

STRENGTH AGAINST TEMPTATIONS
BEING AN EXTRACT FROM
DE REMEDIIS CONTRA TENTATIONES

BY

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Translated by

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[The following treatise copied and modernised from MS. Bodley 131 is in another MS. (Harleian 2409) attributed to Hilton, 'a devout matter by the drawing of M. Walter Hilton', 'drawing' having the meaning of translation. Flete's Latin treatise with name of author occurs only in the oldest Cambridge MS. II.6.30; in Bodl. 43, the *Latin* is erroneously attributed to Hilton. Both Harleian 2409 and Bodl. 131, the English translations, are followed by translations of parts of Flete's *Documento Spirituale*, the account of St Catherine's conversation with Flete at Lecceto. It would seem therefore that both by the mistaken Latin attribution and the definite English one, Hilton was closely associated with this treatise and his relation to Flete and the St Catherine tradition in England is indicated. The matter will however be thoroughly examined in the critical edition of the Latin and English text which the Very Rev. Fr B. Hackett, O.S.A., is publishing shortly. From an examination of the passages added by the translator, and comparison with similar passages in Hilton's undisputed translation of the *Stimulus Amoris*. I am of the opinion that both works are by the same hand.—C.K.]



LOR as mickle as the apostle says that without faith and true belief it is impossible to please God, therefore is it that our old enemy the fiend enforceth him night and day through false incastings of errors and false engines¹ and imaginations and other such manner of wonderful devises, for to destroy and let² our belief and our faith which is the groundstone of all holy kirk and beginner of all virtues. And them that he sees he may not cast down utterly from stabilness of this belief, he ceaseth not to cast them down by other diverse manner of ways (through his quantise and his wiles and his temptations).^{*} Wherefore we shall warily and ghostly withstand his wiles on this wise. We shall charge as nought all such manner of fantasies, imaginations, false conceits of error, or foul stirrings, blasphemous sights or hearings, or any other such fantasies, and bear them meekly

¹ devices

² hinder

^{*}*Note.* The passages in brackets are the translator's additions to the Latin text.

and patiently (putting all our hope and our trust in the mercy and in the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ), for as the prophet says, 'Man's thoughts are but vain: Dominus scit cogitationes homini quia vane sunt'.³ And they are variand and without numbers. And therefore a man shall not rest nor tarry with such false fantasies, again-fighting and troubling his belief, nor he shall not be mickle busy to discuss or throw the causes and the skills of such false fantasies. For the more busy that a man is to know them and to ensearch them, the more fast cleave they on him and the more blind and heavy they make him. Nor a man (nor a woman) shall not over mickle anger him, nor blame himself, for such manner of ill stirrings and foul thoughts, nor utterly arret⁴ them to his own default or sin, for such temptations are to such a man utterly unwilful and displeasing and therefore it is painful to him and no sin but it is a purging and a cleansing of the soul and a strength of patience and a keeping of meekness and a farring⁵ and a raising up of the soul to endless life. Saint Augustine says in a book *De vera religione* that all manner of sin is wilful, and if it be not wilful it is no sin. And Ysidore, *De summo bono, lib. 3^o*, says, whoso is tormented and troubled through stirring of the fiend with foul thoughts of despair, blasphemy and doubts or dreads, which are passions of the soul, he shall not trow nor suppose that he is aliened from God (and forsaken) for [that] he suffers such, but he shall thank God and love him that vouchsafeth to chastise him here with such a yard⁶ so that the spirit may be safe before our lord God, who (beateth and chastens all his loved children and his dear darlings which he has ordained to endless bliss). And if he do thus, then shall (his temptation, his pain and his disease) that he suffers be counted to him for virtue. And if all he wot not for what sin or encheson⁷, he should suffer such temptation nevertheless he shall meekly commend and praise the goodness of our Lord (that doth nothing but right wisely and mercifully), who maketh his sun to shine both on good and on ill. For wit thou well, the fiend may no more do to thee, than the will of God suffers him to do, to great profit to his true servants (?); for the fiend serves to our profit whether he will or not, through God's mercy, for the temptations that he stirs to our death and damnation, our Lord turns them into virtue and into soul hele.⁸

The fiend ceaseth not to tarry and disease the rightwise man through stirring of divers temptations, now tribulations of heart,

³ Ps. 93, 11. ⁴ attribute ⁵ journeying, cf. 'fare ye well'. ⁶ rod ⁷ reason
⁸ See St Catherine of Siena: *Dialogue* (Part III, ch. i, in Orchard of Syon. Thorold's text, ch. 43.)

grievings of bodily cares and diseases and oft time torments the silly soul with divers and many temptations and painful feelings both within and without, that sometime for greatness of pain and anguish he is in point to fall in despair. But soothly as long as he dwells in dread and love of God, all such diseases are turned to great merit (and profit) of soul. And therefore such a man (or such a woman) is not departed from God (and aliened), but they are mickle more (fastened and oned) to him, what anguish or (tribulation or temptation) he suffers (or feels), for many are the anguish, angers (tribulations, temptations and diseases) that the soul suffers through instigation and (stirring) of the enemy (as David says: 'multae tribulationes iustorum', that is to say, many are the tribulations of the rightwise). But only the soul may not through such temptations disperish (nor be lost) from endless life, for soothly our merciful Lord accounteth not that for damnation of sin, that the suffering man (or woman), through God's ordinance bears against his will! for soothly then only sin we, when we through our lust fall down to such temptation (through assent and pleasaunce of will). But when we are borne down by violence against our will (to feeling of such temptations) it is only pain and no sin. St Isidore *ut supra specificatus* (?) Ch. 4^o (?) *et alibi docet* 'si in te agitur non agis' etc. Nevertheless it seems sometime to a man that is thus tempted that such feelings of despair are doubting and hesitation in the faith, made by the illusion of the fiend, smiting-in such dread and fearfulness into the soul, were great sin. What is it but only doubting in the belief, for sin is ever wilfully coveted and freely chosen, at the least through ignorance, which more leans to error than to soothfastness, and therefore since the faith is an habit and a disposition of the will, on which whoso will trow, he troweth, and whoso will hope, he hopeth, and whoso will not doubt, he doubteth not. Therefore saith the Apostle that 'with our heart',¹⁰ that is with our will 'we trow', which trowing is accounted for rightwisenes^s and therefore in our will (which our enemy only may not bring to consenting of such foul stirrings and feelings), stands all our merit and demerit (that is to say meed or blame). Nevertheless, the soul may not clearly see his own will and that is no force,¹¹ for his good deeds prove his good will, and his ill works, his ill will. (And he shall aye persevere) and suppose they are good unto that it may be reasonably proved that they are ill.

But if this foresaid temptation cease not by this will and this dissimulation beforesaid, but ever dwells fast, and through malice

⁹ Latin quotes reference not text. Ch. 4^o et 5^o.

¹⁰ corde ad iustitiam. Rom. 10, 10.

¹¹ no matter

of the fiend is ever more jangling his fantasies that he infects and stirs in the soul, proffering to thee falseness under the colour of soothfastness or overlays the soul and blinds it by way of the complexion and continually anguishes thee (and diseases thee and troubles thee), thou shalt sometime, but not but seldom, as it were by manner of abjuration and utterly forsaking and contrary affirming, show thy faith (and thy belief) with thy mouth and thy word, again saying (the fiend's temptations) and that thou wilt for nothing consent to his errors and (his falseness) that he proffers to thee and such other, although the false conceit that thou (feelest in thy soul against thy will) be contrary and not fully according unto thy saying; for the apostle says that confession of mouth and acknowledging of thy belief by words is helpful and profitable, for sikerly he is not deceived through falseness and (subtilty) of the fiend, that openly and with deliberation (and avisement), both in word and work gainsays (such ill stirrings, temptations and will on nowise receive them nor consent unto them).

Our enemy is weak and of no power and he may overcome no man against his will that will not freely and advisedly consent to him.¹² Therefore no man shall think heavy nor be angered or grieved for (that) he sees the fiend on divers manner tempt and (disease) chosen souls (for through many temptations and tribulations needs us for to enter the kingdom of heaven¹³). Thus the fiend seeks and searches the (weakness) and the condition of each man's complexion, and whom that he finds has mickle of moistness of melancholy complexion, he tempts them and tarries them on divers manners through ghostly temptation. Men that treat of kinds of things¹⁴ tell [that] the smoke of black colours rises up to the brain and comes to the lake and deepness of thought and troubles (and mirketh the light and brightness of it) and lets the soul to have clear knowing and (discretion betwixt good and evil, falseness and truth, error and soothfastness). Such men are commonly heavy and dreadful with-[out] a reasonable cause, weak of heart, dry of complexion. But such dread and heaviness is no sin, when it is painful and against a man's will and it comes oftentimes to him through the stirring of the fiend. [And such men and women ween that the false fantasies and errors and deceits of the enemy be true and soothfastness, for they are letted by this black smoke that fills and overwhelms their brain so that they may not see nor know the soothfastness.] And so their cursed enemy beholds and espies over all man's estate [and com-

¹² See again St Catherine of Siena: *Dialogue* (id. loc. Thorold, ch. 43).

¹³ Acts, 14, 22.

¹⁴ of the nature of things, i.e. philosophers, including scientists.

plexion how he might deceive him and over come him]. For as Leo the Pope says in a sermon that he made of the circumcision of our Lord 'Our old enemy the fiend ceaseth not for to lay and spread in every place the snares of his deceit, [busying him night and day] in what manner he may corrupt and trouble Christian man's belief. He knows well enough to whom, how and when he shall proffer the burnings of covetise, whom he shall tempt in gluttony, to whom he shall put the stirring of lechery, and to whom he shall put the venomous sin of (ire) and envy and (pride). He knows also whom he shall deceive with vain joy and overmickle gladness, whom he shall deceive through musing of fantasies and divers things; he discusses the custom of all men, he beholds busyness and ensearches their (desires) and affections (and vile stirrings through bodily countenances and outward bearing), and in that thing seeks he occasion to hurt a man wherein he sees him most occupied.' *Hec Leo Papa*.¹⁵ And therefore he puts oftentimes and brings so great bitterness into a soul, what through stirring of a man's complexion (on the tone side) what through smiting of doubts and dreads on (the tother side), that him thinketh it a huge torment and (insufferable pain, the bearing of his bodily life), and covets to die as for a (sovereign) remedy (and a lessening of the pain that he suffers), in so mickle that he is oftime nearerhand¹⁶ in point, for to despair both of bodily hele and of ghostly. They ween that they be forsaken of God for he suffers them to be so pyned¹⁷ and proves them by the fire of tribulation for as the wise man says: Right as the burning furnace assays and proves the vessel of the potter,¹⁸ which are able to men's use and which not, right so suffers God rightwise men to be assayed through fire of tribulation and temptation; and the holy man Job says thus: our Lord has proved me and assayed me as gold that passeth through the fire, for he knows all my case, that is my deeds, and mine affections, by which I go to God.¹⁹ And the Apostle says . . . us behoves be heavied here a little in this present life, through tribulations and temptations, so that the proving of our faith be mickle more precious than gold, that is proved by the fire.²⁰ And to the holy man Thoby said the angel Raphael thus: 'for as mickle as thou wast accepted and pleasing to God therefore it is needful that temptations should prove thee'.²¹ And therefore it is needful in this fore-said case that a man may have ghostly strength that he may suffer such manner of heaviness and bitterness patiently and meekly, so

15 The quotation ends. But Hilton has added to the Latin. St Leo. Sermo XVIII. P.L. 54, cap 3, col. 218.

16 nigh at hand

17 tormented

18 Eccles. 27, 5.

19 Job. 23, 10.

20 I. Pet. 1, 7.

21 Tobit 12, 13 (Vulgate & Breviary).

that he may say with Job, as he said thus: 'Si bona susceptimus de manu domini, mala autem quare non sustineamus'.²² That is since we have received (and taken) the good things and (prosperities of the hand of our Lord, why shall we not also suffer adversity and disease), yea, and unbethink him of the merit (and the fruit) of patience in this life (and the meed of endless joy) in the tother life, and let him pray with Job: that he spare his sorrow (nor his disease here), and say thus, 'Yea, Lord, if thou would slay me, yet shall I hope and trust in thee'.²³

And what wonder is it if a wretched man be troubled and anguished and diseased in this present life, when our Lord said of himself in the Gospel thus: 'Tristis est anima mea usque ad mortem'²⁴, that is to say my soul is troubled and heavied to the death, and in time of his passion he cried and said thus 'Eloy, eloy lama sabatany', that is to say, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' And think also what Isaiah the prophet says; in the person of our Lord thus: 'A little while have I forsaken thee, and in a short time of my wrath I have turned and hid my face from thee, but in mine endless mercy, I have mercy on thee.'²⁵ A little thing and a short is all that we suffer here; yea, if we were in tribulation and temptation and disease, all our life time, to regard²⁶ of endless bliss, which we shall have for suffering of such disease. (For as the Apostle says: 'All the passions, anguishes, pains, tribulations and all the temptations that we may suffer all our life time are not worthy to the endless joy and bliss that we shall have after'.²⁷

²⁸A man marvel nor wonder that a ghostly man (or woman and a ghostly liver) is thus hugely and singularly tempted (when he sees peradventure other men that are sinners or ill-livers, mickle less perfect in life, in mickle ease and rest, as it seems, both inward and outward. Nor a man shall not be too mickle busy for to know and discuss the privities of God's dooms); for as long as a man's goodwill (the which he has to God), and to rightwiseness lasts whole, and is not broken, though consenting to sin,²⁹ as long as he not cast down from faith, hope and charity, but he is more sadly confirmed (and stabled) in all virtues. The manner and the remedy of this temptation showed our Lord when he said to his disciples thus: 'Sathanas expetivit vos ut cribraret sicut triticum',³⁰ that is to say, the fiend has asked you for to sift as whoso sifteth wheat. A man is sifted when he is inwardly and perfectly examined (through fire of temptation and tribulation); and then is he made strong and perfect, when he is, through the virtues of patience and devout

²² Job 2, 10.

²³ Job 13, 15.

²⁴ Matt. 26, 38.

²⁵ Isai. 54, 7.

²⁶ in respect of

²⁷ Rom. 8, 18 (free).

²⁸ see Scale I, ch. 17.

²⁹ so long

³⁰ Luke 22, 31

prayer, or else by heful doctrine and teaching of his brother confirmed and (strengthened) in goodness, and therefore (says our Lord in the same place to Saint Peter thus, in the person of those that are thus tarried and tempted) 'Ego autem rogavi pro te ut non deficiat fides tua',³¹ 'I have prayed for thee, he says, that thy prayer and thy belief should not fail', and our Lord said the same time to Saint Peter thus: 'Tu autem aliquando conversus confirma fratres tuos'³² that is to say therefore thou when thou art turned and delivered of this temptation confirm and stable thy brother beside thee.' And so when a man is thus comforted of his brethren and made perfect in Christ, then may he say thus word following: 'Quare tristis es anima mea et quare conturbas me, spera in deo etc',³³ why art thou heavy and sorry, thou my soul, and why troublest thou me? Trust and hope fast in our Lord (and he shall deliver thee of all thy pain and disease that thou sufferest.) And look that he (*sic*) in the mean time pray busily and do all the good that he may, and that he oft look in holy writ, and namely and principally that he take tent³⁴ to the teaching of the Gospel, and though he feel not no sensible (nor feelable) devotion, look that he suffer it meekly (and patiently). And nevertheless look that he may be busy for to have devotion in good will and that suffices thee to the soul hele. For oft times all actual and sensible devotion is withdrawn, for our good profit, that our prayer should be the more meedful, for Saint Bernard saith, '*Super istud canticum*' quae sivi et non inveni',³⁵ he says that the spouse hides him whilst he is sought. And Saint Austin: *De verbis domini*, says sometime when our Lord gives a thing lately³⁶ (and as it were dangerously), he denies not his gifts but commends them and makes them more precious (for the things that are gotten through great desire and long travail going before, are most precious and dearworthy to us to be kept and held in great dainty³⁷) than the things that are lightly set by are lightly forgotten. And therefore ask thou and pray devoutly and seek thorough lasting desire, and if he hear thee not at the first time, cease not therefore, but continue lastingly in prayer and (holy desire till he will give thee that thou asketh); for he keeps it to thee full sikerly, but he will not give it to thee so soon, for that thou shouldst know that great things should greatly be desired. [But since the things are so great which our Lord behoteth (promiseth) us, mickle ought our desire to be for to get them, for the mickleness of desire should accord with the mickleness of the things behight before.]

31 Luke 22, 32.

32 Idem.

33 Ps. 42, 5.

34 pay attention

35 Cant. 2, 2, or 5, 6.

36 belatedly, ?

37 dignitatem, worth.