, which is evidently impossible in its present form, and provide her with some simpler and shorter Rule. Tell her that the Rule of Prayer is a gift she gives to God to show that she wants to answer His love; and she would not like anyone to promise her a gift and not give it. Five minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night would be a convenient minimum;

and she should be given a simple book of prayers to use. This type of penitent, and all who suffer from overstrain, always begin by asserting that any change in the routine of life is impossible, but patience and gentle argument will nearly always reveal a possible way of lessening strain.

(b) To treat the fear: Begin with her childhood and find out what was then her greatest fear. Tell her that God wants our love and that fear hinders us from loving Him. His love is around us every day, and He has given us wonderful gifts to show us His love, the gift of sleep to restore our strength, the gift of being able to talk to Him in prayer and to draw near Him, the gift of His life in Holy Communion. If she thinks of these gifts and thanks Him for them she will grow to love Him more and more. Next tell her that even after we have done wrong and are sorry, as she has proved that she is by making her confession, He loves us so much that He forgives our sins and loves us as much as ever.

Then ask her to show God that she trusts His love in all kinds of little ways, by asking Him to help her to do a piece of work, or to find a way out of some difficulty. These little prayers will be answered by God, and she will grow to trust Him and to know that He loves her.

Tell her that her resentment is due to being afraid, that people always get angry when they are frightened, and that the more she learns to trust God the less resentment she will feel towards others. Tell her to make this effort just for a month, so that she can find out how ready God is to help her. If she has any fear about God, advise her to read every day from the Gospels something which our Lord said because He came to show us what the love of God is really like.

4. PENANCE

To thank God each day for a fortnight for three things which He has done for her to show His love.

EXERCISE III

Penitent. A man, aged 45.

Last Confession. A year ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Neatly dressed, high forehead, copy of *The Times* in his overcoat pocket.

Confession

Doubts about religion, and especially about the love and justice of God.

Has ceased to attend church for the last six months.

Irritability.

Resentment against his wife, often expressed in word.

Impure thoughts.

Discontent with life.

Fears death.

The penitent stated that he worked in a Government office, that he had been married twenty years, and had no children, though both he and his wife had wished for them; that he was not sociable by nature, and had no hobby. He had always been in the habit of coming to confession before Easter. His chief interest was in his work, in which his wife took no interest.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of this man's character and what is hindering him in his spiritual life.
2. Outline the treatment you would prescribe.

3. What four reasons would you give him for returning to his attendance at church?
4. What penance would you suggest?

Suggested Answer to Exercise III

1. DIAGNOSIS

This man is intellectual. The outstanding mark of his present state is that he is dissatisfied with life. If this dissatisfaction is not treated, and a way out is not suggested, he will probably give up his religion. The most visible sign of his dissatisfaction is to be seen in his resentment against his wife; they probably differ in tastes and interests, and with the advance of age their separation has become greater. The impure thoughts support this inference and convey the suggestion that the cause of the rift is not sensual but one of character and temperament, otherwise they would have been acts. The irritability is very likely habitual with this man, and has increased the rift with his wife. The fear of death is typical of this period of life when there is a new awareness of its inevitability. The religious doubts are probably a reflection of his dissatisfaction with life, and it is for this reason that they are centred on the love and justice of God, since he feels he has not received what he deserved.

2. TREATMENT

If this case is attacked from the intellectual side the treatment will fail, for it will be met by unspoken arguments which will deprive it of all its driving force. A thinker cannot resist the habit of arguing about any dogmatic intellectual proposition. Nor is there any external way of removing from his life the most visible cause of disturbance. He is bound to his wife by the

Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, and they have each grown fixed in character and tastes which they will not find it easy to change at this age. The most likely way of approaching his problem is by getting him to see it as part of a spiritual training fitting him for the life to come, which God allows for this reason. He is used in his work to value and understand training, and this approach may also help to lessen his fear of death. In order to outflank argument about his dissatisfaction, the appeal should be based on purely spiritual grounds. Tell him that our Lord came to reveal the nature and purpose of God, which is to secure the ultimate welfare and happiness of man; and that in His life on earth He showed how human beings were to be trained so that this purpose of God might be carried out. Point out very simply that a great element in the training which our Lord underwent was the calm and undisturbed nobility with which He bore and used the hardships and sufferings of His life. Mention especially the loneliness of His life, for in the face of human selfishness He must have seemed to be leading a forlorn hope. At last He summed up all His training by proving to His disciples that there is life after death, and that it is to end in heaven. This earthly life is limited, and if men could see that, they would want much more the real life which is to follow it and which has no end, and for which they are offered a training. Our Lord summed up in a few sentences the training for that life: 'If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me' (*St. Luke ix. 23*).

Then tell him how this is to be done in practice. It means that he must look on the things which he finds hard as a way of training and use them instead of grumbling to himself about them. It means that he must stop saying irritable things to his wife or others so that he can be

trained for the new life to come. He will ask God to disinfect his mind from impure thoughts, and go on asking until they cease. He will have to stop complaints. All this looks hard, but when he thinks of the reason for doing it and the reward it will bring, it is worth the effort. If he tries to do it, he will come close to our Lord, Who said it was the only way to follow Him, and he will begin to know by experience the love of God, which will make all the difference to his happiness and the happiness of others.

3. FOUR REASONS FOR ATTENDING CHURCH

(a) The worship of the Church is the greatest help we can find for our training for the life to come. It trains us in communicating with God through prayer. It gives us in its sacraments the life and strength which we need in order to persevere.

(b) The work in any office is impossible without orderly co-operation in which each one takes his appointed part. If he fails to take his appointed part in worship, the whole training of mankind suffers in some degree.

(c) Regular attendance at church is the outward and visible sign that he has taken up his cross and is attempting to follow our Lord.

(d) Our Lord told us that when we are praying with others He is present, and the services of the Church therefore offer a great opportunity of being near Him and being aware of His love.

4. PENANCE

To thank God each day for a month for offering him a training for his ultimate happiness and welfare.

RULE OF PRAYER

Something rather cut and dried would suit this man.

- (a) To read one of the lessons and one of the Psalms appointed for each day.
- (b) To pray for five persons each day.
- (c) To read one theological book each Lent.

EXERCISE IV

Penitent. A woman, aged 49, a widow.

Last Confession. Two weeks ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Preface to confession gabbled over very quickly. Very full notes.

Confession

- Lack of love for God or neighbours.
- Self-consciousness, self-seeking, self-love, self-complacency, self-justification.
- Many failures to serve God.
- Broken rules of rising.
- Greediness almost daily.
- Bible not read sufficiently.
- Many wrong thoughts.
- Not always recollected in prayer.
- Constant untruthfulness.
- Dishonesty.
- Irreverence in prayer and at the Sacrament.
- Disloyalty to God.
- Injured others by setting a bad example.

The penitent stated that she had five periods of prayer daily, and attended four services on Sundays. She lived alone and gave twenty minutes every night to self-examination. She was childless. She gave considerable time to working in her parish.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of what is wrong in this woman's life.
2. State four questions you would ask to confirm or elucidate this.
3. What treatment would you prescribe?
4. What penance would you suggest?

Suggested Answer to Exercise IV

1. DIAGNOSIS

Several points in this confession suggest that the woman's greatest hindrance is due to the spiritual disease of scruples. The number and variety of sins confessed, the vague and general terms in which they are described, the exaggeration of their description, all point to this conclusion.

The spiritual disease of scruples is a state of mind in which the major part of religious attention and interest is concentrated on sin and failure, and this leads to the multiplication of rules and resolutions which only increase the disease. The effect of the disease is to produce a spiritual condition in which the cloud of personal sinfulness is allowed to eclipse God and the spiritual gaze is fixed on self instead of on God. It produces inflammation of the conscience and a morbid sensitiveness and anxiety which seek relief in searching for sins and confessing them as the main duty of religion, while the positive, spiritual, and God-centred side of religion is becoming atrophied. In order to test your diagnosis you can take the most concrete sins as subjects for your questions and discover what degree of reality there is in them. It is well to remember that in nine cases out of ten, scrupulous penitents confess the sin of greediness, and that on

examination this will usually turn out to mean that they happened to eat a biscuit or a sweet between meals. The scrupulous penitent usually fights hard to maintain the seriousness of the sins, having become obsessed with the idea that any lessening of it is an excuse and insincere. In such cases the power of making decisions and carrying them out is generally weak.

2. QUESTIONS

- (a) What form did the greediness take?
- (b) What was the nature of the dishonesty?
- (c) In what way have you injured others by your example?
- (d) In what way do you examine yourself, and what questions do you ask?

3. TREATMENT

Start by explaining the disease of scruples and the dangers to which it leads. Be very emphatic and clear in doing this, for the penitent will resist it. Tell her that the only hope of restoring strength to her spiritual life lies in paying heed to what you have told her. It must be emphatic, because when scruples reach their last stage they take the form of scruples about accepting direction; and when this stage is reached it seems impossible to help the penitent.

Describe it as a self-centred state, in which she is perpetually looking at a mirror instead of seeking God. Show how this stifles prayer and religion and turns them into one long worry about duties and failures and prevents her from thinking about God and His love and having simple communion with Him. If she wants to grow and to have health in her soul, this habit must be cured, and it can only be cured if she will co-operate with God by doing certain things.

She must first have a period of rest for her inflamed conscience. To provide this she must have only five minutes a week for self-examination, and she must put down only sins of word or deed which are clear. She must begin this period by asking the Holy Ghost to shed His light on her and to show her what sins she is to write down. She must do this for three months, and be satisfied with making her confession once a month.

In the second place she must read in St. Paul's Epistles what he teaches about the Atonement of Christ, and she must thank God daily for having forgiven her sins. She must not use any list of self-examination questions.

In the third place, revise her Rule of Prayer, and make it consist of a large number of thanksgivings, a meditation on the love of God from the last prayer of our Lord in St. John's Gospel, and intercessions for others.

4. PENANCE

The penance should be something done in church before she leaves, and it should be simple, so that she may be prevented from worrying about it afterwards. Five minutes prayer before the Altar, to consist entirely of thanksgivings for her forgiveness, and for the Atonement, and an affirmation of her trust in God and in His guidance for her future might serve the purpose.

EXERCISE V

Penitent. A youth, aged 18.

Last Confession. First confession.

Facts noted before Confession. Pale, features and forehead denoting intelligence, worried look in eyes, nervous tension in manner.

Confession (rather wordy and confused, frequent repetitions).

Lying, habitual in childhood but still frequent.

Cheating in school examination.

Personal impurity, but none for the past year.

Morning and evening prayers often forgotten.

Laziness in work.

Disobedience to father, and untruthfulness.

Many broken resolutions. Many lies.

Desire to change life.

The penitent stated that he worked in an office and lived at home. He had been brought up strictly and justly. His father said he ought to have done better than he had, and that he was a failure. He had always been obliged to attend church twice on Sundays. There had lately been a mission at the church. He is a communicant and reads his Bible daily.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of this boy's character and what is wrong with his life.
2. What treatment would you prescribe?
3. What Rule of Life would you suggest? 4. and what Penance?
5. Answer the penitent's question: 'How am I to know whether I am converted?'

Suggested Answer to Exercise V

1. DIAGNOSIS

The confession suggests that the penitent is nervous, sensitive, and highly strung, and the key to the diagnosis is likely to be in the confession of disobedience to his father and untruthfulness, his frequent lies, cheating in school examination, and lack of confidence in his own powers. It is probable that fear of his father was the

first cause of his troubles. This fear has, from infancy, formed a habit of trying to escape from any situation which he finds too difficult, and is likely to be responsible for the laziness in work and the weakness of will. Lying and cheating represent the efforts of such sufferers to make themselves appear less of a failure. Owing to his father, he has a deeply rooted sense of his own inferiority and inability to succeed in any effort. That the possibilities of this youth are considerable is shown by his conquest of personal impurity, by his facing the ordeal of confession, and by his desire to change his character. That someone who has acquired the habit of evading difficult situations by untruthfulness should be able to force himself to face confession, means that there is plenty of will power if the obstacle to its use can be removed.

It seems clear from his statement that he has just experienced the impact of a religious revival and that this has led to a conversion, an uprising of dormant spiritual powers within him. It will be most necessary to use this and to direct it into channels in which it will be safe from subsequent reaction. Care must be taken to avoid encouraging the many and rash resolutions into which an adolescent rushes in such a situation, for in this case any broken resolution would increase to a serious degree the penitent's belief in his own incapacity. This is at present a real danger in his life.

2. TREATMENT

Gentleness and sympathy should mark the whole of the treatment, for the fear of force and threats is the centre of his trouble. Speak gently, and begin by stressing the hopeful signs which are apparent, and especially the conquest of impurity. Next tell him that this confession marks a real crisis in his life, he is standing at the

cross-roads. Up till now he has been following the road of fear, his life and his thoughts have been governed by fear. There is only one cure for fear, and that is trust in the love and power of God. Our Lord kept on showing His followers that this was the road they had to take. The way to learn to trust God is by making little adventures. Say to him, 'If you are called upon to do a job you must offer up to God a very short prayer asking Him to help you. Then do the job, and offer up another short prayer thanking God for His help. If after that you have any thoughts of worry, stop them by remembering that this means that you are taking the care of the job out of God's hands. If you act like this in one thing each day you will learn to trust God.'

Next tell him that if his father blames him he must remember that it is only because he loves him and is trying to help him, and that if he gets depressed he is not using his father's help. If his father does not understand that he has really tried to do his best, he must not take any notice of the blame, but forget it as soon as he can.

Then talk to him about his soul, the essence of his being; and about God having given it to him because He loved him. The soul is something which God gives to each individual to be used for His glory. It must not be buried, but developed so that he may become the person God meant him to be. He must try to be himself. To do this he must be honest, and say what he really thinks. Each time he tells a lie he makes it more difficult to be himself.

God has brought him to the cross-roads, and is now calling him to leave the road of fear and to grow and develop into a real and separate individual to be used by God. God's special call came to him in the mission

to help him to do this. He has now a wonderful opportunity to grow stronger and to leave behind him the weakness of his youth. God has loosed his bonds. He must use this opportunity by regular prayer. He must learn to know God. God is not like a schoolmaster looking for our failures, but Someone Who loves us and sympathizes with our difficulties. But he must be careful not to try to do too much at once. He must try only a few things which he is sure he can do, and then he must do them regularly, and if there are failures he must still go on trying. In this way his will will be strengthened and God will draw out and develop his separate personality.

Then suggest a Rule of Life.

3. RULE OF LIFE

- (a) Ten minutes in the morning in which to read the passage and commentary from the Bible Reading Fellowship and to think about it.
- (b) Ten minutes in the evening to thank God for His help and to pray for others.
- (c) Communion once a week, to be prepared for by self-examination.
- (d) To fine himself each time he tells a deliberate lie.

4. PENANCE

To read his Rule of Life daily for a fortnight before going to bed. (The object of this is to impress it on his memory and to form a suggestion before sleeping which will be carried out next day.)

'You can test your conversion by asking whether you have made a serious attempt to answer the new certainty which God has given you that He has called you. If you have really tried to do something hard because of this call you may be certain that you are

converted. You have proved to God and yourself by your effort in making this confession that you have really heard His call to a new life and are trying to answer it. This means that your life has been turned round to God, or converted.'

EXERCISE VI

Penitent. A girl, aged 20.

Last Confession. First confession.

Facts noted before Confession. Spectacles, untidy and rather slipshod, looks patient and unenterprising.

Confession

Carelessness and disobedience in childhood.

Petty thefts in childhood.

Unpunctuality.

Irregular attendance at church.

No regular prayers since her Confirmation.

Lack of interest and reality in religion.

Unsociability and avoiding people.

Jealousy of the success and possessions of others.

Resentment at snubs.

The penitent stated that she lived at home, and was apprenticed to a fashionable dressmaker as a sempstress. She had an elder sister who was very popular and a great success. She felt that there was something in religion if she could find it, and had come to confession hoping to be made different.

Questions on Direction

1. Diagnose the character and difficulties of the penitent.
2. Outline your treatment.
3. Give verbatim the closing portion of your direction.
4. Suggest a penance and a Rule of Prayer.

Suggested Answer to Exercise VI

I. DIAGNOSIS

The whole confession suggests a lack of vitality, a loss of interest, and a character which is going to sleep. Carelessness, unpunctuality, and the avoidance of social contacts are all signs of this. It is evident that this condition has affected her religion and threatens her contact with God. The clearest key to the cause of this spiritual hindrance is the confession of unsociability and the avoidance of friendship. This points to the deduction that her rather unattractive exterior and lack of vivacity, combined with the popularity and success of her elder sister, have led her to despair of the success and companionship which she has coveted. She has withdrawn into her shell and lost hope and interest in life. Her business of dressmaking, with its enforced contact with fine clothes and gossip about customers, has added to the sense of hopelessness and has led to the resentment which is damaging her soul's health. She has sought relief by evading effort and trying to withdraw from life.

Owing to an uprush of spiritual longing given to her by God, she has taken what must have seemed to her a desperate step, in the hope of finding relief, and has come to confession. If she cannot find through it an answer to her problem, it is probable that she will give up both religion and hope for the rest of her life. Her religion has suffered from ignorance, and the refusal to allow her to teach in Sunday School, which was excusable in view of that ignorance, was a grievous blow to her spiritual life, since it seemed to link it up with her failure to succeed in her worldly life. She probably gave up regular prayer both through lack of teaching about prayer and because

her prayers did not seem to touch the great problem in her life or to help with it. Nor does she seem to have found in her church any help in social contacts.

2. TREATMENT

The first necessity is to arouse her interests. The most likely point of contact for this purpose is suggested by her longing for some social happiness in her life. This quite worthy and natural desire may be made to serve as a basis for spiritual growth. Begin, therefore, by explaining how character, the expression of our soul, affects the whole of our personality, our appearance, our manners, our speech. It is only character which really attracts others to us in any lasting way. Our character will always shine through us. Picture a fine character and its attraction, nothing to do with good looks, but simply the force of kindness, unselfishness, goodness, coming through the person and drawing others like a magnet. What makes the attractive character? It is not fine clothes or smart manners, because very unattractive people sometimes have these. She can learn the secret of an attractive character by studying the character which has always attracted every one, and by trying to copy this character she will become a help to all whom she meets. This character is the character of Christ. It is caught by looking at our Lord and talking to Him. To do this we must have regular prayer and communion with Him. Our Lord is drawn to those who seek Him; He loves them and will readily communicate His character to them if they try to persevere.

The first thing to do is to try to find out what her prayers are like. Stress the fact that in prayer she is talking to Someone Who really loves her and Whom she can absolutely trust. Teach her to talk to our Lord about how much she wants to copy Him and to please Him.

Tell her to put before Him all that has happened during the day and ask Him to teach her what to think about it. Let her pray that He will help those she has met during the day, and if she knows any of their troubles, ask Him to help them. Get her to end her prayers with thanks to Him for loving her and for having helped her.

The second thing to do is to get her to make little presents to our Lord to show Him that she wants to love and thank Him. She can begin to do this by taking one daily duty and resolving to be punctual in it, and then offering it to Him as a gift. When she has learnt to do this regularly she can go on to trying to speak specially kindly to one person each day.

End the direction by trying to arouse her enthusiasm and to give her an impulse which will overcome the inertia. It will help in doing this to remember that this confession probably represents the biggest effort she has made in her life, and that she will appreciate the argument that it must not be wasted.

3. VERBATIM CLOSE OF DIRECTION

'You have made a big effort by coming here. Is it going to be a beginning or an end? If it is an end, you will have wasted one of the greatest opportunities of your life. The choice is in your hands, and no one else can make it for you. I can help you by telling you what are the almost certain results of the two choices. If you waste this opportunity, if you do not make this a turning point in your life, you will become more and more colourless, more and more isolated from others. You will be so slack, lazy and untidy at last that you will be of no use to any one. You will have no interests and will be as dull company for yourself as you will be for others. Above all you will have wasted a chance of being of

service to God and of knowing what His love is like, and you will have less to hope for in your future. If, however, you decide to take this opportunity, and carry out faithfully the simple things you have to do in order to receive God's help, the prayer and the little gifts of love, you will gradually change. All manner of things which are hidden in you will appear. Your life will have a purpose, you will be able to serve God and others, you will have hope and purpose in your life, you will develop into what God meant you to be, and the more others see of the love of our Lord in you, the more they will be attracted.

'God has given you this great chance. Do not refuse His gift by slackness and lack of effort. He has given you this chance because He loves and values you, because He sees what you can be if you try to copy Christ in your life. Make up your mind not to waste His gift or your own effort in making your confession, and when you have made up your mind, stick to it at all costs.'

4. PENANCE

When you get home, write down what you believe God has taught you in this confession, and read it once a week for a month.

RULE OF PRAYER

1. To thank God each day for five things.
2. To pray each day for five people.
3. To read each day a portion of a Life of Christ (which should be lent to her by the confessor).

EXERCISE VII

Penitent. Man, aged 30.

Last Confession. First confession.

Facts noted before Confession. Clothes neat but worn, ink-

stains on fingers, looks like a clerk, an honest and rather simple face, signs of worry in eyes.

Confession. (This penitent made no attempt to recapitulate past life, and evidently regarded Confession as a means of seeking an answer to a present problem.)

Absence of love for God.

Loss of faith.

Attendance at Church and Communion have become a lifeless form.

Daily prayers and Bible reading have been given up because unreal.

Prayers seem no use, and as if nobody heard them.

He has given up the rules which he had always kept since he was confirmed.

Irritability.

Depression.

The penitent stated, in answer to questions, that he was happily married, and had a child, that he was in business that he liked and was not overworked, that he had been a regular communicant and had always enjoyed his daily prayers, morning and evening, and had been very much aware of God when he prayed.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of the difficulties of this man's spiritual life.
2. Outline the treatment you would suggest.
3. How would you deal with the question of the sufficiency of the confession?
4. What answers would you give to the following questions put by the penitent?

(a) What is the sin against the Holy Ghost?

(b) Is it not hypocrisy to pray when your prayers are not sincere?

5. How would you advise the penitent to pray?

Suggested Answer to Exercise VII

1. DIAGNOSIS

It seems evident that this man has had a strong but simple religion all his life and has a real capacity for prayer. His prayers have always been accompanied by such a degree of awareness of the reality of God as to make them real and satisfying. For the first time in his life he is experiencing a period of severe aridity or darkness in prayer. He has evidently never been taught much about prayer, and consequently this has brought the whole of his spiritual life tumbling about his ears, and has led to despair. His questions show that he is searching for an explanation of his problem in the possibility that the aridity is due to some sin against the Holy Ghost, and that his only measure of the value of prayer lies in his own awareness of the nearness of God's presence.

2. TREATMENT

Begin by explaining that all prayer contains two parts, giving and receiving. In prayer we must learn to give what we have and to receive what God gives us. The only two things we are able to give are our time and our desire, which we offer when we pray. All the help and comfort we receive in prayer are God's gift. So the sense of reality and nearness in prayer is God's gift, and He gives it when He sees that we need it to help us. Sometimes in our life He does not give it because we shall

be more helped by its absence. The reason why we can be helped by its absence is that it trains us in faith and teaches us to put our trust in God. Trust can only be learnt when we are in difficulties. So when there seems no reality in our prayer we can show that we trust God by going on praying just as much as we used to do, and waiting patiently until He gives back the sense of reality in them. This dryness in prayer is not a punishment but a training to help us to grow.

Examine next the Rule of Prayer the penitent has kept of recent years. Tell him when prayer is hard to use prayers out of a book, and in his prayer time to write out prayers and to offer to God the written prayers. Tell him that the aridity and hardness will gradually pass if he perseveres; and end with encouragement and comfort, urging him to use this opportunity to learn and display trust, for the darkness will purify the selfishness from his prayer.

3. QUESTION OF FIRST CONFESSION

Explain the difference between direction and absolution. Direction is the giving of counsel by a priest who is one of God's tools used for helping those in difficulty by their advice and teaching. The Prayer Book shows that every Christian has the right to seek this help if he feels he needs it. Absolution is the official announcement by a priest, acting as God's instrument, of God's forgiveness of our sins when we repent. Christ gave power to His Church to make this announcement to people who have done wrong, and His Church has commissioned its priests to make it in a special and very clear way to an individual if he fulfils certain conditions. The first of these conditions is that the individual must show that he is really sorry, by telling God in the presence of a priest

all the sins he can remember having done. The second condition is that the individual shall make up his mind to try hard not to commit these sins again. Show the penitent that he has really come to seek direction and not absolution. Tell him that absolution would help him by making it very certain to him that all his sins were forgiven. Suggest that he should go away and try to recall and write down all the sins he remembers committing from the days of his childhood, so that by making his confession he can receive the certain assurance of God's forgiveness of them. End your direction by giving him a blessing.

4. ANSWERS

(a) The sin against the Holy Ghost is not an act but a state. Our Lord spoke of it as blasphemy against the Holy Ghost (*St. Mark* iii. 29). The Holy Ghost teaches us how to pray and to follow our Lord, so the sin against the Holy Ghost is the state of a man who makes up his mind that he will regard as bad and to be avoided everything which he knows to be good and holy; and that he will regard as good and desirable everything which he knows to be bad and immoral. If any man could be found who would consciously and intentionally do this, his soul would be in danger of eternal damnation. It is not a sin which you would ever commit, so you need not worry about it, or fear it.

(b) There are two aspects of our prayers, our intention and our feeling. It is by our intention and not by our feeling that our prayers are judged in God's sight. If we intend to talk to Him and to pray, it does not matter what we feel like. He will receive and answer our prayer. In order to be sincere you must intend and want to pray. If you feel your prayers are no good and have no meaning,

it does not matter, for God will look at what you intended to do. When the widow brought her two mites to the Temple it was something worth less than a farthing, and therefore of no use to any one, but God saw her intention and valued it so highly that He said it was the best offering He had received. Your prayers are sincere because you intend to pray, and if they are heard they are worth more than they appear to you to be worth, like the widow's mites.

5. ADVICE ON PRAYER

During times of dryness or darkness in prayer concentration becomes very difficult. For this reason services and manuals of prayer will help most. These will be felt to be unsatisfying, but they will give a real sense that something has been offered to God. An outlet must, however, be provided for personal prayer, and this may be secured by advising the penitent to write out a prayer in his own words every week and to use it during the next week. He should also read his Bible daily, and think for a few minutes about what he has read, and this will keep alive his capacity for meditation. It will be in his intercessions that he will first be aware of the passing of the dryness, so he should be advised to have a small list of people for whom he prays daily. It would be well for him to make a fresh list every week, or his intercessions will quickly become formal. When signs of ease reappear in his prayer, he should be encouraged to try meditation (in a simple form) twice a week. He will need watching, for he is in danger of falling into a habit of darkness, and this is the only serious danger in aridity. Encourage him to expect at any time a gradual change in his prayers, which may well be small at first but will slowly increase.

EXERCISE VIII

Penitent. A woman, aged 32.

Last Confession. A year ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Fluent talker, uses rather exaggerated terms, no shyness.

Confession

Jealousy.

Unable to forgive a great wrong.

Refused to listen to someone's advice, and lost her temper.

Has been angry in word many times.

Too demonstrative physically with a woman friend.

Has given up prayer for the last six months.

Has ceased to believe in God's love.

The penitent ended her confession as follows: 'I am unhappy, and I thought I would give God a chance of explaining things. I want to be quite honest, so I feel I ought to say that if I can't see a reason for it all I shan't try again.'

The penitent stated that she was unmarried, that she lived in a boarding house, that she was a schoolmistress, that she was sociable and impulsive by nature, that she used to give twenty minutes a day for prayer.

Questions on Direction

1. Diagnose what is wrong in this woman's life.
2. What treatment would you prescribe?
3. Give verbatim the opening paragraph of your treatment.
4. What Rule of Prayer would you suggest?
5. What direction would you give on physical demonstrations of affection to a woman friend?

Suggested Answer to Exercise VIII

1. DIAGNOSIS

There is little possibility of mistake in this diagnosis. It is a case, evidently, of violent and possessive friendship for another woman which has been broken off or interrupted. The 'great injustice,' 'jealousy,' 'anger,' 'physical demonstrations' all indicate this, and the date when prayer was given up dates the rupture of the friendship. The end of the confession does not necessarily show a lack of penitence—there is a desire for penitence with great blindness; but it must be taken seriously, for it is very likely to be a true prophecy. The twisted heterosexual who turn to homosexual practices, while inferior in number to the ordinary heterosexual, are a large class. They are sometimes found in the teaching profession because a homosexual twist gives a special sympathy with, and attraction for, pupils of the same sex. In this aspect homosexual feelings may be turned into a talent and endowment which is of great value if it is disciplined. Its misuse is no more frequent than with the heterosexual, and has the same guilt and no more.

2. TREATMENT

There is need for great caution and for ejaculatory prayer for wisdom. If the treatment is too vague or gentle the penitent will either feel she is justified or that she has had no help. If it is too strong and outspoken, the shock of its impact on a deep and open wound may well lead either to despair or to bitterness, as it has evidently done in her reaction to the advice which was offered to her. Remember that frustrated love, even if it is selfish, leaves a very serious sore, and twists the outlook in many directions.

The treatment must go to the root of the trouble and deal with the question of love. We must first teach that love is the noblest gift of God, and the true explanation of what is meant by God creating man in His own image, for God is love. Like every gift which God has given us, it can be misused by our free-will, and if it is misused it will deteriorate into selfishness and love of ourselves. It is a terrible thing if we turn the noblest gift of God into self-love, and it can but lead to great suffering. It was a good, helpful, and blessed gift which God gave her in her love for her friend; but it was a bad, harmful and disastrous thing when she allowed her love to get selfish. If she allows that to go on, her misused love will only damage her own life and happiness, and those of her friend.

In these cases it is often useful to ask the penitent: 'Do you really love your friend?' and when she answers vehemently, ask her what she means by loving. Then explain the harm which will be done to her friend by a possessive friendship, how it will limit her freedom to grow and develop, how it will make her life narrow and prevent her from becoming her natural self. Ask her if that is what she wants her love to do. Then appeal to her to get her love true and unselfish for two reasons, first of all to show God that she is thankful for the gift He has given her, and then for the sake of her friend.

Love is healthy and strong so long as it gives, but if the desire to grab grows and increases it becomes unhealthy and selfish. It is this desire to possess which has brought trouble into the penitent's life. She has grown more anxious to get something for herself than for her friend's happiness and welfare. The first sign that love is getting unhealthy is jealousy, the desire to keep her friend entirely for herself. Any part of us which becomes diseased causes pain, and if love becomes diseased it

causes the worst pain of all. We cannot stop pain by complaining of it, but only by curing its cause. The penitent will regain happiness by making her love unselfish, as it was at first. She must do this by an act of surrender, in which she surrenders her love to God Who gave it to her. She must then train herself by a series of little exercises in giving, until her love grows unselfish and more like God's love for us. The first of these acts might be some small act of kindness, or sociable approach, to the person of whom she is jealous (presumably the person to whom she refused to listen). She may go on to give up voluntarily some opportunity of being alone with her friend, and offer it to God as a gift to show Him that she wants to thank Him. Unless there has been a very definite act of impurity, it would not be wise to break off the friendship entirely. In the case of such definite impurity this would have to be done, for both their sakes, but the result might be serious. If such a course is necessary it should be approached gradually, and if possible the penitent should be led to make the suggestion. In any case the only way to get the treatment carried out is by building up a prayer life. This will take time. Unless the impurity is very serious the director will do well not to allow the treatment to end in a sudden challenge or an instant decision. Time and prayer will work on his side if he can keep in touch with the penitent. He will do well to remember that impulsive characters like this penitent are apt to make rash statements and violent resolves from which they are too proud to withdraw later. He must therefore be patient and humble in dealing with this case.

3. OPENING OF TREATMENT

'You are in the same position as if you had gone to a doctor and had shown him symptoms of a very serious

disease. If he pointed out to you what would happen if you allowed the disease to go on unchecked and showed you how it should be treated, you would pay very serious attention to his advice, and you would try the treatment he suggested even if it was painful. That is all I want you to do to-day; and I want to show you the nature of the disease in your love and how you can remedy it.'

4. RULE OF PRAYER

- (a) Five minutes daily given entirely to thanking God for little things in your daily life.
- (b) Ten minutes daily for reading the Bible and thinking about what you have read. Use the Bible Reading Fellowship leaflets (12 Buckingham Palace Gardens, S.W.1).
- (c) Five minutes daily given to praying for at least five different people.
- (d) Receive Communion once a week, and make your confession when you feel it is needed.

5. DIRECTION ON PHYSICAL DEMONSTRATION

God has made the body to fulfil various purposes. Some parts of the body are set aside for special purposes, and are not to be used apart from them. There is a part of the body set aside for the production of children, another part of the body set aside for their nourishment. It is a sin to use those parts of the body for the selfish procuring of sensations. Kissing is a normal manifestation of affection, and can be used without fear. Embraces are not necessarily wrong, but should not be unduly prolonged when there is temptation to misuse love, and it would be well to give them up as a gift to God to prove your repentance.

EXERCISE IX

Penitent. A man, aged 38.

Last Confession. Six months ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Intellectual, long fingers, rather dreamy way of speaking.

Confession

Undisciplined in work and smoking. Masturbation very frequent. Irregular in prayer, but no failure in weekly Communion. Very critical in attitude toward, and remarks about, others. Frequent fits of depression due to being criticized.

The penitent stated that he was a bachelor living in a studio and engaged in painting. He had plenty of social life, but was not desirous of marrying. He tried to give ten minutes morning and evening to prayer. He had been timid as a child, but had grown out of it.

Questions on Direction

1. What questions would you ask to elucidate the sin of impurity?
2. Give your diagnosis of what is wrong in this man's life.
3. What treatment would you propose:
 - (a) for the sin of impurity?
 - (b) for his attitude towards others?
4. In what way would you suggest he should use his prayer time?

Suggested Answer to Exercise IX

1. (a) How long have you been giving way to this sin of impurity?
- (b) How did it start?
- (c) Is it usually committed when going to sleep?

- (d) Is it due to a purely physical desire, or is it encouraged and increased by some imaginary picture in your mind?

2. DIAGNOSIS

It seems evident that the penitent is an artistic and imaginative man, and that his sins (lack of discipline, criticism, depression, and probable impurity) are coloured by this fact. They represent the diseased sides of his strong points. The sin of self-abuse probably started in childhood, for it is common among sensitive and nervous children. A very frequent cause of its origin is the child's fear of going to bed alone. If the child is afraid of being alone in the dark he often turns to this habit to distract his mind. In adolescence it becomes linked up with sexual ideas and imaginary pictures, until it becomes a rooted habit with well worn tram-lines in the mind which stimulate it. There is throughout his life a lack of control, and it is likely that behind this there is a feeling that lack of control is not blameworthy. The artistic mind is very liable to give a high value to impulse, and to depend upon it in work, and this lays it open to lack of discipline and reactions of depression. The critical attitude of mind is necessary for any artist, and he is therefore liable to the temptation to extend it to people and to indulge in uncharitable criticisms. It is clear that the penitent worries about his reputation. This has its good and bad sides. It is a spur to effort and to reaching his ideal of beauty, but it brings the danger of debasing his gift and vocation for selfish ends. It is evident from his timidity as a child, his fits of depression and his critical remarks, that his vocation is in peril of being poisoned by his desire for reputation and success. When this is the case the artist is driven into all kinds of tricks in the effort to ease

his fear of failure which started in childhood. Among such tricks masturbation may find its place and be sought not so much from a purely sexual urge as in the search for distraction.

The regularity of the weekly Communion shows that there is a real spiritual basis in his life. It may well be connected with some deep-seated awareness of spiritual beauty which leads to efforts to worship God. His prayer is probably hindered by the lack of discipline and control which marks his life and character.

3. TREATMENT

(a) In the case of a long continued habit such as this, it is almost useless to try to stop it completely and at once. Two advantages may be gained by a method of gradually increasing control. The method suggested is that the man should measure and judge the sincerity of his repentance entirely by the lengths of the intervals between failures. If he lengthens the interval he has shown true repentance, and if he shortens it he must deepen his repentance. The first advantage of this method is that it turns his thoughts and the centre of his interest away from the sexual act to the period of time. The second advantage is that it gives him some ground for hope and may do much to remove the reaction and depression which follow failure and which are often the greatest obstacles to further resistance. In the case of this sin, the sense of guilt is often deep. The reason probably lies in the fact that there is usually a longer and clearer period of choice, and the choice of sin is more deliberate than in the case of sudden impulsive sins. There is a real difference between the cases where this sin is the result of a purely physical urge and those in which it is encouraged by imaginary pictures, the latter being

clearly sins of lust, and more harmful than the former. The treatment may make its best approach through the penitent's love of beauty, for he hates to see beauty defaced or destroyed. God's gift of sex is one of His loveliest gifts; and in masturbation he is misusing it in order to produce a barren sensation for entirely selfish ends, whereas its use was meant to have a result that is beautiful and fruitful, and not to be selfish and ugly. Each time he gives way to it he is destroying beauty. The beauty, truth, and goodness of God are the objects of his worship to which God has drawn him, and he is debasing that great gift and treasure. It is on these reasons that you base your appeal to him to make a great effort.

It is not advisable to suggest to the man that he should pray much about this sin, but rather suggest that he should offer each lengthened interval as an offering to God at Communion. In cases which sometimes occur, where the habit has only just started, every effort should be made to bring it to an immediate stop by a strong exhortation and some severity. In such cases the penitent may be offered the use of a 'crutch' to strengthen his resistance, by being required to confess at once any further failure. But this must be left to his voluntary choice, in order not to weaken his will.

(b) It is likely that in this man there is a really kindly and sincere nature. His infantile fear may have originated the habit of criticism as a defence and in order to gain a feeling of superiority. He will be helped if he can be brought to see uncharitable criticism as a cowardly and underhand way of injuring others. Ask him to note in the Gospels how often our Lord deplored this sin in the Pharisees, and to consider whether the Lord Who loves him so much would not deplore it in him. Point out that

he himself is sensitive, and that he feels acutely the stab of criticism. In like manner the criticisms he flings out so carelessly will each of them stab some other person and bring pain, perhaps greater than he feels himself. Our Lord taught us to love our neighbour as ourself, yet he is wounding his neighbour and so disobeying his Lord and Master. Encourage him each time he feels depressed at a criticism to think of some criticism he has himself launched against another. Point out to him that he is becoming too sensitive, and that his depression is largely due to this. If he does not struggle against it and learn to accept and use criticism, his work will fall off and he will cease to learn what God is so lovingly teaching him.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR USE OF PRAYER TIME

The morning period should be given up to thanksgiving, which will lead to worship. It is likely that worship will make a great appeal to an artistic nature. Suggest the use of the *Sanctus*, of portions of the *Te Deum*, and of passages from the Greek liturgies, in his daily prayers. Enlarge on worship as objective prayer, and the perception of the beauty of God. Encourage his private use of the prayers in the Liturgy.

The evening period should be given up to intercessions and prayers about his work. A suitable devotional book might be Richard Rolle's *The Fire of Love and the Mending of Life*.

EXERCISE X

Penitent. A girl, aged 21.

Last Confession. First confession.

Facts noted before Confession. Rather worn clothes, common-sense and practical face, no signs of strain except a stutter when making the confession.

Confession

- (a) *Up to leaving school:* Untruthful. Cheating at school. Continual petty thefts of toys and money.
- (b) *Since leaving school:* Many lies. Frequent thefts of money. Long periods without prayer. Has given up Communion for some years.

The penitent stated that her parents were divorced during her childhood, and that she was, and always has been, unable to resist the fascination of stealing, and enjoyed planning thefts so that they would not be discovered. She had twice been dismissed from posts for dishonesty, and on several occasions had attempted to make reparation by paying back money. If she had to confess her theft in her present post she would lose it, and she saw no chance of getting another. She believed in God and would like to please Him and was very unhappy about her sins.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of what is the cause of the trouble in this woman's life.
2. What treatment would you propose?
3. How would you deal with the question of (a) confession to her employer; (b) reparation by paying back money?
4. What suggestions would you make about prayer?

Suggested Answer to Exercise X

1. DIAGNOSIS

The whole confession is dominated by the habit of theft, starting in early childhood and now ruining the whole life. The other sins can all be traced to this source. A big distinction must be made between a single case of

theft and the habit of theft. The former, due usually to a selfish impulse, should be dealt with severely, and in nearly all such cases acknowledgement and reparation should be required before absolution is given. The habit of theft is a different matter and requires different treatment. Undue severity would probably increase the failures and confession might not be used again. In a great majority the cause of the habit of theft is to be found in a sense of insecurity in early childhood. It is most frequent in adopted children, or in children whose parents are divorced. Any sense of insecurity in childhood, even if only dimly perceived, will be apt to make the child seek compensation and security by trying to possess things of its own. This subconscious motive gets deeply rooted, and when it is satisfied by success, makes theft fascinating. The contrast between her failure to pray or to receive Holy Communion and her coming to Confession must be (like all sharp contrasts) studied by the director. It is almost certain that it is due to the fact that her thefts have made her feel unable to approach God, though she would like to do so. This will suggest to the director that she has had awareness of God and that she has, somewhere in the depths, a desire for prayer and Communion. It may well be that the conception of God as a Judge has almost entirely obliterated the conception of Him as love, and that she has never been taught about the miracle of healing made possible by the Atonement.

2. TREATMENT

Every effort should be made in the first place to trace the source of this habit of stealing. The penitent should be encouraged to give the earliest possible examples of it, so that the origin of the fear of insecurity in the child may be

traced. There is little doubt that it originated in the divorce of the parents. For the child, as for the young bird, the breaking up of the nest which is its home means disaster.

The penitent must be shown the connection between this early fear and her present habit of stealing. She must be told that she is allowing herself to be bullied by a small child every time she steals. If she wants to go on being bullied all her life she will be very unhappy and will end in prison. But there is a more important reason for stopping the bullying: by giving way to it she is losing the very thing which she is afraid of losing, and which is being offered to her all the time. God will give her perfect safety and security if she will only turn to Him and ask His help. He never stops loving those who want Him, and His love is so great and powerful that He can stop even long habits if we will try to do our bit to show that we want to be helped. There is no sin that He will not forgive if we really repent, because our Lord died on the Cross so that we might be forgiven. By coming to Confession she has opened a door, and she can now enter into the security of His love, and be safe. If she will trust Him and do her best, He will bring her through.

It is important to trace the origin of the sin, because once the penitent understands it, the strength of the temptation, which owes much to the mystery with which fear is surrounded in childhood, is weakened. It is even more important to build up trust in God's love. The danger which remains, as in the case of all habitual sins, is that one further failure may stop the cure. She should be taught that the door into safety and security which God has opened to her in this confession remains open, and that whatever happens she must not shut it by discontinuing confession.

3. (a) In this case it would not be wise to make confession to her employer a condition of absolution. The reason for this is that it would probably mean the loss of her employment, which would cause a tremendous increase in the fear of insecurity which is at the root of her sins. We must recognize that in this case the habit is both a disease and a sin, and that in order to conquer the sin the disease must be treated and not made worse. There must be two exceptions to this advice. (i) If her theft has led to suspicion falling on another person, she must face the necessity of confessing the theft in whatever way will give her the best chance of retaining her employment. (ii) If as a result of questioning she states that her employer is a merciful and understanding person, she should confess her theft.

(b) Reparation is on a different basis, for it can be carried out without increasing the disease, and it is a test of the sincerity of repentance for the sin. The penitent should be encouraged to pay back the money she has stolen. This must be done by setting aside a small sum each week. It is important that the sum should not be so large as to cause any sense of economic insecurity. So twisted do such cases sometimes become that the person may steal afresh to make reparation. Very careful examination of any proposal of reparation must therefore be made, and if possible it should be paid from savings rather than from income. It would also be right that the penitent should confess to past employers her thefts, and express her sorrow, in so far as this can be done without endangering her present position.

4. SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER

It would not be helpful in this case that the penitent should be led in prayer to think of past sin, since this

would be very suggestive to her. Thanksgiving should play a large part in her prayer, and a section of her daily prayer should be given up to thanking God for His forgiveness and for all the mercies of the past day. The affirmations of trust should be strengthened by the selection for her of a series of passages in Holy Scripture, of which one is to be read each day. These passages should deal with God's care of us and provision for us. She should repeat daily her trust in God and His loving help. Intercession should be encouraged, and she should be told to pray for at least five people each day.

EXERCISE XI

Penitent. A man, aged 38.

Last Confession. A year ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Intellectual face, well dressed.

Confession

Laziness and lack of self-discipline, especially about rising in the morning.

Cynical attitude towards good people.

No prayers, and no Communion for six months.

Serious acts of impurity with two boys.

In answer to questions, the penitent said he was a writer and journalist, that he had always been homosexual from his school days, and had been expelled from school for this reason; that he had found in religion the only means of resisting this tendency, that after his last fall he had been afraid to have anything to do with religion, and that it was his narrow escape from prosecution which had brought him back to God. His office hours were variable, but nominally from 2 to 10 p.m. with the

whole day off on Saturdays. He had no hobby but was keen on music.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of this case.
2. What treatment would you advise, and why?
3. Give details of the Rule of Life you would suggest.
4. What penance would you impose before giving absolution?

Suggested Answer to Exercise XI

1. DIAGNOSIS

It is evident that all the rest of the confession (laziness, cynicism, and the absence of prayer) is probably due to the last sin (impurity). The origin of this misuse of sex was in his school days. This leaves open the question whether he is one of the small class of true homosexuals or one of the large class of twisted heterosexuals. In the latter case he has formed an habitual sin, but there is more hope for its cure. In either case the great reason for hope lies in the fact that there is a real spiritual capacity and desire in him; and that he has proved that only by God's grace can he conquer his sin. His employment is not helpful, since it brings him into contact with so many cases of sexual sin. It is possible that his expulsion from school and his disgrace encourage a state of rebellion and revolt, of which his cynicism is a later fruit.

2. TREATMENT

(a) Begin by discussing the homosexual tendency in the abstract. Point out that all human beings fall into two classes in sex matters, those who are attracted to the opposite sex, and those who are attracted to their own sex. The second class is smaller in number than the first, but is not in any way abnormal. The sex instinct is one of the most powerful and useful of all instincts,

it is a driving force for creative work and the most powerful instrument for bringing us into contact with our fellow beings. Those who are attracted to their own sex provide some of the best trainers and teachers, because this attraction gives them a special understanding and sympathy. In both classes the possibility of a sinful use of this sex endowment is due to a selfish misuse of one kind of self-expression, a use which puts the procuring of sex-sensation before the good of others and which twists bodily functions into a channel for which they were not intended. Dwell on the value of this sex endowment and the way in which it could have been used in this man to help many others and to make his writing creative. He is spoiling and wasting this gift and injuring others. Try to stir him to the ambition to use the gift. But this is not the most important part of his misuse of God's gift of sex. By misusing it he has eclipsed with a thick cloud of selfishness his sight of God's love and beauty which was once so dear to him, and which he has so often proved could help him. It is an awful thing to throw away the greatest beauty and love that a man can find. Tell him to turn away for a moment from thinking about himself and try to think of the tenderness of God's love trying to reach him and being rebuffed. Such ingratitude is really foreign to what in his inmost being he knows and believes.

In order to use the gift of God he must find the right channels in which to use it. To use sex properly, the necessary outlets are social, creative, and religious. Probably in this man's life, owing to his hours of work, there is not enough feminine society. He should try to join a tennis club and get games on Saturdays. For creative outlet he should cultivate music by having lessons and playing every day. For the religious outlet he requires

regular prayer and Communion. Teach him that there is a part of his being which is always seeking contact with God, and that he can find the deepest contact with God in prayer, and also strength to resist temptation. Prayer is communion with God. Any fellowship with a good man helps him to live better, and how much more must fellowship with God help him. Above all he needs the life which our Lord gives us in Holy Communion.

In the second place, try to find out where in his childhood he first began to go wrong. In many cases it will be found that impure ideas are associated with some picture or imagination which is used in temptation to stimulate them. Such a picture is often harmless in its nature, and its corruption is due to the fact that the first sensations of sex arise in connection with it. It will require time and patience to discuss this subject, but once the origin of the early temptation is discovered, a step towards lessening temptation will have been taken. The exposure of the idea to the light of day will rob it of much of its mystery and fascination. The idea may be further invalidated by being associated with some feature which is holy (e.g. if it were a case where it was a window, the cross formed by the window frame might be emphasized in such a way that in future it would dominate the scene.)

(b) *Reasons for Treatment*

The first reason for this treatment is for the removal of one of the great hindrances felt in cases of this sin—the idea that the sinner must be abnormal and that nothing can help him. This idea is deeply rooted in these cases; and if it can be lessened there is an increase in hope and in resistance to temptation.

The second reason for the treatment is the use of the

deep spiritual desire for God and belief in His grace, by dwelling on the loss and deprivation produced by his sin; and by appealing to his instinctive attraction to the love and beauty of God. He has done something which has specially wounded the love of God (*St. Matt.* xviii. 6). If he really wants to love God, the one important thing he can do to prove it now is to show the reality of his sorrow for the injury he has done Him by accepting the conditions given him and promising to keep them as his penance.

The third reason is to show him that there is a plentiful outlet and use for his sex instinct if he will search for it. He is hindered by the idea that sex has only one outlet. He has not sought for others, and consequently his sex instinct has been repressed.

The fourth reason is to lessen the power of temptation by attacking its starting point and rendering it easier for the man to resist at the beginning, and this offers a real chance of success.

3. RULE OF LIFE

(a) *Exterior.* Adequate exercise daily.

The pursuit of some hobby. This offers the best alternative line of thought in times of temptation. Painting is always a good thing for an intellectual man and provides an outlet for creative power. Music is excellent for the same purpose.

(b) *Discipline*

He must decide how much sleep he requires for health and make a rule of rising on that basis. Let him make a habit of throwing off the bedclothes the moment the alarm goes off. Laziness in rising may be a cause of temptation.

(c) Prayer

Twenty minutes' prayer and Bible reading before breakfast. Theological books which will appeal to his intellect should be suggested for his reading.

Holy Communion at 8 a.m. each Sunday.

Ten minutes' prayer during the morning, chiefly intercession.

Confession every two months.

4. PENANCE

A promise that for a year he will not voluntarily be alone with a boy.

A promise that he will make his next confession before two months are past.

(In the case of those in Holy Orders, the penitent should be told that the requisite sign of repentance before absolution is the acceptance of the necessity of informing a bishop.)

EXERCISE XII

Penitent. A woman, aged 45.

Last Confession. Three months ago.

Facts noted before Confession. Restlessness and a rather sullen look

Confession

On three occasions impulsive, angry words.

Moments of revolt followed by a refusal to talk or be pleasant.

Prayers neglected and Communion formal.

Fear of losing her faith.

Extravagance over dress.

The penitent stated that she was married and had two children. She had a happy childhood, and had always

been brought up to pray and to go to church. She had for many years found prayer easy, but for a year now it had been hard, and she felt that she had no contact with God. She wanted to find some new way of praying. She felt very irritable, especially with her husband.

Questions on Direction

1. Give your diagnosis of this case.
2. Give four questions you would ask about her prayer.
3. What treatment would you suggest?
4. What Rule of Prayer would you advise?

Suggested Answer to Exercise XII

1. DIAGNOSIS

It would seem probable that a great part is played in the confession by the physical change during this period of life. The irritation and revolt, the extravagance, all point to the operation of this cause. It is evident that the greatest spiritual hindrance felt by this penitent is thought to be in prayer. It is therefore important to find out the nature of her former prayers. The period of change varies very much in the severity of its effects, and occurs much later in the life of a man.

2. QUESTIONS

- (a) How long have you been accustomed to give to prayer?
- (b) What kind of prayer have you found most easy, thanksgiving, worship, meditation, or intercession?
- (c) What is the special difficulty which you find hardest in your present prayer?
- (d) How do you try to prepare for Holy Communion?

3. TREATMENT

Begin by telling the penitent that God has made body and soul partners in the activity of prayer. The

physical part of prayer is at the beginning, and takes the form of concentration and fixing the attention. When any change takes place in the bodily life either through illness or through the physical change which takes place in everybody at a certain period in life, this makes prayer more difficult because it is harder to fix our attention or to concentrate in prayer. This normal kind of change is taking place in the penitent and is causing much of the difficulty which she finds in prayer. Do not let her think for a moment that this means a loss of spiritual value or progress. On the contrary, it offers her a really great opportunity in her spiritual life. It offers a chance of purging her prayer from selfishness, and of making it a greater means of contact with God than it has ever been. God is offering her a chance of growing in unselfish love which she, having had children, knows is the best and highest form of love. If she wants to use this part of her life to the greatest advantage she must make unselfishness the watchword in prayer and in life. In prayer she can do this by offering: instead of measuring the value of her prayer by the feelings and happiness she has obtained from it, she must put in the first place offering. It will need more effort and forgetfulness of herself, but it will make the prayer a much more valuable gift in showing her love for God. Even if she can only repeat the words of prayer from her prayer book and try to keep her attention in that way, it will be a better gift than she has ever given, and when she has passed through this period in her life, she will find that her prayer has been enriched and has reached a higher level.

In preparing for Holy Communion she had better use some book of prayer, and when she has used the preparation in it she will know that God accepts it and that He will give her His gift of life in the Blessed Sacrament.

In her daily life she must try to be true to the same incentive of offering. Each time she feels irritable or angry she has the opportunity of making a gift of love to God by suppressing the words she wants to say, and asking God to receive it as a gift. When she wants to sulk she can force herself to say some pleasant words and to make them a gift to God.

Her extravagance over dress is really only a poisonous drug which she is taking to get relief for herself, and so far from helping her, it will only increase her difficulty.

4. RULE OF PRAYER

When attention has become difficult, reading is a help, as it uses sight as an aid to concentration. The particular kind of books to use will depend to a large extent on the answers of the penitent to questions on prayer:

(a) If the prayer is largely institutional, the rule should include the following in the Prayer Book of all the prayers in a public service, and in private prayer the use of a book of prayers. Part of the private prayer should consist of the reading of a Life of Christ. Each day the prayer should start with the General Thanksgiving. She should be encouraged to widen her intercessions.

(b) If the prayer is more intellectual the rule should require the fixing of attention on one special prayer or collect, and trying to put it into her own words. Meditation should be used daily, and for this purpose a book of meditations should be suggested. In such a case, Archbishop Temple's *Readings in St. John's Gospel* would be of great value. For Holy Communion, she should be encouraged to write out in her own words what she thinks is the meaning of the Prayer of Consecration, and to use

it in her preparation. In intercession she should be taught to think of the special needs of each case.

(c) If the prayer had been more mystical, the difficulty will be felt more acutely. In private prayer she should be encouraged to take a collect, and write out a prayer based on each clause in it, and to use afterwards these written prayers. In the Blessed Sacrament she should fix her attention on one of the prayers in the liturgy and try to see how it applies throughout the service. In worship she should take the *Te Deum* and try to make of it an offering to God. She may be given *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* by St. John of the Cross.