

accuse himself of that number. If, on the contrary, there is question of sins of habit, — if, for example, the penitent has blasphemed every time that he got angry ; if he defrauded his customers whenever he could ; if every day, or almost every day, he committed sins of impurity, above all, in thought, it would be utterly impossible for him to decide even upon the approximate number of his sins. It would be necessary for him to understand arithmetic and, pen in hand, make numberless calculations, which, however, would give only very doubtful results, especially in what regards sins of thought which, in persons living without the fear of God, sometimes count a hundred or so in the day.

What, then, ought the penitent to do in the case of bad habits continued for a long time, nay, even for long years ? He ought to examine, as well as he can, the frequency of his falls into such sins, whether it has been several times a month, a week, or even a day. This is very easily done, provided he recalls with certainty, at least in a confused manner, the greater or less frequency of those sinful acts.

If a penitent was troubled at not being able to make this examination, simple though it be, it would suffice for him to declare the evil habit, and answer the confessor's questions on that point.

We meet some persons who are absolutely incapable of making such calculations. They are unable to recall anything. They can say to the confessor only : *I have always blasphemed. I have always wished evil to my neighbor. I have always committed such and such a sin.*

Ought such persons to confess ? Yes. Let them confess as well as they can. If the confessor desires to have a more distinct knowledge of things, he can gain it by questioning.

Do not think us too easy with regard to sinners who have lived in the habit of sin, in satisfying ourselves with so general an examination. We can cite illustrious theologians more indulgent than we in this respect, such as, Melchior Canus, Pierre Soto, Navarrus, Cajetan, Billuart, and Cardinal Gousset. Speaking of persons who for long years have exercised some criminal profession, or who have lived in the occasion of sin, these theologians teach