

April 27, 1925.

Building a Solid Character. III.

5. Atrophy of the will.

Clarence Darrow gets paid fabulous sums for proving to juries that man has no free will and is therefore undeserving of punishment, no matter what his offense. Here in lies a strange contradiction, for if there is no demerit deserving of punishment, there is no merit deserving of reward. Since Clarence can't help doing what he does, he should not be paid for it; and since again he can't help doing what he does, he can't help taking the money as he does.

We know better, of course; so does everyone who has a conscience to bother him with remorse for the things he could have avoided.

Human patience has no more trying ordeal than trying to bear up with and encourage the weak will which succumbs to every temptation. We can't help feeling sorry, for instance, for the poor wreck who is the complete victim of strong drink, yet we are disgusted with his lack of manhood. In spite of this, we cannot upbraid him to severely, for as long as we commit sins ourselves our own wills are weak to just that extent.

The will withers up when it is not exercised. The exercise to be followed in strengthening the will depends upon its state of development. Personal consultation with a spiritual director will help the individual to choose the exercise best suited to his own condition. The following prescriptions are given for what they are worth:

1. For light cases of weakness of will:

- a) Constant mortification of the will by unquestioning obedience to superiors, and of the intellect by the acceptance of authority in solving problems;
- b) Consistent mortification of the flesh in light matters;
- c) Fidelity to one resolution each day pointed at sin or its occasions.

2. For serious cases of weakness:

- a) Frequent confession and consultations with a spiritual director;
- b) Rigid adherence to a time schedule which distributes the study time for each specific class and the kind of recreation to be followed in free time;
- c) Strict rules of mortification, particularly in matters of eating and drinking;
- d) Strenuous athletic exercise of the kind that punishes the body.

3. For extreme cases of weakness:

- a) Daily confession (except for scrupulous persons), and absolute submission to a spiritual director;
- b) Daily exercise of the will in trivial matters, such as deliberately and thoughtfully counting the boards in the floor (for five minutes or so) deliberately performing such mechanical acts as lacing the shoes, deliberately choosing which shoe shall be put on first, etc;
- c) Light bodily mortification, easy of fulfillment;
- d) Daily Communion. This practice, useful to all three classes, is absolutely essential to success for individuals of the third class.
- e) Daily meditation, for at least five minutes, preferably in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Above all it must be remembered that every day's indulgence adds to the difficulty of the cure, and that it will never be easier to accomplish than right now. Even a catastrophe, involving a narrow escape from death, will not effect a permanent cure in those who let his will go too long. You have seen this too often in hardened sinners in your home town to need any elaborate statement of cases. Read the new Survey, pgs. 84-89  
Note: The class in meditation will begin at five this evening in the Serin Chapel.