

Part 3--Of Covetousness, Gluttony, and Sloth

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Of Covetousness. Let us now somewhat see what this part of this medicine may do to the cure of covetousness, which is a sickness wherein men be very sore deceived. For it maketh folk to seem far of another sort than they be indeed. For covetous men seem humble, and yet be they very proud; they seem wise, and yet be they very foolish; they seem Christian, and yet have no trust in Christ; and, which most marvel is of all, they seem rich, and yet be very beggars, and have naught of their own.

As for pride of the possession of their goods, whoso be well acquainted with them shall well perceive it how heartily they rejoyce where they dare speak and call their betters beggars, if money be not so rife¹ with them, because they regard it less and spend it more liberally.

Men ween them wise also, and so they do themselves, because they seem to have providence and be folk of foresight, and not to regard only the time present, but make provision for time to come. But then prove they more fools than they that live from hand to mouth. For they take at the leastwise some time of pleasure with their own, though they fare hard at another. But these covetous niggards, while they pass on with pain always the time present, and always spare all for their time to come, thus drive they forth wretchedly till all their time be past and none to come. And then when they least look therefor, leave all that they have heaped to strangers that shall never can them thank.²

If ye will say there be no such fools, I might say that I have seen some such in my time. And if ye believe not me, I could find ye record. But to the intent ye shall not deny me but that there have been such fools of old, ye shall hear what Solomon said seven years ere I was born. "I have seen," saith he, "another plague under the sun, and it is common among men: a man unto whom God hath given riches, substance and honour, so that he wanteth nothing that his heart can desire, yet God hath not given him leave to eat of it or to enjoy it, but a stranger devoureth."³ Of such sort of fools, also, speaketh the psalmist, thus: "A man disquieteth himself in vain, and heapeth up riches, and cannot tell for whom he gathereth them."⁴ And in the forty-eighth Psalm, the prophet expresseth plainly the folly of such fools, "For," saith he, "both the rich and the poor shall die, and leave their riches unto strangers."⁵ And surely where they seem Christian, they have none earthly trust in Christ; for they be ever afraid of lack in time to come, have they already never so much. And methinketh utterly on the other side, that albeit every man that hath children is bound by the law of God and of nature to provide for them till they be able at the least by the labour of their hands to provide for their bellies (for God and nature looketh not, as methinketh, much farther, nor thrust us not out of the paradise of pleasure to make us look and long to be lords in this wretched earth), yet, I say, meseemeth verily, that have we never so little, if we be not in spirit merry therewith, but live in puling and whimpering and heaviness of heart, to the discomfort of ourselves and them that are about us, for fear and dread of lack in time to come, it appeareth, I say, plainly, that speak we never so much of faith and of trust in Christ, we

have in our hearts neither more belief in His holy words nor trust in His faithful promise than hath a Jew or a Turk.

Doth not holy Scripture say, “Cast thy thought into God and he shall nourish thee?” ‘Why takest thou thought now in thyself, and fearest to fail for food?’

Saith not our Saviour Himself, “Have no care for to-morrow,” ‘and then furnisheth and enforceth His commandment by example, saying, “Look upon the birds in the air, they neither sow nor reap, nor gather to no barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye far more excellent than they? Your Father in heaven knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Seek ye first for the kingdom of heaven and the justice of Him, and all these things shall be cast unto you beside”?’ ‘Whosoever he be that heareth this, and yet puleth and whimpereth for doubt and fear of lack in time coming, either he believeth not that Christ spoke these words (and then believeth he not the gospel) or else, if he believe that Christ spoke them and yet feareth lest He will not keep them, how believeth he Christ or trusteth in His promise? Thou wilt haply say that Christ would not for any trust of Him that thou shouldst not provide for to-morrow, but look to be fed by miracle. In this thou sayest true: and therefore He said not, ‘Provide not for to-morrow, nor labour not for to-morrow.’ In token whereof he sent the Jews double manna, weekly, the day before the sabbath day, to be provided for before the hand. But He said unto us, ‘Have none anxiety nor care of mind for tomorrow.’ For the mind would Christ have clean discharged of all earthly care, to the end that we should in heart only care and long for heaven. And therefore He said, long for first and chiefly the kingdom of heaven, and all these earthly things God shall cast unto us besides: showing thereby that by the hearty longing for heaven we shall have both twain.

And surely the things coming of the earth for the necessary sustenance of man, requireth rather the labour of the body than the care of the mind. But the getting of heaven requireth care, cure and ardent desire of the mind, much more than the labour of the body, saving that the busy desire of the mind can never suffer the body to be idle.

Thou wilt haply say, “What if I cannot labour, or have more small children to feed than my labour of three days will suffice to feed for one day? Shall I not then care and take thought how they shall live tomorrow, or tell what other shift I shall find?” First shall I tell thee what shift thou shalt make in such case: and after shall I show thee, that if all shift fail thee, yet if thou be a faithful man, thou shalt take no thought. I say, if you lack, thou shalt labour to thy power by just and true business to get that thee and thine behoveth. If thy labour suffice not, thou shalt show thy state that thou hast little money and much charge, to some such men as have much money and little charge: and they be then bound of duty to supply of theirs that thee lacketh of thine. What if they will not? Then, I say, that yet oughtest thou not to take thought and care in heart or despair of God’s promise for thy living: but to make thyself very sure, that either God will provide thee and thine meat by putting other men in the mind to relieve thee, or send thee meat by miracle (as He hath in desert wilderness sent some men their meat by a crow ‘), or else His pleasure is that thou and thine shall live no longer but die and depart by famine, as He will that some other die by sickness. In which case thou must willingly without grudge or care (which, care thou never so sore, cannot get thee a penny the more) conform thyself to His ordinance. For though He hath promised to provide us meat, yet hath He not promised it for longer time than Him liketh to let us live, to Whom we be all debtors of death. And therefore, though He sent

Daniel meat enough by Habakkuk ¹⁰ the prophet into the lake among lions, yet sent He none at all to Lazarus, but let him die for famine at the rich glutton's gate. ¹¹ There died he without grudge, without anxiety, with good will and glad hope, whereby he went into Abraham's bosom. Now if thou do the like, thou shalt go into a better bosom, into heaven, into the bosom of our Saviour Christ.

Now if the poor man, that naught hath, show himself to lack faith and to have no trust in Christ's words if he fear lack of finding, what faith hath then the covetous wretch, that hath enough for this day, for to-morrow, for this week, for the next, for this month, for the next, for this year, for the next, yea and peradventure for many years, yearly coming in, of lands, offices, or merchandise, or other ways, and yet is ever whining, complaining, mourning, for care and fear of lack many years hereafter for him or his children, as though God either would not, or were not able to keep His promise with us? And (which is the more madness) his care is all for the living of himself and his children, for some such time as neither himself nor his children shall haply live thereto. And so loseth he the commodity of all his whole life, with the fear of lack of living when he is dead. Now if he hap to have a great loss, in what heaviness falleth he then? For if he had ten thousand pounds, and thereof had eight thousand taken from him, he would weep and ween he were undone. And yet if he had never had but one, he would have thought himself a great rich man, where now for the loss of eight, twain can do him no pleasure. Whereof riseth this high folly, but of the blind covetous affection that he had to that he lost? If he had had it still, yet he would peradventure not have occupied it: ¹² for this that is left is more than he will spend or haply shall need to spend. If ye would have spent it well, ye have no cause to be sorry of the loss, for God accepteth your good will. If ye would have kept it covetously or spent it naughtly, ¹³ ye have a cause to be glad and reckon that ye have won by the loss, in that the matter and occasion of your sin is by God's goodness graciously taken from you.

But ye will say that ye have now lost of your worship, and shall not be set by so much as ye were when ye were known for so rich. Ah well, I say, now ye come home, lo! Methought always that ye covetous niggards, how lowly soever ye looked, would if ye were well searched, prove yourself proud and high-hearted. For surely make they never so meek and humble countenance, they have much pride in the mind, and put their trust in their goods, making their goods their God. Which thing is the cause that our Saviour Christ said it were as hard for the rich man to come into heaven, as a great cable or a camel to go through a needle's eye. ¹⁴ For it is not sin to have riches, but to love riches.

"If riches come to you, set not your heart thereon," saith holy Scripture. ¹⁵ He that setteth not his heart thereon, nor casteth not his love thereon, reckoneth, as it is indeed, himself not the richer by them, nor those goods not his own, but delivered him by God to be faithfully disposed upon himself and others: and that of the disposition he must give the reckoning. And therefore, as he reckoneth himself never the richer, so is he never the prouder. But he that forgetteth his goods to be the goods of God, and of a disposer reckoneth himself an owner, he taketh himself for rich. And because he reckoneth the riches his own, he casteth a love thereto, and so much is his love the less set unto God. For, as holy Scripture saith, "Where thy treasure is, there is thine heart"; ¹⁶ where if thou didst reckon the treasure not thine, but the treasure of God, delivered thee to dispose and bestow, thy treasure should be in earth and thy heart in heaven. But these covetous folk that set their hearts on their hoards, and be proud when they look on their heaps, they reckon

themselves rich, and be indeed very wretched beggars: those, I mean, that be full christened in covetousness, that have all the properties belonging to the name, that is to wit, that be as loath to spend aught as they be glad to get all. For they not only part ¹⁷ nothing liberally with other folk, but also live wretchedly by sparing from themselves. And so they reckon themselves owners, and be indeed but the bare keepers of other men's goods. For since they find in their heart to spend nothing upon themselves, but keep all for their executors, they make it even now not their own while they use it not, but other men's, for whose use and behoof they keep it.

But now let us see, as I said before, how the remembrance of death may quicken men's eyes against this blind folly of covetousness. For surely it is an hard sore to cure: it is so mad that it is much work to make any good counsel sink into the heart. Wilt thou see it proved? Look upon the young man whom Christ Himself counselled to sell that he had and give it to poor folk, and come and follow Him. ¹⁸ He clawed his head and went his way heavily, because he was rich: whereas Saint Peter and other holy apostles at the first call left their nets, which was in effect all that they had, and followed Him. They had no great things whereupon they had set their hearts to hold them back. But an if their hearts had been sore set upon right small things, it would have been a great let. ¹⁹

And no marvel though covetousness be hard to heal. For it is not easy to find a good time to give them counsel. As for the glutton, [he] is ready to hear of temperance, yea and preach also of fasting himself, when his belly is well filled,--the lecherous, after his foul pleasure past, may suffer to hear of continence, and abhorreth almost the other by himself. But the covetous man, because he never ceaseth to dote upon his goods, and is ever alike greedy thereupon, whoso giveth him advice to be liberal seemeth to preach to a glutton for fasting when his belly is empty and gapeth for good meat, or to a lusty lecher when his leman ²⁰ is lately light in his lap. Scantly can death cure them when he cometh. I remember me of a thief once cast at Newgate, that cut a purse at the bar when he should be hanged on the morrow; and when he was asked why he did so, knowing that he should die so shortly, the desperate wretch said that it did his heart good to be lord of that purse one night yet. And in good faith, methinketh as much as we wonder at him, yet see we many that do much like, of whom we nothing wonder at all. I let pass old priests that sue for advowsons of younger priests' benefices. I let pass old men that hove and gape ²¹ to be executors to some that be younger than themselves: whose goods, if they would fall, they reckon would do them good to have in their keeping yet one year ere they die. But look if ye see not some wretch that scant can creep for age, his head hanging in his bosom, and his body crooked, walk pit-pat upon a pair of pattens with the staff in the one hand and the *pater noster* in the other hand, the one foot almost in the grave already, and yet never the more haste to part with anything, nor to restore that he hath evil gotten, but as greedy to get a groat by the beguiling of his neighbour as if he had of certainty seven score years to live.

The man that is purblind cannot see far from him,--and as to look on death, we be for the most part purblind all the meinie: ²² for we cannot see him till he come very near us. But these folk be not purblind but stark blind: for they cannot see him when he cometh so near that he putteth almost his finger in their eye. Sure the cause is for that they willingly wink, and list not to look at him. They be loath to remember death, loath to put this ointment on their eyes. This water is somewhat pricking and would make their eyes water, and therefore they refuse it. But surely, if they would use it, if they would as advisedly remember death as they unadvisedly forget him,

they should soon see their folly and shake off their covetousness. For undoubtedly, if they would consider deeply how soon they may, yea, and how soon they must, lose all that they labour for, they would shortly cease their business, and would never be so mad, greedily to gather together that other men shall merrily soon after scatter abroad. If they thought how soon in what painful plight they shall lie a-dying, while their executors afore their face ransack up their sacks, they would, I ween, shortly empty their sacks themselves. And if they doubt how far that death is from them, let them hear what Christ saith in the gospel to the rich covetous gatherer that thought to make his barns and his warehouses larger to lay in the more, because he reckoned in himself to live and make merry many years: and it was said unto him: “Thou fool! This night shall they take thy soul from thee: and then these things that thou hast gathered, whose shall they be?”²³ And holy Saint Bernard saith that it may be said unto him farther; “thou that hast gathered them, whose shalt thou be?”

If we would well advise us upon this point and remember the painful peril of death that we shall so soon come to, and that of all that we gather we shall carry nothing with us, it would cause us to consider that this covetous gathering and niggardous keeping, with all the delight that we take in the beholding of our substance, is in all our life but a very gay golden dream, in which we dream that we have great riches, and in the sleep of this life we be glad and proud thereof. But when death shall once waken us, our gay golden dream shall vanish, and of all the treasure that we so merrily dreamed of, we shall not (as the holy prophet saith) find one penny left in our hands.²⁴ Which if we forgot not, but well and effectually remembered, we would in time cast covetousness

out of our heads, and leaving little business for our executors after our death, not fail to dispose and distribute our substance with our own hands. If thou knewest very certainly, that after all thy goods gathered together, thou shouldst be suddenly robbed of all together, thou wouldst, I ween, have little joy to labour and toil for so much, but rather as thou shouldst happen to get it, so wouldst thou wisely bestow it there as need were and where thou mightst have thank therefor: and on them specially that were likely to help thee with theirs when thine were all gone. But it is so that thou art of nothing so sure as that death shall bereave thee of all that ever thou heapest, and leave thee scant a sheet. Which thing, if we did as well remember as we well know, we should not fail to labour less for that we shall so lose, and would put into poor men’s purses our money to keep, that death, the cruel thief, should not find it about us, but they should relieve us therewith when the remnant were bereft us.

Of Gluttony. Now have we to consider how this part of our medicine, that is to wit, the remembrance of death, may be applied to the cure and help of gluttony, which is a beastly sickness and an old sore. For this was in the beginning joined with pride in our mother Eve: who besides the proud appetite that she had to be by knowledge made in manner a goddess, yet took she such delight also in the beholding of the apple, that she longed to feel the taste. And so entered death at the windows of our own eyes into the house of our heart, and there burned up all the goodly building that God had wrought therein. And surely so falleth it daily, that the eye is not only the cook and the tapster, to bring the ravenous appetite of delicate meat and drink into the belly (so far forth that men commonly say it were better fill his belly than his eye, and many men mind it not at all till they see the meat on the board), but the eye is also the bawd to bring the heart to the desire of the foul beastly pleasure beneath the belly. For when the eye immoderately delighteth in long looking of the beauteous face, with the white neck and round

paps, and so forth as far as it findeth no let, the devil helpeth the heart to frame and form in the fantasy, by foul imaginations, all that ever the clothes cover. And that in such excellent fashion, as the mind is more kindled in the feigned figure of his own device than if it should haply be if the eye saw the body belly naked such as it is indeed. And therefore saith the holy prophet, "Turn away thine eyes from the beholding of vanities."²⁵ Now, as I began to say, since it is so that this old sore of gluttony was the vice and sin by which our forefathers, eating the forbidden fruit, fell from the felicity of paradise and from their immortality into death and into the misery of this wretched world, well ought we to hate and abhor it, although there should now no new harm grow thereof. But so is it now, that so much harm daily groweth thereof new, not to the soul only, but to the body also, that if we love either other, we see great cause to have it in hatred and abomination, though it had never done us hurt of old. For hard it is to say whether this vice be more pestilent to the body or to the soul: surely very pestilent to both. And as to the soul, no man doubteth how deadly it is. For since the body rebelleth always against the spirit,²⁶ what can be more venomous and mortal to the soul than gorbellied gluttony, which so pampereth the body, that the soul can have no rule thereof, but carrieth it forth like an headstrong horse, till he have cast his master in the mire. And if the corruptible body be (as the wise man saith) burdensome to the soul,²⁷ with what a burden chargeth he the soul that so pampereth his paunch that he is scant able to bear the burden of his own belly, though it were taken from that place and laid upon his back. If the body be to the soul a prison, how strait a prison maketh he the body that stuffeth it so full of rift-raff that the soul can have no room to stir itself, but as one were so set, hand and foot, in a strait stocks that he can neither stand up nor lie down,--so the soul is so stifled in such a stuffed body that it can nothing wield itself in doing of any good spiritual thing that appertaineth unto his part, but is, as it were, enclosed, not in a prison but in a grave, dead in manner already, for any good operation that the unwieldy body can suffer it to do.

And yet is gluttony to the soul not so pernicious and pestilent for the hurt it doth itself, as for the harm and destruction that is done by such other vices as commonly come thereon. For no man doubteth but sloth and lechery be the very daughters of gluttony. And then needs must it be a deadly enemy to the soul, that bringeth forth two such daughters, of which either one killeth the soul eternally,--I mean not the substance of the soul, but the wealth²⁸ and felicity of the soul, without which it were better never to have been born. What good can the great glutton do with his belly standing astrut like a taber,²⁹ and his noll toty³⁰ with drink, but balk³¹ up his brews³² in the midst of his matters, or lie down and sleep like a swine. And who doubteth but that the body delicately fed maketh, as the rumour saith, an unchaste bed. Men are wont to write a short riddle on the wall that D. C. hath no P. Read ye this riddle? I cannot: but I have heard say that it toucheth the readiness that woman hath to fleshly filth, if she fall in drunkenness. And if ye find one that can declare it, though it be no great authority, yet have I heard say that it is very true.

Of our glutton feasts followeth not only sloth and lechery, but often-times lewd and perilous talking, foolhardiness, backbiting, debate, variance, chiding, wrath, and fighting, with readiness to all manner mischief, running to ruin for lack of circumspection, which can never be without soberness. The holy Scripture rehearseth that in desert, the children of Israel, when they had sat down and well eaten and drunk, then rose they up and played the idolators whereof by the occasion of gluttony, the wrath of God fell upon them.³³ Holy Job, when his children fell to feasting, feared so greatly that the occasion of gluttony should in their feasts make them fall into foolish talking and blasphemy, that while they were about their feasts, he fell to prayer and

sacrifice, that God might at his prayer send them grace so to make good cheer that they fell not in the vices usually coming of gluttony. ³⁴ Now to the body what sin is so noyous, ³⁵ what sin so shameful? Is it not a beastly thing to see a man that hath reason, so to rule himself that his feet may not bear him, but when he cometh out he weeneth that the sky would fall on his head, and there rolleth and reeleth till he fall down the kennel, ³⁶ and there lie down till he be taken up and borne to bed as a corpse were borne in bier? And in good faith, in my mind much wrong is there done him that any man presumeth to take him up, and that he is not suffered to take his ease all night at his pleasure in the king's highway, that is free for every man.

Wonder it is that the world is so mad that we had liefer take sin with pain, than virtue with pleasure. For, as I said in the beginning and often shall I say, virtue bringeth his pleasure, and vice is not without pain. And yet speak I not of the world to come, but of the life present. If virtue were all painful, and vice all pleasant, yet since death shall shortly finish both the pain of the one and the pleasure of the other, great madness were it if we would not rather take a short pain for the winning of everlasting pleasure, than a short pleasure for the winning of everlasting pain. But now, if it be true, as it is indeed, that our sin is painful and our virtue pleasant, how much is it then a more madness to take sinful pain in this world, that shall win us eternal pain in hell, rather than pleasant virtue in this world, that shall win us eternal pleasure in heaven?

If thou ween that I teach thee wrong, when I say that in virtue is pleasure and in sin is pain, I might prove it by many plain texts of holy Scripture, as by the words of the psalmist, where he saith, "I have had as great pleasure in the way of Thy testimonies as in all manner of riches." ³⁷ And Solomon saith of virtue thus, "Her ways are all full of pleasure, and her paths are peaceable." ³⁸ And further he saith, "The way of the wicked is as it were hedged with thorns; but the way of the righteous is without stumbling." ³⁹ "And we be wearied," shall the wretches say, "in the way of wickedness; we have walked in hard and cumbrous ways": and the wise man saith, "The way of the sinners is set or laid with stones, but in the end is hell darkness and pains." ⁴⁰ But to tell us worldly wretches the words of holy Writ is but a dull proof. For our beastly taste favoureth not the sweetness of heavenly things. And as for experience, we can none get of the one part, that is to wit, the pleasure that is in virtue. The other part we cannot perceive for bitter, for the corruption of our custom whereby sour seemeth us sweet. But yet if we would consider our sin well, with the dependants thereupon, we should not fail to perceive the painful bitterness of our wallow ⁴¹ -sweet sin. For no man is so mad that will reckon that thing for pleasant that hath with little pleasure much pain. For so might we call a man of India white, because of his white teeth. Now if thou shouldst, for a little itch, claw thyself suddenly deep into the flesh, thou wouldst not call thy clawing pleasant, though it liked thee a little in the beginning. But so is it that for the little itching pleasure of sin, we claw ourselves suddenly to the hard bones, and win thereby, not a little pain, but an intolerable torment. Which thing I might prove beginning at pride in every kind of sin, saving that the digression would be over long; for the abridging whereof, let us consider it but in the selfsame sin that we have in hand.

The pleasure that the glutton hath in his viand can be no longer any very pleasure than while it is joined with hunger, that is to say, with pain. For the very pleasure of eating is but the diminishing of his pain in hungering. Now all that ever is eaten after, in which gluttony beginneth, is in effect pain altogether. And then the head acheth, and the stomach gnaweth, and the next meal is eaten without appetite, with gorge upon gorge and grief upon grief, till the

gorbely be compelled to cast up all again, and then fall to a rere ⁴² -supper.

If God would never punish gluttony, yet bringeth it punishment enough with itself: it disfigureth the face, discoloureth the skin, and disfashioneth the body; it maketh the skin tawny, the body fat and fobby, ⁴³ the face drowsy, the nose dripping, the mouth spitting, the eyes bleared, the teeth rotten, the breath stinking, the hands trembling, the head hanging, and the feet tottering, and finally no part left in right course and frame. And besides the daily dulness and grief that the unwieldy body feeleth by the stuffing of his paunch so full, it bringeth in by leisure the dropsy, the colic, the stone, the strangury, the gout, the cramp, the palsy, the pox, the pestilence, and the apoplexy, diseases and sickness of such kind that either shortly destroy us, or else the worse is, keep us in such pain and torment that the longer we live the more wretched we be.

Howbeit, very long lasteth no man with the surfeits of gluttony. For undoubtedly nature, which is sustained with right little (as well appeared by the old fathers that so many years lived in desert with herbs only and roots) is very sore oppressed, and in manner overwhelmed, with the great weight and burden of much and divers viands, and so much laboureth to master the meat and to divide and sunderly ⁴⁴ to send it into all parts of the body and there to turn it into the like and retain it, that she is by the force and great resistance of so much meat as she hath to work upon (of which every part laboureth to conserve and keep his own nature and kind such as it is) forweared and overcome, and giveth it over, except it be helped by some outward aid. And this driveth us of necessity to have so much recourse to medicines, to pills, potions, plasters, glisters, and suppositaries: and yet all too little,--our gluttony is so great and therewith so diverse that, while one meat digesteth, another lieth and putrefieth. And ever we desire to have some help to keep the body in health. But when we be counselled to live temperately, and forbear our delicacies and our gluttony, that will we not hear of: but fain would we have some medicines, as purgations and vomits, to pull down and avoid that we cram in too much. And in this we fare (as the great moral philosopher Plutarch saith) like a lewd ⁴⁵ master of a ship that goeth not about to see the ship tight and sure, but letteth by his lewdness his ship fall on a leak, and then careth not yet to stop the chinks, but set more men to the pump rather with much travail and great peril to draw it dry, than with little labour and great surety to keep it dry. "Thus fare we," saith Plutarch, "that through intemperate living drive ourselves in sickness, and botch us up with physic, where we might with sober diet and temperance have less need of and keep ourselves in health."

If we see men die some dear year by famine, we thereof make a great matter,--we fall to procession, we pray for plenty, and reckon the world at an end. But whereas yearly there dieth in good years great people of gluttony, thereof we take none heed at all, but rather impute the blame to the sickness whereof they die, than to the gluttony whereof the sickness cometh. And if there be a man slain of a stroke, there is, as reason is, much speech made thereof, the coroner sitteth, the quest ⁴⁶ is charged, the verdict given, the felony found, the doer indicted, the process sued, the felon arraigned, and dieth for the deed. And yet if men would ensearch how many be slain with weapon, and how many eat and drink themselves to death, there should be found (as Solomon saith) more dead of the cup and the kitchen, than of the dent of sword ⁴⁷ and thereof is no words made at all.

Now if a man willingly kill himself with a knife, the world wondereth thereupon, and, as well worthy is, he is indicted of his own death, his goods forfeited and his corpse cast out on a

dunghill, his body never buried in Christian burial. These gluttons daily kill themselves with their own hands, and no man findeth fault, but carrieth his carrion corpse into the choir, and with much solemn service burieth the body boldly at the high altar, when they have all their life (as the apostle saith) made their belly their God, ⁴⁸ and liked to know none other: abusing not only the name of Christian men, preferring their belly joy before all the joys of heaven, but also abusing the part and office of a natural man and reasonable creature. For whereas nature and reason showeth us that we should eat but for to live, these gluttons are so glutted in the beastly pleasure of their taste that they would not wish to live an it were not for to eat.

But surely wisdom were it for these gluttons well and effectually to consider that, as Saint Paul saith, “the meat for the belly and the belly to the meat: but God shall destroy both the meat and the belly.” ⁴⁹ Now should they remember and think upon the painful time of death, in which the hands shall not be able to feed the mouth, and the mouth that was wont to pour in by the pottle ⁵⁰ and cram in the flesh by the handfuls, shall scant be able to take in three drops with a spoon, and yet spew it out again. Oft have they had a sick drunken head, and slept themselves sober; but then shall they feel a swimming and aching in their drunken head, when the dazing of death shall keep all sweet sleep out of their watery eyes. Oft have they fallen in the mire, and thence borne to bed; but now shall they fall in the bed, and from thence laid and left in the mire till Gabriel blow them up.

Whereas these considerations much ought to move any man, yet specially should it so much the more those gluttons, in how much that they may well wit that their manner of living must needs accelerate this dreadful day, and draw it shortly to them, albeit that by course of nature ⁵¹ it might seem many years off. Which thing if these intemperate would well and advisedly remember, I would ween verily, it would not fail to make them more moderate in their living, and utterly flee such outrageous riot and pestilent excess.

Of Sloth. Of the mortal sin of sloth men make a small matter. Sloth is a sin so common, and no notable act therein that is accounted for heinous and abominable in the estimation of the world, as is in theft, manslaughter, false forswearing, or treason, with any of which every man would be loath to be defamed, for the world perils that do depend thereupon,--that therefore of sloth there is no man ashamed, but we take it as for a laughing matter and a sport.

But surely since it is a great capital sin indeed, the less that we set thereby, the more perilous it is: for the less we go about to amend it. Now, to the intent that we do not deadly deceive ourself, it is necessary that we consider well the weight. Which if we do, we shall find it far greater than we would before have weened.

There are, ye wot well, two points requisite unto salvation, that is to wit, the declining or going aside from evil, and the doing of good. ⁵² Now whereas in the first part there are all the other six to be eschewed, that is to wit, pride, envy, wrath, gluttony, covetousness, and lechery, the other part, that is, the one half of our way to heaven, even sloth alone is able to destroy.

Sir Thomas More wrote no farther of this work.

From *The English Works of Sir Thomas More* , vol. 1, edited by W. E. Campbell. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1931, pp. 486-499.

- ¹ plentiful.
- ² can them thank=thank them.
- ³ Eccles. vi. 1-2.
- ⁴ Ps. xxxix. 6.
- ⁵ Ps. xlix. 10.
- ⁶ Ps. lv. 22.
- ⁷ Matt. vi. 34.
- ⁸ Matt. vi. 26-33; Luke xii. 24-31.
- ⁹ 1 Kings xvii. 4.
- ¹⁰ Dan. xiv. 33 (Vulgate).
- ¹¹ Luke xvi. 20.
- ¹² put it to use.
- ¹³ wastefully.
- ¹⁴ Matt. xix. 24; Mark x. 25; Luke xviii. 25.
- ¹⁵ Ps. lxii. 10.
- ¹⁶ Matt. vi. 21.
- ¹⁷ share.
- ¹⁸ Matt. xix. 21; Mark x. 21; Luke xviii. 22.
- ¹⁹ hindrance
- ²⁰ mistress
- ²¹ wait greedily
- ²² company
- ²³ Luke xii. 20.
- ²⁴ Ps. xlix.
- ²⁵ Ps. cxix. 37.
- ²⁶ Gal. v. 17.
- ²⁷ Wisdom ix. 15.
- ²⁸ well-being
- ²⁹ drum, tabour
- ³⁰ dizzy
- ³¹ belch
- ³² broth
- ³³ Ex. xxxii. 6.
- ³⁴ Job i. 5.
- ³⁵ hurtful
- ³⁶ gutter
- ³⁷ Ps. cxix. 14.
- ³⁸ Prov. iii. 17.
- ³⁹ Prov. xv. 19.
- ⁴⁰ Ecclus. xxi. 11.
- ⁴¹ sickly, nauseatingly.
- ⁴² late
- ⁴³ soft, flabby

⁴⁴ in different directions

⁴⁵ ignorant

⁴⁶ jury

⁴⁷ Ecclus. xxxvii. 34.

⁴⁸ Phil. iii. 19.

⁴⁹ 1 Cor. vi. 13.

⁵⁰ half-gallon

⁵¹ See p. 218 (101.D.1).

⁵² Ps. xxxiv.14; 1 Pet. iii. 11.