



ESSAYS OF DOROTHY L. SAYERS

Part V

THE OTHER SIX DEADLY SINS

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Perhaps the bitterest commentary on the way in which Christian doctrine has been taught in the last few centuries is the fact that to the majority of people the word “immorality” has come to mean one thing and one thing only. The name of an association like yours is generally held to imply that you are concerned to correct only one sin out of those seven which the Church recognizes as capital. By a hideous irony, our shrinking reprobation of that sin has made us too delicate so much as to name it, so that we have come to use for it the words which were made to cover the whole range of human corruption. A man may be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous, and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct—and still we are ready to say of him that he is not an immoral man. I am reminded of a young man who once said to me with perfect simplicity: “I did not know there were seven deadly sins: please tell me the names of the other six.”

LUST

About the sin called *Luxuria* or *Lust*, I shall therefore say only three things. First, that it is a sin, and that it ought to be called plainly by its own name, and neither huddled away under a generic term like immorality, nor confused with love.

Secondly, that up till now the Church, in hunting down this sin, has had the active alliance of Caesar, who has been concerned to maintain family solidarity and the orderly devolution of property in the interests of the State. But now that contract and not status is held to be the basis of society, Caesar need no longer rely on the family to maintain social solidarity; and now that so much property is held anonymously by trusts and joint-stock companies, the laws of inheritance lose a great deal of their importance. Consequently, Caesar is now much less interested than he was in the sleeping arrangements of his citizens, and has in this matter cynically denounced his alliance with the Church. This is a warning against putting one’s trust in any child of man—particularly in Caesar. If the Church is to continue her campaign against Lust, she must do

so on her own—that is, on sacramental-grounds; and she will have to do it, if not in defiance of Caesar, at least without his assistance.

Thirdly, there are two main reasons for which people fall into the sin of Luxuria. It may be through sheer exuberance of animal spirits: in which case a sharp application of the curb may be all that is needed to bring the body into subjection and remind it of its proper place in the scheme of man's twofold nature. Or and this commonly happens in periods of disillusionment like our own, when philosophies are bankrupt and life appears without hope—men and women may turn to lust in sheer boredom and discontent, trying to find in it some stimulus which is not provided by the drab discomfort of their mental and physical surroundings. When *that* is the case, stern rebukes and restrictions are worse than useless. It is as though one were to endeavour to cure anaemia by bleeding; it only reduces further an already impoverished vitality. The mournful and medical aspect of twentieth-century pornography and promiscuity strongly suggests that we have reached one of these periods of spiritual depression, where people go to bed because they have nothing better to do. In other words, the “regrettable moral laxity” of which respectable people complain may have its root cause not in Luxuria at all, but in some other of the sins of society, and may automatically begin to cure itself when that root cause is removed.

The Church, then, officially recognizes six other capital or basic sins—seven altogether. Of these, three may be roughly called the warm-hearted or disreputable sins, and the remaining four the cold-hearted or respectable sins. It is interesting to notice that Christ rebuked the three disreputable sins only in mild or general terms, but uttered the most violent vituperations against the respectable ones. Caesar and the Pharisees, on the other hand, strongly dislike anything warm-hearted or disreputable, and set great store by the cold-hearted and respectable sins, which they are in a conspiracy to call virtues. And we may note that, as a result of this unholy alliance between worldly interest and religious opinion, the common man is rather inclined to canonize the warm-hearted sins for himself, and to thank God openly that he is broad-minded, given to a high standard of living, and instinct with righteous

indignation—not prurient, strait-laced or namby-pamby, or even as this Pharisee. It is difficult to blame the common man very much for this natural reaction against the insistent identification of Christian morality with everything that Christ most fervently abhorred.

WRATH

The sin of *Ira* or *Wrath* is one, perhaps, to which the English as a nation are not greatly addicted, except in a rather specialized form. On the whole we are slow to anger, and dislike violence. We can be brutal and destructive—usually, however, only under provocation; and much of our apparent brutality is due much less to violence of temper than to sheer unimaginative stupidity (a detestable sin in itself, but quite different in nature and origin). On the whole, we are an easy-going, good-humoured people, who hate with difficulty and find it almost impossible to cherish rancour or revenge.

This is true, I think, of the English. It is perhaps not quite true of those who profess and call themselves British. The Celt is quarrelsome; he prides himself that with him it is a word and a blow. He broods upon the memory of ancient wrongs in a way that to the Englishman is incomprehensible; if the English were Irish by temperament they would still be roused to fury by the name of the Battle of Hastings, instead of summing it up philosophically as “1066 and All That.” The Celt clings fiercely to his ancient tribal savageries, and his religious habits are disputatious, polemical, and (in extreme instances, as on the Irish border) disgraced by blood-thirst and a persecuting frenzy. But let the Englishman not be in too great a hurry to congratulate himself. He has one besetting weakness, by means of which he may very readily be led or lashed into the sin of Wrath: he is peculiarly liable to attacks of righteous indignation. While he is in one of these fits he will fling himself into a debauch of fury and commit extravagances which are not only evil but ridiculous.

We all know pretty well the man—or perhaps still more frequently the woman—who says that anybody who tortures a helpless animal should be flogged till he shrieks for mercy.

The harsh, grating tone and the squinting, vicious countenance accompanying the declaration are enough to warn us that this righteous anger is devil-born, and trembling on the verge of mania. But we do not always recognize this ugly form of possession when it cloaks itself under a zeal for efficiency or a lofty resolution to expose scandals—particularly if it expresses itself only in print or in platform verbiage. It is very well known to the more unscrupulous part of the Press that nothing pays so well in the newspaper world as the manufacture of schism and the exploitation of wrath. Turn over the pages of the more popular papers if you want to see how avarice thrives on hatred and the passion of violence. To foment grievance and to set men at variance is the trade by which agitators thrive and journalists make money. A dog-fight, a brawl, or a war is always news; if news of that kind is lacking, it pays well to contrive it. The average English mind is a fertile field in which to sow the dragon's teeth of moral indignation; and the fight that follows will be blind, brutal, and merciless.

That is not to say that scandals should not be exposed, or that no anger is justified. But you may know the mischief-maker by the warped malignancy of his language as easily as by the warped malignancy of his face and voice. His fury is without restraint and without magnanimity—and it is aimed, not at checking the offence, but at starting a pogrom against the offender. He would rather the evil were not cured at all than that it were cured quietly and without violence. His evil lust of wrath cannot be sated unless some-body is hounded down, beaten, and trampled on, and a savage war-dance executed upon the body.

I have said that the English are readily tempted into this kind of debauch. I will add that *it is* a debauch, and, like other debauches, leaves him with a splitting head, a bad hang-over, and a crushing sense of shame. When he does give way to wrath, he makes a very degrading exhibition of himself, because wrath is a thing unnatural to him; it affects him like drink or drugs. In the shame-faced mood that follows, he becomes spiritless, sick at heart, and enfeebled in judgment. I am therefore the more concerned about a highly unpleasant spirit of vindictiveness that is being commended

to us at this moment, camouflaged as righteous wrath and a warlike spirit. It is not a warlike spirit at all—at any rate, it is very unlike the spirit in which soldiers make war. The good soldier is on the whole remarkable both for severity in his measures, and for measure in his severity. He is as bloodthirsty as his duty requires him to be, and, as a rule, not more. Even in Germany, the difference between the professional and the political fighter is said to be very marked in this respect. There are, however, certain people here whose martial howls do not suggest the battle-cry even of a savage warrior so much as Miss Henrietta Petowker reciting *The Blood-Drinker's Burial* in Mrs. Kenwigs's front parlour. If I say: "Do not listen to them," it is not because there is no room for indignation, but because there is a point at which righteous indignation passes over into the deadly sin of Wrath; and once it has passed that point, it is liable, like all other passions, to stagger over into its own opposite, the equally fatal sin of Sloth or Accidie, of which we shall have something to say presently. Ungovernable rage is the sin of the warm heart and the quick spirit; in such men it is usually very quickly repented of—though before that happens it may have wrought irreparable destruction. We shall have to see to it that the habit of wrath and destruction which war fastens upon us is not carried over into the peace. And above all we must see to it now that our blind rages are not harnessed and driven by those men of the cold head and the cold heart—the Envious, the Avaricious, and the Proud.

GLUTTONY

The third warm-hearted sin is named *Gula* in Latin and in English, *Gluttony*. In its vulgarest and most obvious form we may feel that we are not much tempted to it. Certain other classes of people—not ourselves—do, of course, indulge in this disreputable kind of wallowing. Poor people of coarse and unrefined habits drink too much beer. Rich people, particularly in America and in those luxury hotels which we cannot afford, stuff themselves with food. Young people—especially girls younger than ourselves drink far too many cocktails and smoke like chimneys. And some very reprehensible people contrive, even in war-time, to make pigs

of themselves in defiance of the rationing order—like the young woman who (according to a recent gossip column) contrived to eat five separate lunches in five separate restaurants in the course of a single morning. But on the whole, England in war-time is not a place where the majority of us can very easily destroy our souls with Gluttony. We may congratulate ourselves that, if we have not exactly renounced our sins, this particular sin at any rate has renounced us.

Let us seize this breathing-space, while we are out of reach of temptation, to look at one very remarkable aspect of the sin of Gula. We have all become aware lately of something very disquieting about what we call our economic system. An odd change has come over us since the arrival of the machine age. Whereas formerly it was considered a virtue to be thrifty and content with one's lot, it is now considered to be the mark of a progressive nation that it is filled with hustling, go-getting citizens, intent on raising their standard of living. And this is not interpreted to mean merely that a decent sufficiency of food, clothes, and shelter is attainable by all citizens. It means much more and much less than this. It means that every citizen is encouraged to consider more, and more complicated, luxuries necessary to his well-being. The gluttonous consumption of manufactured goods had become, before the war, the prime civic virtue. And why? Because the machines can produce cheaply only if they produce in vast quantities; because unless the machines can produce cheaply nobody can afford to keep them running; and because, unless they are kept running, millions of citizens will be thrown out of employment, and the community will starve.

We need not stop now to go round and round the vicious circle of production and consumption. We need not remind ourselves of the furious barrage of advertisement by which people are flattered and frightened out of a reasonable contentment into a greedy hankering after goods which they do not really need; nor point out for the thousandth time how every evil passion—snobbery, laziness, vanity, concupiscence, ignorance, greed—is appealed to in these campaigns. Nor how unassuming communities (described as “backward countries”) have these desires ruthlessly forced upon

them by their neighbours in the effort to find an outlet for goods whose market is saturated. And we must not take up too much time in pointing out how, as the necessity to sell goods in quantity becomes more desperate the people's appreciation of quality is violently discouraged and suppressed. You must not buy goods that last too long, for production cannot be kept going unless the goods wear out, or fall out of fashion, and so can be thrown away and replaced with others. If a man invents anything that would give lasting satisfaction, his invention must be bought up by the manufacturer so that it may never see the light of day. Nor must the worker be encouraged to take too much interest in the thing he makes; if he did, he might desire to make it as well as it can be made, and that would not pay. It is better that he should work in a soulless indifference, even though such treatment should break his spirit, and cause him to hate his work. The difference between the factory hand and the craftsman is that the craftsman lives to do the work he loves; but the factory hand lives by doing the work he despises. The service of the machine will not have it otherwise. We know about all this, and must not discuss it now—but I will ask you to remember it.

The point I want to make *now* is this: that whether or not it is desirable to keep up this fearful whirligig of industrial finance based on gluttonous consumption, it could not be kept up for a single moment without the co-operative gluttony of the consumer. Legislation, the control of wages and profits, the balancing of exports and imports, elaborate schemes for the distribution of surplus commodities, the State ownership of enterprise, complicated systems of social credit, and finally wars and revolutions are all invoked in the hope of breaking down the thing known as the present Economic System. Now it may well be that its breakdown would be a terrific disaster and produce a worse chaos than that which went before—we need not argue about it. The point is that, without any legislation whatever, the whole system would come crashing down in a day if every consumer were voluntarily to restrict his purchases to the things he really needed. “The fact is,” said a working man the other day at a meeting, “that when we fall for these advertisements we’re

being had for mugs.” So we are. The sin of Gluttony, of Greed, of overmuch stuffing of ourselves, is the sin that has delivered us over into the power of the machine.

In evil days between the wars we were confronted with some ugly contrasts between plenty and poverty. Those contrasts should be, and must be, reduced. But let us say frankly that they are not likely to be reduced, so long as the poor admire the rich for the indulgence in precisely that gluttonous way of living which rivets on the world the chain of the present economic system, and do their best to imitate rich men’s worst vices. To do that is to play into the hands of those whose interest it is to keep the system going. You will notice that, under a war economy, the contrast is being flattened out; we are being forced to reduce and regulate our personal consumption of commodities, and to revise our whole notion of what constitutes good citizenship in the financial sense. This is the judgment of this world: when we will not amend ourselves by Grace, we are compelled under the yoke of Law. You will notice also that we are learning certain things. There seems, for example, to be no noticeable diminution in our health and spirits due to the fact that we have only the choice of, say, half a dozen dishes in a restaurant instead of forty. In the matter of clothing, we are beginning to regain our respect for stuffs that will wear well; we can no longer be led away by the specious argument that it is smarter and more hygienic to wear underlinen and stockings once and then throw them away than to buy things that will serve us for years. We are having to learn, painfully, to save food and material and to salvage waste products; and in learning to do these things we have found a curious and stimulating sense of adventure. For it is the great curse of Gluttony that it ends by destroying all sense of the precious, the unique, the irreplaceable. But what will happen to us when the war-machine ceases to consume our surplus products for us? Shall we hold fast to our rediscovered sense of real values and our adventurous attitude of life? If so, we shall revolutionize world economy without any political revolution. Or shall we again allow our Gluttony to become the instrument of an economic system that is satisfactory to nobody? That system as we know it thrives

upon waste and rubbish-heaps. At present the waste (that is, sheer gluttonous consumption) is being done for us in the field of war. In peace, if we do not revise our ideas, we shall ourselves become its instruments. The rubbish-heap will again be piled on our own doorsteps, on our own backs, in our own bellies. Instead of the wasteful consumption of trucks and tanks, metal and explosives, we shall have back the wasteful consumption of wireless sets and silk stockings, drugs and paper, cheap pottery and cosmetics—all the slop and swill that pour down the sewers over which the palace of Gluttony is built.

Gluttony is warm-hearted. It is the excess and perversion of that free, careless, and generous mood which desires to enjoy life and to see others enjoy it. But, like Lust and Wrath, it is a headless, heedless sin, that puts the good-natured person at the mercy of the cold head and the cold heart; and these exploit it and bring it to judgment, so that at length it issues in its own opposite—in that very “dearth in the midst of plenty” at which we stand horrified today.

COVETOUSNESS

In especial, it is at the mercy of the sin called *Avaritia* or *Covetousness*. At one time this sin was content to call itself “Honest Thrift,” and under that name was, as they might say in Aberdeen, “*varra weel respectit*.” The cold-hearted sins recommend themselves to Church and State by the restraints they lay upon the vulgar and disreputable warm-hearted sins. The thrifty poor do not swill beer in pubs, or indulge in noisy quarrels in the streets to the annoyance of decent people—moreover, they are less likely to become a burden on the rates. The thrifty well-to-do do not abash their pious neighbours by lavish indulgence in *Gula* or *Luxuria*—which are both very expensive sins. Nevertheless, there used always to be certain reservations about the respect accorded to *Covetousness*. It was an unromantic, unspectacular sin. Unkind people sometimes called it by rude names, such as *Parsimony* and *Niggardliness*. It was a narrow, creeping, pinched kind of sin; and it was not a good mixer. It was more popular with Caesar than with Caesar’s subjects; it had no

glamour about it.

It was left for the present age to endow Covetousness with glamour on a big scale, and to give it a title which it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it Enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, Covetousness has gone forward and never looked back. It has become a swaggering, swashbuckling, piratical sin, going about with its hat cocked over its eye, and with pistols tucked into the tops of its jack-boots. Its war-cries are “Business Efficiency!” “Free Competition!” “Get Out or Get Under!” and “There’s Always Room at the Top!” It no longer screws and saves—it launches out into new enterprises; it gambles and speculates; it thinks in a big way; it takes risks. It can no longer be troubled to deal in real wealth, and so remain attached to Work and the Soil. It has set money free from all such hampering ties; it has interests in every continent; it is impossible to pin it down to anyone place or any concrete commodity—it is an adventurer, a roving, rollicking free-lance. It looks so jolly and jovial, and has such a twinkle in its cunning eye, that nobody can believe that its heart is as cold and calculating as ever. Besides, where is its heart? Covetousness is not incarnated in individual people, but in business corporations, joint-stock companies, amalgamations, trusts, which have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned—nor hearts to be appealed to, either: It is very difficult to fasten on anybody the responsibility for the things that are done with money. Of course, if Covetousness miscalculates and some big financier comes crashing down, bringing all the small speculators down with him, we wag self-righteous heads, and feel that we see clearly where the fault lies. But we do not punish the fraudulent business-man for his frauds, but for his failure.

The Church says Covetousness is a deadly sin—but does she really think so? Is she ready to found Welfare Societies to deal with financial immorality as she does with sexual immorality? Do the officials stationed at church doors in Italy to exclude women with bare arms turn anybody away on the grounds that they are too well-dressed to be honest? Do the vigilance committees who complain of “suggestive” books and plays make any attempt to suppress the literature which “suggests” that getting on in the

world is the chief object in life? Is Dives, like Magdalen, ever refused the sacraments on the grounds that he, like her, is an “open and notorious evil-liver”? Does the Church arrange services with bright congregational singing, for Total Abstainers from Usury?

The Church’s record is not, in these matters, quite as good as it might be. But is perhaps rather better than that of those who denounce her for her neglect. The Church is not the Vatican, nor the Metropolitans, nor the Bench of Bishops; it is not even the Vicar or the Curate or the Church-wardens: the Church is you and I. And are you and I in the least sincere in our pretence that we disapprove of Covetousness?

Let us ask ourselves one or two questions. Do we admire and envy rich people because they are rich, or because the work by which they made their money is good work? If we hear that Old So-and-so has pulled off a pretty smart deal with the Town Council, are we shocked by the revelation of the cunning graft involved, or do we say admiringly: “Old So-and-so’s hot stuff—you won’t find many flies on him”? When we go to the cinema and see a picture about empty-headed people in luxurious surroundings, do we say: “What drivell!” or do we sit in a misty dream, wishing we could give up our daily work and marry into surroundings like that? When we invest our money, do we ask ourselves whether the enterprise represents anything useful, or merely whether it is a safe thing that returns a good dividend? Do we regularly put money into football pools or dog-racing? When we read the newspaper, are our eyes immediately arrested by anything which says “MILLIONS” in large capitals, preceded by the £ or \$ sign? Have we ever refused money on the grounds that the work that we had to do for it was something that we could not do honestly or do well? Do we NEVER choose our acquaintances with the idea that they are useful people to know, or keep in with people in the hope that there is something to be got out of them? And do we—this is important—when we blame the mess that the economical world has got into, do we always lay the blame on wicked financiers, wicked profiteers, wicked capitalists, wicked employers, wicked bankers—or do we sometimes ask ourselves how far we have contributed to make the mess?

Just as the sin of Gluttony thrives on our little greeds, so the sin of Covetousness thrives on our little acts of avarice—on the stupid and irresponsible small shareholder for example, who is out to get money for nothing. There is a book called *Wall Street Under Oath* [Louise Pecora] which makes entertaining but rather shameful reading. It is an account of the exposure of various great business and banking frauds in the United States at the time of the post-war slump. When we have finished wondering at the bare-faced venality, graspingness, and lack of scruple of the notorious financiers who stood in the dock to answer the charge of fraud, we may fruitfully wonder at the incredible avarice and criminal folly of their victims. For no share-pusher could vend his worthless stock, if he could not count on meeting, in his prospective victim, an unscrupulous avarice as vicious as his own, but stupider. Every time a man expects, as he says, his money to work for him, he is expecting other people to work for him; and when he expects it to bring in more money in a year than honest work could produce in that time, he is expecting it to cheat and steal on his behalf.

We are all in it together. I often wonder why Germany was so foolishly impatient as to go to war. If domination was all she wanted, she could have it without shedding a drop of blood, by merely waiting long enough and trusting to the avarice of mankind. You may remember the sordid and cynical French business-man on the boat that brought Elie J. Bois to England after the collapse of France. Someone asked him: “Why did France break down like this?” and he answered: “Because she had too many men like me.” France was bought—the politicians were bought, the Press was bought, Labour was bought, the Church was bought, big business was bought, even the army was bought. Not always by open bribes in cash, but by the insidious appeal to security, and business interests and economic power. Nobody would destroy anything or let go of anything; there was always the hope of making a deal with the enemy. Everybody, down to the smallest provincial official and the pettiest petty shop-keeper had a vested interest in non-resistance. Wars are not made by business-men, who are terrified of the threat to their powers: what business-men make are surrenders. Nobody prays more fervently than the business-man

to be freed from the “crushing burden of armaments”; the first thing that happens in a war is the freezing of international credits, which the business-man does not like. The same business-man who will view with perfect indifference the senseless destruction of fish and fruit, coffee and corn in peace-time, because it does not pay to distribute them, is preternaturally sensitive about the senseless destruction of property by war. Patience, cunning, and the appeal to avarice could bring the whole world into economic subjection by a slow interior corruption. We may, perhaps, count ourselves fortunate that Hitler’s patience was at length exhausted and that he conjured up the devil of Wrath to cast out the devil of Covetousness. When Satan casts out Satan, his kingdom does not stand; but we have come to a grievous pass if we have to choose between one devil and another—if the only deliverance from Covetousness is the Wrath of war, and the only safe-guard against war, a peace based on Covetousness.

The virtue of which Covetousness is the perversion is something more positive and warm-hearted than Thrift—it is the love of the real values, of which the material world has only two: the fruits of the earth and the labour of the people. As for the spiritual values, Avarice has no use for them: they cannot be assessed in money, and the moment that anyone tries to assess them in money they softly and suddenly vanish away.

We may argue eloquently that “Honesty is the best Policy”—unfortunately, the moment honesty is adopted for the sake of policy it mysteriously ceases to be honesty. We may say that the best Art should be recompensed at the highest rate, and no doubt it should; but if the artist lets his work be influenced by considerations of marketing, he will discover that what he is producing is not Art. And we may say, with some justice, that an irreligious nation cannot prosper; but if a nation tries to cultivate religion for the sake of regaining prosperity, the resulting brand of religion will be addressed to a very queer God indeed. There is said to be a revival just now of what is called “interest” in religion. Even governments are inclined to allot broadcasting time to religious propaganda, and to order National Days of Prayer. However admirable these activities may be one has a haunting feeling that God’s

acquaintance is being cultivated because He might come in useful. But God is quite shrewd enough to see through that particular kind of commercial fraud.

ENVY

But we are only half-way through our list of the Deadly Sins. Hand in hand with Covetousness goes its close companion—*Invidia* or *Envy*, which hates to see other men happy. The names by which it offers itself to the world's applause are Right and Justice, and it makes a great parade of these austere virtues. It begins by asking, plausibly: "Why should not I enjoy what others enjoy?" and it ends by demanding: "Why should others enjoy what I may not?" Envy is the great leveller: if it cannot level things up, it will level them down; and the words constantly in its mouth are: "My Rights" and "My Wrongs." At its best, Envy is a climber and a snob; at its worst, it is a destroyer—rather than have anybody happier than itself, it will see us all miserable together.

In love, Envy is cruel, jealous, and possessive. My friend and my married partner must be wholly wrapped up in me, and must find no interests outside me. That is my right. No person, no work, no hobby must rob me of any part of that right. If we cannot be happy together, we will be unhappy together—but there must be no escape into pleasures that I cannot share. If my husband's work means more to him than I do, I will see him ruined rather than preoccupied; if my wife is so abandoned as to enjoy Beethoven or dancing, or anything else which I do not appreciate, I will so nag and insult her that she will no longer be able to indulge these tastes with a mind at ease. If my neighbours are able to take pleasure in intellectual interests which are above my head, I will sneer at them and call them by derisive names, because they make me feel inferior, and that is a thing I cannot bear. All men have equal rights—and if these people were born with any sort of privilege, I will see to it that that privilege shall be made worthless—if I can, and by any means I can devise. Let justice be done to me, though the heavens fall and the earth be shot to pieces.

If Avarice is the sin of the Haves against the Have-Nots, Envy is the sin of the Have-Nots against the Haves.

If we want to see what they look like on a big scale, we may say that Avarice has been the sin of the Anglo-Saxon democracies, and Envy the sin of Germany. Both are cruel—the one with a heavy, complacent, and bloodless cruelty; the other with a violent, calculated, and savage cruelty. But Germany only displays in accentuated form an evil of which we have plenty at home.

The difficulty about dealing with Envy is precisely that it is the sin of the Have-Nots, and that, on that account, it can always find support among those who are just and generous-minded. Its demands for a place in the sun are highly plausible, and those who detect any egotism in the demand can readily be silenced by accusing them of oppression, inertia, and a readiness to grind the face of the poor. Let us look for a moment at some of the means by which Envy holds the world to ransom.

One of its achievements has been to change the former order by which society was based on status and substitute a new basis—that of contract. Status means, roughly speaking, that the relations of social units are ordered according to the intrinsic qualities which those units possess by nature. Men and institutions are valued for what they are. Contract means that they are valued, and their relations ordered, in virtue of what bargain they are able to strike. Knowledge, for example, and the man of knowledge, can be rated at a market value—prized, that is, not for the sake of knowledge, but for what is called their contribution to society. The family is esteemed, or not esteemed, according as it can show its value as an economic unit. Thus, all inequalities can, theoretically, be reduced to financial and utilitarian terms, and the very notion of intrinsic superiority can be denied and derided. In other words, all pretension to superiority can be debunked.

The years between the wars saw the most ruthless campaign of debunking ever undertaken by nominally civilized nations. Great artists were debunked by disclosures of their private weaknesses; great statesmen, by attributing to them mercenary and petty motives, or by alleging that all their work was meaningless, or done for them by other people. Religion was debunked, and shown to consist of a mixture of craven superstition and greed. Courage was debunked, patriotism was debunked, learning and art

were debunked, love was debunked, and with it family affection and the virtues of obedience, veneration, and solidarity. Age was debunked by youth and youth by age. Psychologists stripped bare the pretensions of reason and conscience and self-control, saying that these were only the respectable disguises of unmentionable unconscious impulses. Honour was debunked with peculiar virulence, and good faith, and unselfishness. Everything that could possibly be held to constitute an essential superiority had the garments of honour torn from its back and was cast out into the darkness of derision. Civilization was finally debunked till it had not a rag left to cover its nakedness.

It is well that the hypocrisies which breed like mushrooms in the shadow of great virtues should be discovered and removed; but Envy is not the right instrument for that purpose; for it tears down the whole fabric to get at the parasitic growths. Its enemy, in fact, is the virtues themselves. Envy cannot bear to admire or respect; it cannot bear to be grateful. But it is very plausible; it always announces that it works in the name of truth and equity. Sometimes it may be a good thing to debunk Envy a little. For example: here is a phrase which we have heard a good deal of late: "These services (payments, compensations, or what not) ought not to be made a matter of charity. We have a right to demand that they should be borne by the State." It sounds splendid; but what does it mean?

Now, you and I are the State; and where the bearing of financial burdens is concerned, the taxpayer is the State. The heaviest burden of taxation is, naturally, borne by those who can best afford to pay. When a new burden is imposed, the rich will have to pay most of it.

Of the money expended in charity, the greater part—for obvious reasons—is contributed by the rich. Consequently, if the burden hitherto borne by charity is transferred to the shoulders of the taxpayer, it will inevitably continue to be carried by exactly the same class of people. The only difference is this: that people will no longer pay because they want to—eagerly and for love—but because they must, reluctantly and under pain of fine or imprisonment. The result, roughly speaking, is financially the

same: the only difference is the elimination of the two detested virtues of love and gratitude.

I do not say for a moment that certain things should not be the responsibility of the State—that is, of everybody. No doubt those who formerly contributed out of love should be very willing to pay a tax instead. But what I see very clearly is the hatred of the gracious act, and the determination that nobody shall be allowed any kind of spontaneous pleasure in well-doing if Envy can prevent it. “This ointment might have been sold for much and given to the poor.” Then our nostrils would not be offended by any odour of sanctity—the house would not be “filled with the smell of the ointment.” It is characteristic that it should have been Judas who debunked that act of charity.

SLOTH

The sixth Deadly Sin is named by the Church *Acedia* or *Sloth*. In the world it calls itself Tolerance; but in hell it is called Despair. It is the accomplice of the other sins and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for. We have known it far too well for many years. The only thing perhaps that we have not known about it is that it is mortal sin.

The war has jerked us pretty sharply into consciousness about this slug-a-bed sin of Sloth, and perhaps we need not say too much about it. But two warnings are rather necessary.

First, it is one of the favourite tricks of this Sin to dissemble itself under cover of a whiffling activity of body. We think that if we are busily rushing about and doing things, we cannot be suffering from Sloth. And besides, violent activity seems to offer an escape from the horrors of Sloth. So the other sins hasten to provide a cloak for Sloth: Gluttony offers a whirl of dancing, dining, sports, and dashing very fast from place to place to gape at beauty-spots; which when we get to them, we defile with vulgarity and waste. Covetousness rakes us out of bed at an early hour, in order that we may put pep and hustle into our business: Envy

sets us to gossip and scandal, to writing cantankerous letters to the papers, and to the unearthing of secrets and the scavenging of dustbins; Wrath provides (very ingeniously) the argument that the only fitting activity in a world so full of evildoers and evil demons is to curse loudly and incessantly “Whatever brute and blackguard made the world”; while Lust provides that round of dreary promiscuity that passes for bodily vigour. But these are all disguises for the empty heart and the empty brain and the empty soul of Acedia.

Let us take particular notice of the empty brain. Here Sloth is in a conspiracy with Envy to prevent people from thinking. Sloth persuades us that stupidity is not our sin, but our misfortune: while Envy at the same time persuades us that intelligence is despicable—a dusty, highbrow, and commercially useless thing.

And secondly, the War has jerked us out of Sloth: but wars, if they go on very long, induce Sloth in the shape of war-weariness and despair of any purpose. We saw its effects in the last peace, when it brought all the sins in its train. There are times when one is tempted to say that the great, sprawling, lethargic sin of Sloth is the oldest and greatest of the sins and the parent of all the rest.

PRIDE

But the head and origin of all sin is the basic sin of *Superbia* or *Pride*. In one way there is so much to say about Pride that one might speak of it for a week and not have done. Yet in another way, all there is to be said about it can be said in a single sentence. It is the sin of trying to be as God. It is the sin which proclaims that Man can produce out of his own wits, and his own impulses and his own imagination the standards by which he lives: that Man is fitted to be his own judge. It is Pride which turns man’s virtues into deadly sins, by causing each self-sufficient virtue to issue in its own opposite, and as a grotesque and horrible travesty of itself. The name under which Pride walks the world at this moment is the Perfectibility of Man, or the doctrine of Progress; and its specialty is the making of blueprints for Utopia and establishing the Kingdom of Man on earth.

For the devilish strategy of Pride is that it attacks us, not on our

weak points, but on our strong. It is preeminently the sin of the noble mind—that *corruptio optimi* which works more evil in the world than all the deliberate vices. Because we do not recognise pride when we see it, we stand aghast to see the havoc wrought by the triumphs of human idealism. We meant well, we thought we were succeeding—and look what has come of our efforts! There is a proverb which says that the way to hell is paved with good intentions. We usually take it as referring to intentions that have been weakly abandoned; but it has a deeper and much subtler meaning. That road is paved with good intentions strongly and obstinately pursued, until they become self-sufficing ends in themselves and deified.

Sin grows with doing good. . .

Servant of God has chance of greater sin

And sorrow; than the man who serves a king.

*For those who serve the greater cause may make the cause serve
them,*

Still doing right.

T.S. Eliot: Murder in the Cathedral

The Greeks feared above all things the state of mind they called *hubris*—the inflated spirits that come with over-much success. Overweening in men called forth, they thought, the envy of the gods. Their theology may seem to us a little unworthy, but with the phenomenon itself and its effects they were only too well acquainted. Christianity, with a more rational theology, traces *hubris* back to the root-sin of Pride, which places man instead of God at the centre of gravity and so throws the whole structure of things into the ruin called Judgment. Whenever we say, whether in the personal, political or social sphere,

I am the master of my fate,

I am the captain of my soul

we are committing the sin of Pride; and the higher the goal at which we aim; the more far-reaching will be the subsequent disaster. That is why we ought to distrust all those high ambitions and lofty ideals which make the well-being of humanity their ultimate end. Man cannot make himself happy by serving

himself—not even when he calls self-service the service of the community; for “the community” in that context is only an extension of his own ego. Human happiness is a by-product, thrown off in man’s service of God. And incidentally, let us be very careful how we preach that “Christianity is necessary for the building of a free and prosperous post-war world.”

The proposition is strictly true, but to put it that way may be misleading, for it sounds as though we proposed to make God an instrument in the service of man. But God is nobody’s instrument. If we say that the denial of God was the cause of our present disasters, well and good; it is of the essence of Pride to suppose that we can do without God.

But it will not do to let the same sin creep back in a subtler and more virtuous-seeming form by suggesting that the service of God is necessary as a means to the service of man. That is a blasphemous hypocrisy, which would end by degrading God to the status of a heathen fetish, bound to the service of a tribe, and liable to be dumped head-downwards in the water-butt if He failed to produce good harvest—weather in return for services rendered.

“*Cursed be he that trusteth in man,*” says Reinhold Niebuhr [Beyond Tragedy] “even if he be pious man or, perhaps, particularly if he be pious man.” For the besetting temptation of the pious man is to become the proud man: “He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous.”

My Lord Bishop—ladies and Gentlemen—it has been my pleasure to suggest to you that in your work for the Moral Welfare of this nation you will be doing a great thing if you can persuade the people that the Church is actively and anxiously concerned not with one kind of sin alone, but with seven sins, all of which are deadly, and not least with those which Caesar sanctions and of which the world approves. And moreover, that whatever disguise the sins assume, the Church knows the right names for all of them.

Luxuria or *Lust*

Ira or *Wrath*

Gula or *Gluttony*

Avaritia or *Covetousness*

Invidia or *Envy*

Acedia or *Sloth*

Superbia or *Pride*

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS ***

