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THE GOSPEL IN PARIS.

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# THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

## *SERMONS*

BY THE

REV. EUGENE BERSIER, D.D.

OF L'ÉGLISE DE L'ÉTOILE, PARIS.

*WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR*

BY THE

REV. FREDERICK HASTINGS,

AUTHOR OF

"SUNDAYS ABOUT THE WORLD," ETC. ;

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## A PERSONAL SKETCH

OF

THE REV. DR. EUGENE BERSIER.

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To read such sermons as those composing this volume is a great pleasure ; to hear them preached a high privilege. The orator cannot be printed, and Eugene Bersier is an orator of the loftiest rank. It was in the Oratory in the Rue de Rivoli, of Paris, that it was my joy to hear the man with whose "winged words" I had already, through the press, become familiar. That church has a history, and I was glad that there I first heard Bersier. It stands near the spot where the St. Bartholomew massacre commenced and Coligny fell. It was built in the seventeenth century by Pierre de Bérulle, who had first consecrated himself to the conversion of Protestants, and afterwards endeavoured to extirpate Protestantism, and to destroy the political power of the Huguenots. He had already founded convents of the order of Ste. Thérèse, and the congregation of the Oratorians—whence the name of the church. For nearly two centuries it had been in the occupation of the Church of Rome, but the building was appropriated by the Government of Napoleon to the worship of the Reformed Church, which had previously been celebrated in the Church of St. Louis du Louvre,

then about to be taken down. The pulpit, where preached the Jesuit Bourdaloue, and the Oratorians Massillon and Mascaron, has been no less memorably occupied by Adolphe Monod and Bersier.

As I linger, waiting for the reader to finish the chapter, and for Bersier to appear, I try to picture to myself the place filled by the court of Le Grand Monarque, listening to Massillon's marvellous eloquence and pointed rebukes. In those pews, or hidden in those deep recesses, royal and courtly sinners saw themselves in their true characters, and trembled in view of a judgment to come. The church is a spacious edifice, with a number of recesses all around, and a large gallery at the end. The pulpit is at one side, half-way down the church; it has a heavy sounding-board, and a deep green fringe depending from it, shading the face of the preacher. I wished it had been away, for it destroyed oftentimes the expression on the face; and the face of Bersier is one on which the eye rests with satisfaction. It is a firm, manly countenance, with somewhat of the expression and commanding force of the first Napoleon. He was arrayed in the Geneva gown, and stood ready to point the sinful to Christ, or to enter the lists with the sceptic or atheist in the city which is a centre of unbelief.

Of course the writer was prepared to appreciate the measured, stately utterance, the intense fervour, the cultured emphasis and impassioned rhetoric of which Bersier is a perfect master. I have heard him at other places, but have never felt more powerfully his pulpit eloquence. Pencil and note-book had to be laid aside, and eyes and ears riveted on the speaker.

Many of his references were evidently caught readily by the congregation, for they were adapted to the times and place.

Bersier seemed to realise that he was speaking within

a stone's throw of the spot where the massacre of St. Bartholomew began, and under the shadow of the tower from which the tocsin of slaughter sounded.

How stirringly further on he spoke of the office of the preacher. He has evidently an enthusiasm for his vocation, and at the same time he has a knowledge of the dangers and temptations that beset the man who succeeds in the pulpit. Here are a few sentences, jotted down rapidly, and carrying with them warning and encouragement. He spoke of how Christ went up into a mountain to pray, after the attempt of the multitude to hail Him as King, as an example for all His servants, and said : "if any are liable to be deceived by the allurements of the world, or the fickle breath of popularity, let them hie away to some solitary place of prayer, and by communion with Heaven conquer the entanglements of earth. . . . God has confidence in His own truth. He will ensure its triumph. God is love, justice, mercy. The Gospel is nothing else. It is to bless the world. The simple preacher and pastor has to spread this Gospel. He has to have faith in it, even though persecution disperse the flocks and harass the herd. . . . Ecclesiastical corruption must wither in face of that truth which is liberal, generous, and free. . . . God could have built up His Church, free from evil and corruption, by miracle, had He so willed it, but He has left it to pass through temptation, and to be purified by trial. It will find out in time, that it is not by alliance with the world, not by seeking political power, not by the voice of the multitude, but by the power of the Cross that it will conquer. . . . Christ has not said, 'Go, preach My Gospel : you shall have the help of men, dominion from men, popularity from men, approval of men ;' but, 'Go, preach My Gospel : for lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Yet why does the Kingdom of God delay ?

O heavenly King, let Thy power descend! Let not the heavens be closed to your cry!"

How the orator's face glowed and his voice gained greater force as he spoke further of the opposition from Voltaire and Strauss. He defied them, asserting that "the accounts of Christ's life are too real and sublime to have been the work of the human imagination;" while he exulted with those who are not troubled by these problems, having experience of Christ's power. They do not say, "Christianity is seized with despair, because they know never man spake like Christ. In Him they see living truth and their incarnate God."

Fearlessly and scathingly in that luxurious city of Paris, Bersier upbraids selfishness and indifference to the ills of others. One is glad that such a preacher has such influence, and that with boldness he denounces the "shining sins" of the gay, the wealthy, and the worldly. Fashion would doubtless close its eyes when listening, but it must have writhed under such sarcasm as the following:—"You suffer at the contact with misery? Ah! what is your suffering, I ask, in comparison with that of those who must live and die in the atmosphere which you cannot breathe an instant without disgust?"

The great French orator is not a mere rhetorician, but a thinker. His sermons are not thrown into the form that has obtained so widely in our own pulpits, but they are logical throughout. Moreover, they are full of sympathy and throbbing with life. This all who look in this volume will find, and it is believed that they have only to be presented to English readers in suitable guise to become as popular as those of the best English discourses. It will be seen that Bersier speaks the truth, and that with tremendous force, for his sentences are often like forked lightning.

We cannot wonder, when listening to him, that the

small religious meetings held in the evening at the west end of Paris, just after the war, grew so rapidly that a large church, costing £20,000, had to be erected. It stands in the Avenue de la Grande Armée, near to the Arc de Triomphe, and is called "L'Eglise de l'Etoile." It is a chaste Gothic edifice, with pews far more comfortable than those of the church in the Rue de Rivoli, and a pulpit less contracted and gloomy. The whole of the wide space on which stands the table of communion is covered by a carpet of great cost, all wrought in wool by ladies; and the vestry is furnished with exquisite taste, and hung with portraits of some of the noblest men of the Huguenot Church. A liturgy is used in the service. It has been composed by M. Bersier, and is highly prized by the people.

This great French orator is descended from refugees who fled from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, but he was born in Switzerland, and has adopted France as his country. After being trained at Geneva he went to America, where he came under the influence of some of the foremost preachers of the Republic; and the influence of this American sojourn is often detected in the method and matter of his sermons. When returning to Europe, he went to Geneva, where, under Drs. Gausson and Merle d'Aubigné, he gained a knowledge of systematic theology. He also studied at Halle and Göttingen, and came into association with Thöluck, Müller, and Dörner.

The life of Dr. Bersier, owing to the terrible war of 1870, has evidently been a stirring one. During those dreary months of the siege of Paris, he was one of the principal organisers of the Ambulance Service, and was present in all the conflicts that raged close around the beleaguered city. In conjunction with M. de Pressensé, he had to act as "political moderator" during the time that the Commune held its disastrous sway in Paris. Gazing on the firm face of the orator, it was easy to see

that there was will and daring enough in that man to hold his own, even against a Felix Pyatt. What slaughter, misery, terror, the intervention of Bersier supported by Pressensé must have saved! The interest in listening to him is increased by trying to imagine something of what he had witnessed and passed through. While swept away by the rhetoric, one feels that there is behind the rhetoric the force of conviction, and of a large experience. He has a definite spiritual aim, and we can only hope that he will be long spared to preach the Gospel of Christ to the people of France; and that his spoken words, re-echoed through the press on this side the Channel, may bring spiritual strength and stimulus to thousands.

FREDK. HASTINGS.

LONDON, 1833.

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## I.

### THE SAYING OF CAIN.

“ And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not : Am I my brother’s keeper ?”—GEN. iv. 9.

THESE are the words of the first fratricide. What a contrast between the mournful drama from which they are drawn and the account of creation which almost immediately precedes it! Creation is the plan of God. There all is peace, harmony, and light. It seems as though the human family must of necessity go on increasing and developing itself, yet at the same time remaining united in an unalterable affection. Alas! I turn over that bright page only to hear the words, *Am I my brother’s keeper?* uttered close by the bleeding corpse of Abel.

Since then these words of Cain have been repeated at every period and in all places of the earth. We may say that where the Gospel has not been known they have become, as it were, the motto of humanity. Seek in ancient societies the link which should unite all men! Each nation is penned up within its own territory and within its own religion. Even its deity is confined within its boundaries. Strangers are barbarians. The hope of a religious union, of a brotherhood of souls, is so remote from the ideas of antiquity that, in the second century of our era, the philosopher Celsus, the famous

opponent of Christianity, wrote: "Men were fools indeed to suppose that Greeks and barbarians, Asia, Europe, Libya, and all the other nations can ever be united in the bond of a common religion." And what Celsus affirmed with so much confidence, all think, be they Romans, Greeks, or even Jews. No one rises above that more or less elevated selfishness. Every nation seems to say: "Am I the keeper of others?" And Rome, when she conquers the world, brings men together only in the unity of servitude and degradation.

Even between the various classes of the same people we find the same indifference, the same distance. For instance, who in antiquity feels any concern for the poor, the slaves, the destitute?

The poor! would you know what antiquity thought of them? Plato—that noble and beautiful genius who has often been called a forerunner of Christ—Plato coldly questions, in his book on the Republic, if, when the poor are ill, it is our duty to help them; and he comes to the conclusion that it is not, because, says he, they are not worth the trouble! The slaves! never was a heathen philosopher surprised at their lot. The orphans, the sick, the destitute! in all antiquity, as still to-day in China, Japan, the Indies, in all places where the Cross has not been raised, not a hospital, not an orphanage, not an asylum for old age or poverty. Do I then go too far when I affirm that previous to Christianity, and apart from its influence, man has taken for his motto the saying of the fratricide, and that he has always answered the groans of the slaves and the poor by asking, through the medium of his philosophers, legislators, and priests, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

So the world would have gone on to the end, plunging deeper and deeper in selfishness, had not Jesus Christ come. When entering upon the dark path of His humilia-

tion, at the end of which rose the cross of Calvary, the Son of God might indeed have said to His Father: "Am I the keeper of that depraved and rebellious race who outrage and forget Thee?" He might have spoken thus, and remained in the light and glory which had surrounded Him from the beginning. What He did say you know. You have heard it at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, in Gethsemane, on Calvary. You have seen Him, this King of kings, taking upon Himself, with our mortal flesh, all the humiliations of poverty; you have seen Him accepting to bear the burden of our sorrows and sufferings; you have seen Him, O mystery of love! so identifying Himself with guilty humanity as to take upon Himself the weight of its crimes, all the horror of its condemnation. On the cross you have heard these extraordinary words: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Yes, He, the Holy One and the Just, has felt the consequences of our rebellion. No wonder then, that, at the sight of His cross, the heart of the sinner has trembled. On that cross guilty man has recognised his substitute. It is for us that the blood of the Crucified flows. "It is," we are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "the blood of sprinkling which speaks better things than the blood of Abel." The blood of Abel reminds us of the words of the fratricide: "Am I my brother's keeper?" The blood of Jesus Christ is that of the Chief Shepherd dying, not merely for His brethren, but for His enemies.

We call ourselves Christians. This signifies that we are to be changed into the image of Jesus Christ; that what He was we also desire to be. At the foot of His cross we learn to hate selfishness; we learn that we no longer live for ourselves, but that we are members of one body, and that in a measure we are the keepers of our brethren. But our brethren, where are they? Ask it

of Jesus Christ. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," said He. Yes, all men! His arms extended upon the cross would embrace the whole human family, not only the children of Abraham, but all the children of Adam. Look, then, for a soul which Jesus Christ rejects; for a soul for which His blood has not flowed. Your brethren! they are everywhere. Your brethren! they are those who love you, but they are also your enemies. They are those who communicate with you, but they are also those who refuse you a place by their side in the Church and in heaven. Has God given you wealth? That poor man sitting beside you is your brother. Are you poor? That rich man, towards whom you feel perhaps more envy than love, is your brother. Are you endowed with a noble intellect? That ignorant and narrow-minded being, with whom you have scarcely a common language or one point of intellectual contact, is your brother. Are you virtuous? That fallen being who drags about in your streets the sad spectacle of his misery, of his degradation, of his abjection, that wretch is your brother. Our brethren! they are the publicans, they are those whom society lays under its ban. And beyond the limits of our civilisation and of our churches, our brethren are those poor negroes to whom some so-called Christians still deny the title and character of men; they are those heathen whose customs we loathe; they are those savages of Australia, concerning whom the most intelligent of our sceptics lately asked with a smile if it was worth while that a Papuan should have an immortal soul. Our brethren! they are everywhere. When we go through the world proclaiming Divine mercy, and inviting wandering sinners to the Father's house, we tell them all, as did the messenger in the parable: "Come, for there is still room." From every land and clime we bid them come

to the banquet of Divine love; the poor and the rich, the learned and the ignorant, the virtuous and the vicious, till the day when, from the most remote extremities of the most gloomy and desolate region, the last of the savages will arrive in his turn to take his seat there.

Such is the idea which Christianity gives us of the human family. Thinkers and even infidels are to-day laying hold of it and making it a title of honour; we have a philosophy which bears the pretentious name of Humanitarian, as though it had been the first to feel any concern for humanity. Let us not deceive ourselves in this matter; that idea is a Christian idea; it was born at the foot of the cross. Mankind has understood that it formed but one family only since the day in which the Chief Shepherd died to gather together its scattered members.

We are therefore the keepers of our brethren; their interests are our interests. Such is the general truth which I now desire to recall to your minds. But this general duty presents itself to us under two different aspects, which will occupy us in turn. Man has two natures; he has a body and a soul. He suffers in his body; he suffers in his soul. Thence, for us, a twofold mission: we are called to relieve the sufferings of the body, and to save souls. In presence of this double mission, we have all, perhaps, replied: "Am I my brother's keeper?" It is this sentiment I would combat now. God grant I may be successful!

With both these forms of suffering Jesus Christ was brought into contact. Let us see what was His attitude with regard to them.

First, the sufferings of the body. Jesus Christ met with them under their two most common forms, sickness and poverty. What He did for their victims all the Gospels tell. We see Him ever surrounded by the sick

and the poor. These, we may truly say, are the society of His choice. For them He performs His most magnificent works. See how those unfortunate creatures flock around Him! Would you find Christ, you have but to observe the direction taken by the poor. Before He appears their cries call for Him. No voices welcome Him with louder shouts of "Hosannah!" than those of the suffering multitude. Alas! I well know all there is of materiality and self-interest in this eagerness. I know that what they seek is, above all, the powerful hand which feeds and relieves them. I know that later on they will fly from Him, perhaps even curse Him. But that is precisely why His love appears to me more wondrous, more sublime, more Divine. How He raises them! With what tender solicitude He cares for them! He chooses His disciples from among them. He who has not so much as a look for the splendours of earth, He who, in the whole of his Gospel, has never a word for such as Tiberius or Cesar, bequeaths to immortality the names of a Lazarus, and of a Mary Magdalene, thus showing what He has made of the poor, of the lowly, of the most depraved. He is born amongst them; He lives with them; He dies with them, so that, at whatever page you open the Gospel, you find Jesus and the poor inseparably united. And what is more marvellous still, a fact of which I cannot think without a feeling of deep emotion, it is not only during the days of His flesh, but to the end of the world, that it has pleased Jesus Christ to be united with the sick and the poor. Since He left the earth, the Lord has chosen a representative of Himself here below, one who will be His representative until the end of the world. Recall to mind the sublime scene recorded by St. Matthew in his Gospel.

The world has ended its course, which seemed to

be eternal; the din of earth has ceased, and here are all the generations of men appearing before Jesus Christ, like flocks before their shepherd. And what are the words which Christ will address in that solemn hour to those whom He will acknowledge as the beloved of His Father, and whom He will admit to His glory? He might say: "I was your Master, and ye served me; I was your King, and ye announced my kingdom; I was your God, and ye worshipped me." But no. On that day He will not speak to them of His royalty, nor of His glory, nor even of His Divinity. He will say: "I was poor!" . . . I was poor! this then is the supreme title of the Son of God, of the King of kings. "I was poor, I was sick, and ye visited me, and ye gave me meat, and ye clothed me." Do you understand what there is in these words? As for me, though I should possess but this fragment of the Gospel, I would adoringly recognise in it the mark of the God whose name is love; I would say, "Surely the Lord is in this place."

Now see what has been the result of this sublime teaching. The faithful Church has ever considered the poor as the representatives of Jesus Christ. Thence the marvellous spectacle of the primitive Church at Jerusalem, in which all social distinctions seem to vanish, in which not one of the brethren is left to struggle with poverty. The same love for the poor reappears in the epistles. When the great Apostle Paul sets out on his missionary journeys, and asks of his brethren in the apostolate their last counsels, their final recommendations, he says: "They would only that I should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do." In fact, he is constantly preoccupied with the poor in the midst of his travels, of his perils, of his heroic labours.

Wherever the Gospel has been faithfully preached, the same preoccupation is awakened. At Ephesus, in the

Church where St. John wrote these sublime words: "God is love," the first hospital was founded. Soon after it was followed by the first orphanage. Slaves received the name of brethren, given them for the first time. In fine, notwithstanding the veils with which Christianity is covered, and under which men endeavour to stifle its mighty voice, it everywhere reminds man that the sufferings of his brethren are his sufferings, that none have the right to close their heart to them.

You have heard of the oration in which the most eloquent of the Forum orators startled his hearers by relating to them the tortures of one of their countrymen. He pictured him beaten with rods by the orders of an iniquitous judge, and exclaiming in his anguish: "*Civis romanus sum!* I am a Roman citizen!" This cry alone repeated by Cicero in the market-place at Rome would have been enough to gain his cause, for these words, "*Civis romanus sum!*" had an extraordinary influence throughout the whole world; they surrounded the man who uttered them with the inviolable majesty of the queen of cities, and covered him with a protection which nothing equalled. There is indeed in this feeling of civil solidarity something grand, something which moves us deeply; and yet, if we look at it closely, this feeling rested merely upon the selfish pride of the royal nation, and Cicero would certainly have left his hearers unmoved had he spoken to them of the punishment of a Greek, of a barbarian, or of a slave. But in the present day, though we love our own native country, can we confine our hearts within such narrow bounds? When we are the witnesses of an injustice, is it not the man rather than the citizen who in us is attacked to the very depths of the soul? Now whence comes, if not from Christianity, that power of sympathy which nought can stay? How is it we now see, in the midst of Christian



nations, and there only, that ardent and unflagging interest for the suffering classes? How is it that all the problems connected with it force themselves irresistibly upon us? How is it that, in this respect, the modern world pursues a course wholly opposed to that of antiquity? How is it that the saying of the fratricide, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" is so energetically contradicted in all social and political questions? In a word, how is it that we see this feeling of solidarity increasing more and more, and becoming so intense that, in reality, naught that is human can be foreign to us?

We owe this to the Gospel; for, thanks be to God, it is still the salt of the earth. Ah! I know you will tell me that this is not always the case; you will point out to me the many iniquities practised under the shadow of Christianity, heathens corrupted and degraded by Christian nations, slaves whose chains are rivetted in the name of Christ Jesus. But is not the very impression which these facts produce the strongest argument in favour of Christianity? How account for the immediate, irresistible indignation which seizes even the most unbelieving in presence of these facts? Would they feel so indignant if these crimes were committed under the shadow of another religion? No; what rouses their indignation is the fact that Christians are guilty of them. Ah! men feel that the Gospel is opposed to such deeds, that it is calumniated and altered when such actions are perpetrated in its name. Well, this very indignation is my answer. It attests that the Gospel is innocent of the crimes committed under its shadow; it attests that it is still the safest refuge for all who suffer; it attests, in fine, that He has not deceived men who said to all: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

When iniquities are committed in those lands where

the Gospel has been preached, the infidel triumphs and exclaims: "Of what use then is your religion?" But in presence of those facts, we, on the contrary, must re-echo the grand words of Franklin: "If men are so vile even with religion, what then would they be without it?" Yes, what would they be, what would they become without that Gospel against which they thunder forth their accusations? What was the world before Jesus Christ, what would it be without Him? Ah! endeavour to blot out that Sun of souls whose brightness troubles you. And if, supposing an impossibility, you should succeed in your attempt, the fearful darkness which would cover the world would reveal to you, but too late, what the past splendour of the extinguished luminary must have been.

That is what Christianity has done for the sufferings of the body; but, as we have already said, that is but a part of its mission. Above the body there is the soul. Now, the soul is the eternal part of man. If we are called to sympathise with the temporal interests of our fellow-men, what will it be when that which in them is grandest and noblest, when their soul, is in question? I have referred to the dignity which the Gospel has restored to the poorest—to the most destitute. But on what does this dignity especially rest? On the belief that even in the poorest, in the most degraded, there is an immortal soul made for the felicity of heaven—a soul which Christ has come to save by His blood. It is because I believe in the existence of that soul, that the lowest of slaves or the most benighted of savages has a right to my regard. As the sculptor who, gazing upon the shapeless block, already beholds the graceful or majestic figure which his chisel is about to carve from it; as the smelter who, looking upon the dross-covered ore before him, already sees the glitter of the purified gold,

so in the most untaught, in the most defiled of beings, I see and hail a regenerated soul, which is capable of reproducing the very image of God. It is a soul in ruins I know, but these ruins are those of a sanctuary which God can soon raise up again and fill with His ineffable presence.

Deprive me of this belief, and man, for me, becomes but a being that appears for a moment in the world, a figure in the immense addition, a wheel in the vast machinery. If I believe only in matter, why should I care to develop that superior life which is in him, but whose full opening his low or miserable condition will never permit him to witness here below? It were better to abandon him to his sad and fatal destiny. It were better to say with Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

But if I have understood what my soul is; if I have felt that in it lies my dignity, my greatness, my true life, then I will be anxious to awaken that life in others. It is in this spiritual sense that I will desire to know and love my brethren; and I feel that, in this way, I will know and love them for all eternity.

We have, therefore, the charge of souls, for we know what the human soul is worth. Let me add that this charge is a doubly important one; for we know into what a state sin has plunged them.

We have spoken of the sufferings of the body, but is the soul less injured? Is not the soul labouring under an evil far deeper, far more terrible, since it may be eternal? Look around you! How many souls that know not God, that deny Him, that blaspheme Him? How many souls are pursuing their course amidst what is but dissipation and vanity? How many souls are falling further and further away from communion with God? In a word, how many souls are being lost? All this you know. Well, these souls—they must be saved!

To save souls! For this Jesus came upon the earth. He saw those lost souls. By the glance of His holiness He measured the depth of the abyss in which they were plunged, and to draw them out of it He gave everything—His heart, His blood, His life—everything, ay, even the love of the Father, of which He lost the sense on Golgotha. Henceforth the love of souls has gushed forth at the foot of the cross. See St. Paul. No sooner is he seized with this love, than all else fades and grows dim in his life. His heart has found its supreme passion. He must needs set out, he must march on, he must go forward, he must carry salvation everywhere. One church is founded. He leaves it to found another. After Antioch, Galatia, then Ephesus, then Macedonia, then Greece, then Rome; soon it will be Spain. Even during the hours of night he is beset by visions. Voices cry to him: “Come over and help us!” And when, in his weakness, he would fain murmur: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” the voice of his conscience replies with inexorable power: “Woe art thou, if thou preach not the Gospel!”

The love of souls! Whenever the Church has lived the life of her Master she has felt this love; she has been penetrated by it. That is how we can account for the existence, in our modern world, of a fact utterly unknown to antiquity, of a fact peculiar to Christianity alone—*missions*. Missions! Oh, I know to what attacks they have been exposed; I know how unbelief has sneered at their apparent failures. And yet, know you of anything grander than that mysterious link which causes us to take an interest in what takes place at our antipodes, to pray for souls from which we are separated by thousands of leagues? Here are our children gathered together. We tell them of the Esquimaux of Greenland, of the negroes of the Gold Coast; their

young hearts are moved and softened; they feel an irresistible compassion for those unknown heathen. For them they make sacrifices, and the savings of many a poor apprentice will be employed in procuring food for the heart and mind of some savage of Africa. What philosophy, what philanthropy has ever produced anything like this? Missions! Ah! Christianity alone was capable of giving them birth. Men may sneer at them; but have you ever reflected on what our civilised Europe would have given to the heathen world had not the missionaries been there? Alas! what has it brought them? Arms to destroy one another, brandy or opium to demoralise and degrade themselves. But, behold! among those conquerors who have proved more barbarous than their victims, there have been, and there are still found, men in whose hearts a strange love burns. They come to those heathens and tell them that there is in heaven a Father who loves them, and on earth brethren who would save them; they relate to them the wondrous story of the Incarnate Son of God, and plant in their hearts the cross of Jesus Christ. They are persecuted, scoffed at, killed; but others follow them, and soon on the land watered with their blood are seen, springing into life, the flourishing churches of New Zealand and Labrador, in which, at this very hour, thousands of souls are outstripping us in the kingdom of heaven by their love and zeal. And thus the net of the Gospel, borne of yore by the fishermen of Galilee, sees its two extremities meet after having enveloped the whole world.

But the souls to be saved are not found only on distant shores. Let us beware lest we allow ourselves to be drawn, by imagination only, into those grand enterprises whose heroism inflames all generous spirits. The souls that are intrusted to us are also those quite near to us, in our family, in our dwelling, at our fireside; they

are in our streets and in our workshops. It is amongst those we are first of all to display our activity; it is to them we must carry life and light. Ah! what would it avail us, I pray you, to travel over sea and land to make proselytes, if we leave at our gate a Lazarus covered with sores, or a soul ignorant of the truth that saves? Let us have love enough to embrace the whole world, but let the first objects of that love be those whom God has given us!

Such is our mission in all its extent. It were, on my part, unfaithfulness to the truth to limit it in any measure. Now, let us see how we fulfil this mission.

What, in the first place, shall we say of those who do not fulfil it at all? Alas! it must be confessed there is a religion which is closely linked with coldness of heart. There is an intellectual orthodoxy which is the most fatal of heresies, for it teaches the world, as far as it lies in its power to do so, that the Gospel has no efficacy, and that the blood of Jesus Christ has watered the earth only to leave after it the aridity of the desert. There are people who believe themselves saved, and who have never loved. In their opinion, to be saved is to have settled their affairs with God once for all. They accept the doctrines, whether broad or narrow, easy or severe, which prevail in the Church to which they belong; and having thus solved the weighty problem of eternity, they return with a light, dry, and worldly heart in the midst of a world which is suffering and perishing far from God.

Is that saving faith? No; it is but its pitiful counterfeit. Jesus Christ has described saving faith in these beautiful words: "He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

No, I do not believe in a religion which leaves the heart untouched, in a religion which does not energetically call forth abnegation and sacrifice. The faith which

saves is the faith that impels us to save others. Well, once again let me ask,—How do you fulfil this mission of renewal and salvation?

“*Am I my brother’s keeper?*” We dare not say it, but dare we not think it? Are not these words the most faithful expression of the feeling we experience when we consider the mission with which God has intrusted us? And if selfishness has never prompted us to utter them, have we not often uttered them out of mere discouragement? Ah! it is in presence of such a task we must humbly recall to mind the words of the Master: “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” The spirit is willing, and, in fact, who is there among us that has not been seized with profound emotion in presence of this sublime mission with which God charges us? Who is there that has not felt that life thus understood is the true life? But soon, to-morrow perhaps, when once again you will be placed in presence of this mission, when you will be called no longer to admire, but to act, the flesh will be weak. Let us admit it, the task is great, and this very greatness appals us. There are times when the thought of all that is to be done pursues, besets, and paralyses us. There are times when we hear a vague and deep murmur rising from the depths of our soul, and growing louder and louder. It is the sound of the sorrows of earth, the groans of the oppressed, the bitter complaint of the hungry, the cry of rebellion, or the horrible mirth of perishing souls. All these voices unite and swell like the waves of an angry sea which the stormy wind has raised; their despairing cries reach us. Then, bending over these unfathomable depths, we say: “Of what use would it be to speak my feeble words in this tumult, of what use would it be to crumble my bread upon the surface of this vast ocean?”

You who have felt these temptations, you who know

how strong, in these evil hours, becomes the discouragement which steals into the heart, listen, I have a good word for you. I say to you all: "Look to Jesus!" You sink beneath the weight of your task though you have but a few souls to rescue, a few sorrows to relieve. How then was He, who had the whole world to save, enabled to pursue His work to the end? Because He accepted the will of the Father from day to day; because His work of renewal and salvation was wholly concentrated in each of the duties which every hour brought before Him. His business is to save the world. Yes; but it pleases God that this gigantic work should begin in an humble district of Galilee, and that the first fruits of this great harvest should be a few poor fishermen. Well, in this lowly and insignificant task which many a world-wise man or many a great preacher of our days would perhaps have despised, Jesus is faithful, faithful in each little detail, faithful towards every one of the souls which God intrusts to Him, towards every one of the sorrows which the Father sends Him. Oh, wondrous example! Who could have supposed that among that obscure nation, in that remote country, the salvation of the world was being prepared? It was thus that Jesus understood His task. He whose heart was large enough to sympathise with all our griefs, He who felt that a love deep enough to save all mankind filled His soul, begins by healing and saving those who surround Him. Not one of them appears to Him to be beneath His notice, and it is in connection with the lowliest and humblest that He will teach the world His most sublime lessons.

Let us, therefore, learn of Christ. Let us begin to act as He did in the humble sphere where God has placed us. Let us accept each work which He sends us, let us comfort each sorrow which He places directly in our



way, and, in this faithful and persevering toil, discouragement will certainly never seize upon us. One will labour to gather some souls around the Word which raises and cheers; another in a school will pursue a course of instruction rendered powerful by prayer; a third will seek to obtain work for some poor outcast, who will thus be enabled to earn an honest living; another, again, will watchfully and lovingly follow through life orphans adopted in the name of Christ. What more? The work is infinitely varied, but even its greatness is not discouraging for the Christian who pursues it in the spirit of Christ, for he knows that not one of his efforts will be vain, that not even the most insignificant sacrifice will be lost.

But I hear your final objection. Yes, say you, we are ready to work in the humblest sphere and to work courageously, but on condition that our labour bear at least some fruit. But this labour has been fruitless, we have seen our efforts rendered powerless by obstinate indifference or heart-rending ingratitude. Then follows the mournful story of those vain attempts, of those humiliating failures, of those painful discouragements which every Christian knows, and might, doubtless, recount in his turn.

To all those objections, to all those reasons for losing heart, let me oppose the answer you have just heard, let me once again say to you, "Look to Jesus!"

Did Jesus Christ succeed while He was on earth? Were His benefits met by gratitude, were hearts touched by His words or converted by His miracles? Did He see the multitudes He had fed undertake His defence in the hour of danger, or give Him some token of their sympathy? Did the apostles whom He had taught, the apostles whom He had surrounded with the most tender care, remain faithful to Him? Alas! we must own it,

there never was a ministry less productive of apparent results than that of Jesus Christ. What a contrast between the charity displayed and the results obtained ! Three years of sublime teaching ; three years of a holy and spotless life ; three years of incomparable love ; in fine, a ministry so grand that all others pale before it like as the most brilliant stars pale before the sun, and all this to end in gathering together at the foot of the cross two or three women weeping and trembling in presence of a scoffing and cursing multitude !

Well, ye discouraged souls, who mourn over your want of success, what would you have said at the foot of the cross ? Would you ever have supposed that this cross was His triumph, and that the day was drawing near when all the nations of earth would come and worship at His feet ?

That is the Divine plan. That is the holy foolishness of which the apostle speaks. To conquer in defeat, to conquer in humiliation, to conquer by giving His life, such is the victory of Jesus Christ !

That will, perhaps, be yours also. Like Him you may not be permitted to see the fruits of your activity, like Him you will sow in tears, like Him you will call souls who will refuse to answer, like Him you will multiply the bread of your charity to ungrateful poor, like Him you will see your best intentions misconstrued, your love slighted. . . . Well, in those gloomy hours when discouragement is ready to steal into your souls to draw from you the words of the fratricide, "Am I my brother's keeper ?" in those hours, behold Jesus Christ ; and, looking to His unalterable love, to His extraordinary patience, to His mercy which is greater than all the hatred heaped upon Him, you will find strength to go on loving, working, blessing, till the day when God will welcome you with the words, "Enter into my rest."

No, we will not grow weary. And, moreover, listen. If you, Christians, forget your poor, suffering, and sinful brethren, if you cease to labour with a view to raise and save them, there is in the world a vast and mysterious power propagating darkness, vice, and iniquity, and which slackens not its efforts for one moment. He whom the Scriptures call the Prince of this World, he has also his army and his missionaries. They are continually on the march, calling souls; their voice is heard everywhere; they speak and they write, seeking disciples and imitators. "Follow me," says the man of pleasure or the unscrupulously ambitious worldling to the poor, but still pure youth, as he passes before him in the pride of his wealth and of the homage by which he is surrounded. And the young man follows, dazzled by the fascinations of fortune and ease, and he sells to the world the soul which yesterday yet had been pure and generous. "Follow me," says the harlot to the young workwoman, as she passes before her, rioting in the noisy mirth and luxury of a day. And the unhappy maiden follows her into that existence of demoralisation and infamy; she sacrifices to vice the soul, alas! consecrated to God by a mother's tears, the soul for which so many silent prayers had been wafted heavenward. "Follow me," says the sceptic to the rising generation, as he goes on sowing by his words and by his pen his doctrines of unbelief and death. "Follow me, for the homage of the noblest minds is mine, for the most exquisite of all glories, intellectual glory, attends me in the path I tread." Alas! how many are there who follow him! How many there are who, amid the plaudits of the age, proclaim with a maddened enthusiasm to all the hearts embittered by misery and suffering that heaven is empty, that there is no God there to receive their prayers, and that annihilation is the end of all things. "Follow me,"

they cry to all as they hurry down the broad way. They are not content with losing themselves, they must needs ruin the souls of others also.

And yet, O Christ! Thou wert waiting for them; for them also Thou hadst suffered, and from the cursed tree Thou hadst said to them all, "Come unto me." But have they seen that cross? Do they know Him whom we call the Saviour? What have we done to proclaim Him? What have we done to win souls for Him? O Lord! speak to our consciences; snatch us from our languor, from our unconcern, from our love of ease; inflame our hearts, enable us to achieve great sacrifices, and give us grace to show the world that Thy work is continuing still, and that the final victory is promised to the faith which works by love!

## II.

*THE WIDOW'S MITE; OR, THE UNRESERVED GIFT.*

“And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”—MARK xii. 41-44.

A GRAND spectacle was that presented by the Temple of Jerusalem when, at the close of the divine service, the crowd descended Mount Zion to return to the holy city. The songs had ceased in the sanctuary; the multitude of the faithful thronged the porches. No one, at that time, would have willingly kept away from the solemn assemblies; for the Temple, to the Jews of those days, was not merely a religious edifice, it was the refuge of their national memories, of their past glory and of their future hopes; it was the only spot throughout the land of Judea which the brutal foot of the conqueror had, till then, respected. When the Levites struck up the Psalms, and thousands of voices responded, a powerful emotion seized this invincible people that quivered beneath the stranger's yoke; they looked forward, with inward rapture, to the approaching day of deliverance, in which all the promises

of the prophets would be fulfilled, in which Jerusalem would be more brilliant, more honoured than it had been in the reigns of David and Solomon, in which, even from the most distant isles of the sea, the nations would bring their tribute to the Temple of the Almighty. When, therefore, the Jews passed before the treasury in which were deposited the offerings destined to the embellishment of the Temple and the support of the national worship, they cast in their gifts with a secret pride ; and fondly indulging in their carnal hopes, they returned to their dwellings with a lofty brow and a satisfied heart.

It was on such a joyous day that crowds were coming down the steps of the Temple ; first came the Pharisees, distinguished by their stern expression and their religious attitude. The rich passed on, followed by their retinues of slaves ; and, drawing the silver or the gold from their purses, they dropped it ostentatiously before the admiring gaze of the multitude. But here, in the midst of the throng, is a poor woman, advancing with a meek and gentle step. Who was she ? We know nothing of her past life. She was a widow ; in other words, her heart had been stricken in its tenderest affections ; life stretched out before her a lonely and dreary waste ; and whilst loved and loving ones passed her on her solitary way, whilst happy and smiling mothers accompanied their children, whom they had consecrated to Jehovah, whilst others joyfully retired to the homes where so much felicity awaited them, she walked slowly on, for she knew that none would welcome her at her fireside, that no loving voice would hail her return. She was a widow, and she was poor. Poor ! that is, doubly widowed. For the consolations and sympathy which are generally lavished upon those whose sorrows are brought into evidence by the distinguished rank they occupy, are rarely proffered to those who have the greatest need of

them. She was a widow, and she was poor; that is, to her life appeared henceforth as an unceasing conflict with misery, as a hard and painful struggle, with the continual dread of sickness without provision, and the gloomy prospect of a lonely death.

And yet, you who pity this poor woman, you fail to discover, beneath her mourning garb, the profound joy which fills her heart. She is happy, for she has found God in His Temple. Whilst so many others have gone thither with minds full of their dreams of national glory, or hearts satisfied with their wholly formal worship; whilst the priests themselves think only of exalting Israel, and ascribe to the God they serve their own narrow, ambitious, and vulgar notions, her heart has taken in what the scribes who sit in Moses' seat know nothing of—the love and compassion of the Lord. She has seen in the Scriptures that Jehovah has promised a special tenderness to all sufferers like herself; she has been drawn towards Him by a deep sense of gratitude; ties of love have been formed between herself and her Heavenly Father, and she has found in heaven what has failed her on earth. When the songs of the Levites have extolled the glory of the God of Israel, how fervently has she joined in them! How consoling have these words of the Psalmist appeared to her: “The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed; He giveth food to the hungry; He raiseth them that are bowed down; He relieveth the fatherless and the widow!” All this she has understood and believed; from the depths of her broken heart those beautiful utterances have risen to her lips as the natural language of gratitude, and in this vast assembly none perhaps have more sincerely proclaimed the goodness of the Lord than this poor disinherited widow, apparently so much to be pitied.

But she is anxious to give expression to that gratitude

which fills her soul; she has sung the praises of God, she has paid Him her tribute of adoration, but that is not enough for her. She too would bring her offering to the sanctuary, and contribute for her share towards the beautifying of the Temple of Jehovah. How will she do this? Alas, she is so poor! a farthing is all she has! But what is the value of so insignificant a sum where the embellishment of that vast edifice, and the support of that magnificent worship are concerned? With a farthing one cannot even replace a worn-out stone, nor buy a little incense, nor so much as purchase a turtle-dove for the sacrifice. And yet with this farthing she might procure a little oil or bread for herself; it would suffice to maintain her existence for a day or two. Surely she needs it sadly, for what can be more uncertain than her position, what more precarious than her resources? Even supposing she might, by this meagre offering, contribute to the beautifying of the sanctuary, can she be expected to do so? Are there not others who might give more easily than she? Poor as she is, can she, ought she, to deprive herself of all that is left her? All these thoughts have doubtless entered the heart of the widow, but she will not entertain them; thoughtful, unperceived, she drops her little gift into the treasury and walks on, rejoicing in her sacrifice, towards the dwelling where indigence awaits her.

Poor woman! who can have seen her in the crowd? Who among those noble and wealthy worshippers, who among those priests and Pharisees, has taken notice of her? Alas! the world forgets her as it forgets so many silent acts of heroism, so many unknown sacrifices, which, after all, are that which is noblest and best upon earth. But there is One who has seen her and whose eye follows her with tender sympathy. It is He whose name is Truth, it is the Eternal Son of God; He also is contemned



by that multitude who admire nothing but visible and ostentatious grandeur. Ah! go in peace, poor woman, *He* has seen thee! He has seen thee, and that look of His is enough for thy silent act to be transmitted to all coming ages, when not one stone of Jerusalem and of her magnificent Temple will be left standing. He has seen thee, and He has blessed thee. Go in peace; thou wilt perhaps never meet Him again upon earth, but one day, when thou wilt have ended thy humble career, He will receive thee in the everlasting habitations!

Let us now endeavour, with God's help, to learn the lessons which this touching narrative teaches.

The treasury was placed at the Temple door. A profound thought underlies this simple detail. It is this:—All sincere worship must result in sacrifice. We must assemble in the sanctuary to adore Jehovah. We must join, in thought, with the celestial beings who surround His throne, and with them proclaim His greatness and His holiness. That is our reasonable service, our calling; thus shall we sanctify our lips, so often profaned by trifling, frivolous, or wicked words. We must humble ourselves before Him whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity; we must unburden our hearts to Him, tell Him of our open transgressions and of our secret sins, beseech Him to dispel our natural unconcern and to give us a sense of our misery, so keen that we shall bring Him a broken and contrite heart, for that is what He demands. We must contemplate the salvation which God has prepared for us, worship the Saviour He has given us, rejoice in the thought of His mercies, and to His glory raise the hymns of our gratitude and praise. That is the adoration God requires of us, that is the incense which is agreeable to Him. But if, at the close of this service, after this humiliation, these thanksgivings, we go away fully satisfied; if we think we have offered to God an adequate

worship ; if this inward rapture, these tears, these prayers, lead not to sacrifice,—then indeed is our worship vain, and God will surely reject it.

Moreover, this truth is graven upon the human conscience in characters so deep and ineffaceable, that all religions have proclaimed it. Everywhere, connected with the sanctuary, you find the altar ; here, consisting of a monument of marble and gold, admirably sculptured by ancient art ; there, composed of two or three stones, which the savage, obedient to an irresistible instinct, has raised in the wilderness, to offer upon them his bloody offering. And what is the altar but the place for sacrifice ? This, then, is the centre of all serious religion, and whenever the satisfaction of the inward law which urges man to sacrifice has been concerned, you well know that he has shrunk from no suffering, that he has offered to his gods all that was dearest to him ; ay, his own children, and sometimes his own life. Argument has been powerless against this profound instinct. That is what so many nations which we are pleased to call by the disdainful name of heathen have so well understood. As for me, when I see those rivers of blood which everywhere mingle with the worship of the Deity, I am terrified by that spectacle ; and yet, even in those fearful excesses, I recognise the voice of conscience attesting the necessity of sacrifice. By those immolations which appal us, man proclaims that he owes himself to God.

Well, that law of sacrifice, which has never been obliterated in the human conscience, Christianity affirms it with incomparable power. What is the cross but the greatest of sacrifices ? What do we see there but the most perfect offering which any being has ever made of his life and of his blood for the glory of God and the salvation of his brethren ? What says that spectacle but that you owe yourselves wholly to God, and that, if

religion be not the gift of one's self, it is indeed a senseless thing? Thus did the apostles understand it, St. Paul, St. Peter, St. John, when in every page of their epistles they remind us that we are no longer our own, but that we belong to Him who has saved us, that we are to offer ourselves to Him as a living, holy, and acceptable sacrifice. Yes, self-consecration, that is the true sacrifice, the only one which God accepts, and which fully satisfies Him.

But however clear this truth may be, we always find a way to escape it. Ah! the multitude is large of those who go up to the Temple for praise and adoration; but how many of those worshippers offer to God only out of their superabundance, and then depart happy and self-satisfied? Now, God will not be content with our superabundance, He wants an unreserved gift, and that is what Jesus teaches us with so much authority by the example of the poor widow.

But here I must anticipate a doubt which assuredly arises in your minds. "What!" some will say, "you pretend that man must give to God, not his superfluous wealth only, but even that which is necessary to his existence! You would have wished those wealthy nobles who preceded the widow to cast the whole of their fortune into the treasury! That, in your opinion, was the only way for them to please the Lord. But what would become of society if everybody, in order to be agreeable to God, should dispossess himself of all he has? Would not this be permanent indigence, that is, an immoral and impossible thing?"

That is how modern unbelief has interpreted the words of the Lord. It has overdrawn their meaning in order to weaken it. It has taken them as the expression of a superhuman and chimerical charity. This surely is rather too convenient a method of setting at naught the teach-

ing of Jesus Christ. Men alter it, they give it an extravagant signification, that they may the more easily set it down as the enthusiastic dream of a generous soul.

Could it be true that the aim of Jesus, in placing this example before us, has been to persuade us to live in absolute poverty? Could it be true that His design has been to teach us that none can keep what is necessary to his existence and be agreeable to God notwithstanding? Ah! how little do those who pretend this to be the case understand the character of the teaching of Christ, of the most spiritual teaching to which the world has ever listened. What! Jesus would have dreamed of a social revolution! The ideal, in His eyes, would have been poverty, nay, hopeless misery, set up as a system! But then, if this was His thought, why should we still speak of the grandeur of His views, or of the wondrous penetration of His mind? His kingdom would be nothing more than a foolhardy enterprise! Ah! I know that Christ bade His first disciples leave all their possessions to follow Him. It was to be so. Their mission obliged them to this. For that stupendous work men were required, willing to break all the ties of flesh and fortune. But when has Jesus rendered this rule universal? When has He made of it a condition of salvation for all? What He preaches to all is quite a different doctrine; it is the inward, spiritual sacrifice, that poverty according to the spirit which the rich may know as well as the poor. And, in the very example before us, what Jesus wishes to teach is that God looks to the heart and not to the offering. Why has this widow's mite so great a value in the eyes of Jesus? Because this gift, paltry though it be, is the expression of an inward, complete, unreserved sacrifice. She has given herself to God, this poor woman! That is what renders her offering more precious than all the treasures of the Pharisees, than all the splendours of

the Temple. When the others, on the contrary, have given liberally out of their abundance, this has been, on their part, an effort to escape the complete sacrifice which *she* has offered so lovingly. You are not, therefore, required to give your fortune, your all, towards some special religious work; the point is to know, taking the spirit of our text, if, like the widow, you have given yourselves entirely to God, or if, in all things, you have given Him only a portion of your superfluous wealth. Such is the teaching of the Master, such is the thought I beseech God to impress deeply upon all your consciences to-day.

To give God one's superabundance! To give Him one's overplus when one owes Him everything! Do you know who is capable of such a mode of reasoning, of such a method of calculation? The man who does not believe. God, the future life, heaven, perdition, none of these are realities for him. He does not believe in them, and yet he is not at ease, for he sees continually rising before him the phantom of a *perhaps* which suffices to disturb his peace. Whatever he does, this uncertainty troubles him; he has often been mistaken, mistaken in visible and palpable things, might he not also be mistaken in things invisible? Is there not a mystery in death? Is the grave to be the end of his destiny? Under the influence of these thoughts, I understand that such a man should say to himself: "It is true that I do not believe in God any more than in an eternal future; but nevertheless I might be labouring under an error. I will, therefore, save a plank for the shipwreck. I will keep a supreme resource. I will give to the present life, to my present interests, to my present happiness all these interests, this happiness, this life demand, and I will give the remainder to God. If I have something left, a little money, a little strength, I will consecrate it to the Lord,

that will be my refuge." I can understand this combination of a prudent egotism on the part of an unbeliever; but on the part of a Christian I cannot understand it.

Let us now endeavour to put into words the sentiments of a Christian who, refusing to God the complete sacrifice He claims, will consent to give Him only the residue of his wealth. Hear how he speaks, and how he unwittingly bears witness against himself.

"I believe in God," says he, "that is to say, I acknowledge that all I have I owe to God; my life, my health, my faculties, my intelligence, my heart, all these come to me from Him. Those affections which gladden my heart, those cherished beings, those children in whom I feel, as it were, my life beginning anew, He has given them to me. Not only has He given them, but He has restored them to me. Those blessings have seemed to escape me once; the gloomy prospect of distress has cast its shadow over me; that health has seemed ready to disappear; I have seen sickness, and perhaps death, holding me in its grasp. Those beloved ones who are my joy, I have seen them pining away, I already considered them as lost; but in His infinite love God has recalled them to life; I have come again into possession of that vanished strength; that daily bread has never failed me,—and all this has been God's doing.

"But, above all these gifts, there is another infinitely superior, and far more wondrous still. I had wandered far from God, I was living for the world and for myself; I had transgressed the Divine law, I had brought upon myself a just condemnation. I had fled from the paternal roof and delighted in sin. Then God, who desired not my death, but my life, sent me not only His prophets, not only His apostles, but His only and well-beloved Son. Jesus Christ has come to seek and save me. To snatch me from eternal death, He has given Himself up to the

most painful of sacrifices. He has known all my miseries; He has taken upon Himself all my sins. He, the Holy One and the Just, has willingly submitted to the Divine desertion which *I* had merited. He has offered to God all that a man may offer Him, and though I should exhaust the tongues of men and angels, I would find no fitting words in which to express the depths of His mercy. All this God has done for me, who had fled from Him; and now, to prove my gratitude towards Him, this is what I shall do: of all I possess, of my fortune, of my affections, of my life, I shall make two portions,—the largest and best I shall keep for myself, and then, if there is something left, well, it will be the share of my God!”

This language shocks you. I do not wonder at it. The soul has a modesty of its own, which causes it to blush with shame whenever it looks evil in the face. But the supreme art of the seducer of souls is to conceal his designs. I certainly know none who would be willing to hold this language, but what if, though we dare not utter it, we dare realise it in our life? Oh, the depth of misery of our depraved hearts! What we blush to speak we blush not to do! This language which revolts us, does, after all, but express clearly the line of conduct of the greater number, even among those who continually speak of the love of God, and who have the appearance of piety. A supposition will show you if I am mistaken. In the narrative from which our text is drawn, we are told that Jesus sat down to see what the worshippers cast into the treasury, and that amongst all those who offered to God out of their abundance only, He perceived but one woman, one poor widow, who gave Him all she had. Let me suppose for a moment that to-day, at the very door of this sanctuary, Jesus should watch us passing before Him one by one, and let us

endeavour to picture to ourselves the spectacle He would behold.

First of all, a young man steps forward. He is full of joy and hope. He is strong, and life opens before him as a field for noble struggles. His is a generous soul, whose dream is of a grand and useful career upon earth. Methinks I read in his heart and discover there all his plans for the future. He feels himself born for a superior *rôle*, he loves art and the lofty research of science, he hopes one day to see a ray of glory surrounding his name. His ambition, it may be, reaches not so high; it is limited to the bettering of his condition, to the attainment of some advantageous situation, which would enable him to realise the fond desires of his heart. The career is difficult, numerous rivals surround him; there is no time to be lost; he must march, march on untiringly. That, for him, is the aim of life; that, for him, is the essential. Now in all this I see the share of man, but in vain do I seek the share of God. I question him; he answers that he keeps this portion in store, that he hopes to be able to offer it at some future time. He really means that God will some day come in for a share of all those labours, of those successes, of that fortune, of that glory which are his day-dream. Ah! pass on, my youthful brother, pass on with your offering, for what you have reserved for God is simply a part of your superfluous wealth! Your heart, your life, you have kept them all for yourself.

Here is a maiden advancing with a trusting heart, for the future, for her, is fraught with mysterious promises. Who will tell the countless dreams among which her thought wanders? She sees herself happy, admired, envied; she pictures to herself an existence suited to her tastes and the desires of her heart. Hers, too, may be a generous soul whom the love of dress and worldly



frivolity would fail to satisfy. But however noble her tastes be, her true aim in life is the satisfaction of self. And yet she believes, her conscience has spoken; she feels that she must give God a portion of her life. This portion, she keeps it in store. Yes, in store. When her heart will have tasted all the joys she dreams of; when she will have drained all the cups of bliss; when she will have known all she longs to know, then she will go to God for refuge. Ah! pass on, my young sister, pass on with your offering, pass on amid the approving smiles of the world. There is One whose eye follows you sadly, it is He who is sitting at the door of the Temple; He hoped you would give Him your heart, and you have given Him only what you wanted not for yourself.

Here is a business man. God has blessed his enterprises. His affairs have prospered. His fortune is large. He approaches in his turn, with the buoyancy and confidence which wealth and a strong will give. Oh, if he gave himself to God, what good might he not do! What excellent works might he not sustain! How many of his suffering and degraded brethren might he not raise from their abjection! How many young minds might he not snatch from moral corruption, and thus prepare them for the kingdom of heaven! Will he do so? He believes in God, he knows that God claims a share in his life; but this share, he keeps it in store. Later, says he; later, when I shall have increased my fortune; when I shall exert a wider influence; when I shall have left behind me all those rivals by whom I am surrounded; then I shall consecrate an abundant tithe to the Lord. Ah! pass on, you also, my brother, pass on with your offering! God demanded the gift of your life, you have given Him only out of your abundance!

But here is an aged man who has but a few years, or even, it may be, but a few days to live. What remains

of his existence, what is left of a withered heart, that residue of strength and energy, to whom might he give them if not to God? To whom could he confide them with greater security? Everything is about to escape him; all around him has gradually disappeared; all things speak to him of the vanity of his desires and of his approaching end. Ah! with those trembling hands, so soon to be frozen in death, what will he give to the Lord? He has only half of himself to offer now. Well, God would accept even that; He would not refuse this labourer of the eleventh hour. But no; he will not give himself. In his will, perhaps, he has marked out the Lord's share; but, until then, what remains to him of life he will live for himself. Ah! pass on, brother, pass on with your miserable offering, pass on with your superabundance!

When will she come then, the poor widow? When will he come then, the man who is to give himself wholly to God? Jesus is waiting for them still. Alas! how long has He waited! They are, perhaps, in this assembly. Have they come hither fully resolved to bring to God only their usual offering of a purely outward adoration, in which the heart has no part? Ah! if there be any such, let them come; had they nothing to give God save their extreme poverty; had they nothing to bring Him save their moral and spiritual misery; were they but defiled sinners, let them come, and in the silence of the sanctuary, let them give themselves to the God who calls them! And God will see them, and, turning His eyes away from so many worshippers who to-day have brought Him gifts out of their abundance, He will bless them in secret until the day when He will receive them in the abode of peace.

But you who still hesitate,—you who are unwilling to give God more than your overplus,—you who, like

misers, press the best portion of your treasure upon your hearts,—think you that because you have refused to yield it to God, it will always be yours? It will be taken from you to-morrow, perhaps, and then what bitter regret at not having consecrated it to God! For, had you consecrated it to Him, you would never have lost it. What we give Him we find again, and thus is realised that strange saying of the Gospel: “Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” Yes, that youth snatched from the world and devoted to God, nothing could have withered it; those powers, employed in the service of the best of Masters, would have been restored to you; that fortune, lost in the eyes of the worldly, you would have recovered it, increased a hundredfold; those affections, placed in God, would have lasted for ever. It is the Master who tells us so. Whoever will have renounced what is dearest to him upon earth, will receive, even in this life, an hundredfold; and in the future, everlasting life. Blessed loss, which, after all, is the surest gain!

But though you have refused the best portion of your possessions to God, it does not follow that you will be able to refuse them to death. Now death will surely come. Hark! the gloomy messenger is already on the wing; he is approaching; he is about to knock at your door. Of what use, then, will be those treasures so selfishly guarded,—those worldly affections,—those calculations of a prudent egotism? Oh, how bitterly will you then repent that you have not kept the essential part for God, and given to the world only what remained of your heart, of your time, of your life! But the terrible angel will come, and he will not be content with your overplus. He will require all; you will be obliged to yield everything to him. He will force you to open those arms which you so jealously cross upon your

treasure in a supreme effort. He will force you to leave those riches which you had thought to reserve for yourselves alone. O miserable wealth! O delusive possessions! If all is to finish thus, is life indeed worth living? Is the end of so much labour, of so much planning and scheming, of so much suffering to be annihilation? Annihilation! Ah, if there were nothing more than annihilation to expect! But there is an account to be rendered. God will not be mocked. How do you suppose God will judge a life of which the share assigned to Him has been but a derisive homage? How do you suppose He will welcome those who have so easily dispensed with Him here below? Think you He will be able to say to such servants as those: "Enter into your Master's rest?" Ah, what manner of servants are they who have served only their own interests and personal glory, who have centered all in self? Christ has foretold their future. To them will be addressed this awful and just sentence: "Depart from me, ye cursed; I know you not!"

I feel a misgiving as I draw towards the close of my discourse. I fear I have not been sufficiently faithful to the narrative I have selected for my text. What do I see in it? A poor woman offering all she has to the Lord. I have shown that what we are called to imitate in this example is the inward sacrifice, of which her offering is the faithful expression. This is true; for if, in this gift of her all, she had been actuated by a feeling of pride or fanaticism, her action would have had no value whatever before God. It is therefore to the intention of her heart we must look; it is in this respect we are to consider her as our pattern; what we are to learn from her is not to give all we possess, but to give ourselves.

All this is true, and yet there is something more in this story. The poor widow has given her *all*; I cannot

forget this fact, even though I acknowledge its spiritual meaning. Vainly do I endeavour to persuade myself that we are not called to such sacrifices as this, and that we are to take them in their spiritual sense. I am not satisfied with my explanation. She has given her *all*. That is the fact I would leave upon your hearts to-day without any commentary. I do not say, "Give all, as she did." I feel that this cannot be a duty. Nevertheless, "she has given all she had." Sublime folly! I hear some exclaim. Yes; but it is by folly such as this that the world is to be saved. This folly is not a duty for all; but does it not stand out before us as a bitter reproach? Where are they now, the Christians who have made themselves poor for Christ? I could point you to men who have given their all for their country. I could tell you the name of a mother who sent, one after the other, her three sons to die for the independence of their fatherland. What more shall I add? I humble myself and bow my head low. Alas! will the heroic ages of the Church never again dawn upon her? Will such sacrifices be admired by the world only in other spheres? O God! in presence of the temptations of the world, in this age of comfort and self-indulgence, may these words, uttered by Thine own Son, thrill through our consciences to-day as a withering reproach, "She of her want hath cast in all that she had, even all her living!"

## III.

*HUMILITY.*

“The meek will He teach His way.”—Ps. xxv. 9.

WHEN we read the heathen moralists we find in their writings a blank which cannot fail to strike every attentive observer. They have many admirable pages which are well calculated to astonish us; they often express on the human life and its duties the noblest and most elevated sentiments; they eloquently describe all the human virtues—uprightness, purity, firmness of soul, mansuetude, and even charity. But there is one which is always forgotten, and that is humility. Vainly will you seek throughout all antiquity, in all the works of the greatest philosophers, a single exhortation to humility. The word itself existed not for them, because the term humility, before Christianity, always denoted in their language whatever was low, contemptible, and vile; it was always taken in the worst sense. Christianity transformed the word by giving us the thing itself, and that which till then had been a virtue only in the Bible, found its way as a new virtue in universal morals.

How account for this strange omission? If we reflect upon it we shall understand its real cause. Humility can only be the result of the knowledge of oneself, and man has truly obtained this knowledge only when he

has studied himself in the light of the holy God. So long as man compares himself with man, so long as he has no other standard of comparison than himself, he may entertain on his moral value the most simple and complete illusions, and, whilst confessing certain failings inseparable, he thinks, from human nature, he may be so perfectly satisfied with himself that humility will appear to him a meaningless word. But place before him the image of the holy God. Let him examine himself in that pure light, and then he will see the brightness of his boasted qualities dying away, then he will perceive, at the root of what he called his virtues, a profound misery, traces of pride and vanity which, up to this time, he had totally ignored. The brighter becomes the light, the paler grows that natural goodness in which he had believed, the more clearly he discovers, beneath the superficial gloss of worldly morality, those secret lusts, those shameful feelings of envy, hatred, and selfishness, which lie concealed in every soul of man. Henceforth delusion becomes an impossibility; he has seen himself such as he is, he understands that, in the presence of God, the only attitude which beseems him is that of humility. Therefore the Jews of the old covenant who knew the true God, could already know and practise this virtue; nevertheless, it was only with Jesus Christ that it made its full appearance into the world.

In fact, Jesus Christ has not merely revealed to us the character of God, He has also taught us what man should be. "Behold the man!" said Pilate to the Jews; but he knew not the profound, the eternally true significance which these words of cowardly desertion were destined to have in the future. Yes, that is the man, such as He must be, such as it has pleased God that He should be. That is the man! greater than the prophets had hoped, greater than in their proudest dreams the

nations had imagined He could be; that is the man, pure and undefiled, faithful to truth in word and deed; that is the man, surrounded with the halo of an immaculate holiness, submissive to God, working His will, placing obedience where the first Adam had placed revolt, reflecting clearly and vividly the very image of the Father; that is the man, loving as God loves, loving always, loving to the end. That is the man! I appeal to human conscience, which bows in presence of this figure, awed by a majesty which surpasses it and imposes itself to all. Bring together all the splendours of earth, all the human virtues, place them before Him, and the Divine head of the Crucified will rise, in the brightness of its majesty, above all that men admire. . . . That is the man! and when we compare ourselves with Him we see what we are, and in the same glance we measure the depth of the abyss into which sin has plunged us.

That is how we can explain that humility came into the world only with Jesus Christ. At the feet of the Saviour, at the feet of Him whom St. John called the Light, all worldly virtues pale and vanish, just as the lustre of the most skilfully imitated jewels grows dim beside the unequalled brilliancy of the pure diamond. That is an experimental truth. There are in this assembly persons who, before they had fully resolved on becoming Christians, lived the purest and most honourable life in the eyes of the world. They enjoyed unbroken peace of mind, they delighted in the esteem and consideration by which they were surrounded. And when by accident they opened some religious book, in which they read the confessions of a humbled and repentant soul, or the cries of anguish of a troubled sinner, they unhesitatingly set these down as pious exaggerations in which it seemed to them impossible to join. What then



has occurred that their ideas should be so totally different to-day? They have drawn near to Jesus Christ, they have studied themselves in His light. Henceforth, how many discoveries in their past and present life! How many forgotten sins which the light of day has brought into evidence! How much misery and shame of which they had lost the very memory! How many temptations indulged and which they would certainly have realised had but a favourable opportunity presented itself! How much lukewarmness and indifference for good; how much selfishness, and how much cowardly compliance with the world! But now, let worldly flatteries be addressed to them, they will reject them with energy. But now, bid them hearken to the artful discourses of a complaisant preacher who will extol their qualities, skilfully veil their faults, and seek to inspire them with a carnal security—they will refuse to listen. What they now want is truth, for it is truth that saves. They know too much to accept a religion which lowers God while it exalts man. What they now want is a teaching both frank and firm, a teaching which will trouble and humble them, but to which their conscience will be forced to yield a full assent.

Nevertheless, to produce humility there is something more efficacious still than the sight of the perfection of Jesus Christ—it is the sight of His love. When a sinner who has learned to know himself, to perceive his defilement and misery, understands that he is the object of the love of God, and of a love such as that which is described in the Gospel, it is impossible that the sense of this mercy should not overpower him. Show him a God who is ready to crush and terrify, he will bow the head in the feeling that he deserves it all; but show him a God who comes to him, who loves and pardons him—oh! then, all the pride of his heart is broken. True, he was

humbled, the prodigal son, when, seized with remorse, he rose to return to his father with the confession—"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But what must have been his feelings when he saw himself pressed upon that heart which his errors had caused to bleed, when he felt his father's tears falling upon his guilty head? True, they were humbled, the publicans and Zacchæus and Mary Magdalene, when they beheld Christ, and when the sight of the holiness spread in His countenance, in His looks, in His discourses, all the more clearly set forth their own misery; but what must they have felt when Jesus entered their dwellings, when they understood that they were the objects of His love and of His tender solicitude? And we who have seen His cross; we who believe that we are not destined to remain strangers to this wondrous story; we who believe in redeeming love; we who know that for us also the Saviour came—shall we not feel overwhelmed by the greatness of that mercy? shall we still hesitate to bring to God the sacrifice of a broken heart? I have often heard unbelief exclaiming against that pride of Christians which leads them to believe that the heavens have been shaken for their salvation, and that it was necessary that the Son of God Himself should suffer in their stead. But you who believe in that sacrifice, tell us if what the cross teaches and inspires is not precisely humility? Ah! at the foot of the cross humility was born; from the earth watered by the blood of Christ, sprang that Divine flower which, till then, had been unknown to the world. That is its native soil. Transplanted on any other it can but wither away and die.

We can now understand why, outside of Christianity, humility has ever been ignored. Alas! it does not follow from this that all Christians know this virtue.

We shall be forced to acknowledge this as we retrace the features by which it is distinguished.

Christian humility should penetrate the whole of our being. Since all the parts of our being have participated in the revolt of sin, they must all be brought to bow the head before God. In the first place, our intellect must be humble. That is what we are in danger of forgetting in this age of criticism and discussion, we Protestant Christians especially; for by our position we are called to watch over the interests of personal investigation in respect to the traditional faith of the Church. It is not that I would have the intellect forget its mission, which it has truly received from God; but what I ask is that all its research be stamped with humility, that, in the handling of religious questions, it may never profane them as did, with regard to the vessels of the sanctuary, the Levites whom the Lord chastened. What I ask is that raillery or disdain may never mingle with the discussions it enters upon. What, in fine, I ask is, that we may ever remember that, if we seek religious truth, we seek it that we may the better adore and obey. I admit that, ere we acknowledge it, we should examine it seriously; but from the day when we fully possess it, our duty is to bow before it. It is written that truth makes us free. Yes, but it is on condition that we shall become its willing slaves; if we break through all human formulas, it is that we may the better obey God. A noble Christian woman once said: "I prefer shadow on the side of God, to light on the side of men." Well, it is good for the soul to sit beneath this shadow; to breathe the air of the mysteries which humble and sanctify us. There is a reasoning piety which always, and under every possible form, aims simply at instruction. Is that the piety which does most good? Is that the piety which exercises the most communicative

and sympathetic influence? I think not; and, for my own part, I know of nothing more truly grand than a noble mind which humbles itself, and adores before God.

Intellectual humility thus understood is closely allied with meekness of heart. In reality they should be inseparable, but this is not always the case. Men may profess to submit their minds wholly to God; they may offer to Him the sacrifice of their reason; they may make a boast of their blind faith, and yet shelter in their hearts a world of pride. Again, men may believe by the intellect that salvation is a free gift, and yet be anything but humble before God. Nay, more than this, men may take merit to themselves for not believing in merit; they may rely upon argument for their salvation, and preserve in their hearts the leaven of pharisaism. Which, think you, is the greater Pharisee of the man who trusts in his good works, or the man who trusts in his intellectual orthodoxy? Is it not obvious that between such dispositions as those, and the humble dependence of the sinner, whose hope is in Divine mercy alone, there is an immeasurable distance—the same distance, alas! which separates the heart from the brain, intellectual faith from saving faith? Therefore, so long as humility fails to reach and subdue our hearts, it remains a mere theory, an additional word in the vocabulary of our Christianity, and it is to be feared that we have not understood the Gospel.

But this meekness of heart must pass into our life; it must be recognised by the very manner in which we accept the will of God. The Lord warns us by events as well as by His word; it is this double voice we must hear and obey. What would it avail us to bring a broken heart at the foot of the cross, to offer ourselves there as a living sacrifice, and then to arise anxious to accomplish our own purposes and our own will, in

a word, full of the pride of life? No, no; humility must manifest itself day by day, hour after hour, in the ordinary course of existence; it lies in that docility of the heart which accepts the lessons which each of the events of life is destined to teach; it lies in that respectful attitude of the believer who awaits the signs of the Divine will, fearing lest his own should be found opposed to God's; it lies in the fulfilment of the obscure and unpretending duties which it chooses in preference to all others; it lies in the uncomplaining acceptance of trials, of painful dispensations. It has sometimes been seen adorning with a sublime beauty the close of the most eminent careers. It happens in the Church that men, on whom God had bestowed the noblest gifts, grow in humility as they advance in years and experience. Like those branches which bend towards the earth in proportion as they are loaded with fruit, they also, the more they abound in good works, the lower they bow before God; in them we find nought of the bitter censure, nought of the gloomy morosity which betray spiritual pride. We see them making themselves smaller and smaller, if I may so speak, as they advance; turning their looks away from themselves, and saying with the Forerunner, "I must decrease, and He must increase."

What a grand lesson is this progress in sacrifice! There is in it a secret charm which attracts and subdues us. Like those lofty summits of the Alps which appear less beautiful in the dazzling light of noonday than when the setting sun clothes them with a delicate and mysterious hue, those Christian lives are less attractive to us in the day of their most powerful activity than when, at the close of the conflict, God crowns them with humility.

Such, brethren, is Christian meekness. Such, at least, are some of its features, for to picture it fully is impossible. It is felt rather than seen. We have still to

consider the promise which God, in my text, makes to it: "The meek will He teach His way."

*The way of the Lord!* I like this expression, for it unites earth to heaven. There is, then, here below a way which leads to God, a way in which we walk with God; amongst all those paths which cross each other in all directions and which finally lead to vanity, there is one, however, which leads to no precipice, and which victoriously runs through the valley of the shadow of death. It ends on the shores of eternity. It leads us to the land of rest, light, and justice, where those who have followed it before have already arrived and await us. Happy is he who knoweth this way, for it is the way of salvation; but how is it to be found? The Divine Word answers that the Lord teacheth it to the humble.

Allow me to apply these words to you who have displayed all the powers of your intellect in seeking that way, but who have not yet found it. Can you, within the whole range of history, show us one man who, by the mere force of his reason, has succeeded in finding the way that leads to God? God has allowed the ancient world to go on discussing this question during forty centuries. "What is the path of truth?" has been asked in every clime. With what ardour have men endeavoured to solve this problem! What studies! what deep intellectual research! what wonderful investigations! Will the ancient philosophers ever be surpassed in this respect? Will more patient or penetrating minds than theirs ever be seen? And yet, if in the golden age of ancient thought you had entered one of the schools to ask to be taught the way that leads to God, what answer would you have received? what light could you have obtained from so many contradictory opinions? But if, at the same period, in the land of Judea, you had questioned that son of Jesse, that shep-

herd of Bethlehem, who called himself David, he would have spoken to you of God in the most simple and sublime language man has ever uttered; he would have pointed out to you that way which ancient wisdom was seeking in vain, and which we ourselves have entered upon thirty centuries after him. The Lord teacheth His way to the humble.

Has it not been so in every age? Have not the humble always been the witnesses of God upon earth? Were they not humble, those who for the first time came to worship the Saviour in the night of Bethlehem? Were they not humble, those who listened to the teaching of Jesus Christ whilst the great and the wise shunned or despised Him? Were they not humble, those who, in the day of His modest triumph at the gates of Jerusalem, first struck up those hallelujahs which henceforth will never cease, but will be re-echoed from world to world throughout all eternity? Were they not humble, those who first confessed Him whom we all confess to-day? Have not the meek always been the instruments God has used to conquer the strong? Where then is the page of the Gospel or of history in which we do not find a commentary of these words: "The meek shall He teach His way?"

In our day, human intelligence has acquired a haughty and unlimited confidence in itself; it has faith in its own powers, it believes that it will arrive at a solution of all problems, that it will surmount all obstacles. And, in fact, how many impossible paths has it not opened! It has traced, in the depths of the earth, the roads which lead to inexhaustible riches; it has cast over our globe that iron network which is covering it more and more, and, outreaching the earth, it has followed, through the immensity of the skies, the paths of the stars, it has calculated most accurately their volume and their density.

Truly, man is the king of nature. But amidst all those gigantic discoveries, has he found the way that leads to God? He thinks he might discover it by the power of his genius. We are continually being told that some new enthusiast has caught a glimpse of it, and our minds sometimes delight in following up these systems; but when, oppressed by doubt and suffering, terrified at our darkness and weary of our wanderings, we seek that way, to whom do we go? We go to the school of those meek ones of earth who heard the Saviour in Galilee; we ponder over their words, and they alone give us satisfaction and peace. Contrast with their few pages all your systems, the newest as well as the most ancient, and find, if you can, one which is capable of replacing the Gospel? Ah! when men speak of the insufficiency of Christianity, I ask where is the new way which will more surely or more directly lead to God; and I feel utterly unconcerned, for each system which crumbles is a proof of the insufficiency of human wisdom, and, at the same time, a further demonstration of the truth that "the meek will God teach His way."

Shall men reproach us here with exalting ignorance, intellectual mediocrity, or with lowering reason? Far from us be such a thought. Do we not know that neither ignorance nor intellectual mediocrity give humility? On the contrary, we have often seen them produce pride. Let the intellect grow and its powers increase; let it widen the sphere of its free research, and we shall rejoice; what we ask of it is to acknowledge with simplicity what it ignores, and never to forget its dependence upon God. It is impossible not to observe once more how closely intelligence is allied with the moral condition in religious matters. In Saul, the persecutor of the Church, and in Paul, the apostle, the intellectual vigour is the same. How then are we to account for the vast



distance which separates those two men? By the fact that the heart of Saul has been humbled. Therefore, point out to me a man who deeply feels both his dependence upon God and his natural misery, I will fear nothing for him, for, had his reason the eagle-flight of Bossuet, Newton, or Pascal, I feel that it will willingly submit to be taught of God.

That is the Divine plan, and God will not alter it to-day. Would you learn the way that leads to Him? Be humble. If you seek religious truth only as a critic or amateur, if you acknowledge it only to dissert upon it, to make of it a pedestal for your penetrating spirit, think not it will ever be given you. But if you seek it with the earnest desire to yield your heart and life to it, in the name of the living God I declare unto you that you will find it, for to seek it thus is to have already found it in part. We read that a great and pious preacher of the middle ages one day met a young man who had just completed his studies, and who, to display his penetration of mind, began a subtle dissertation upon God. The old man listened for some time in silence, then, placing his hand on the youth's shoulder, said: "Lift thine eyes, friend, and look at the sun." The young man raised his eyes, but, blinded by that dazzling light, he was forced to bow his head. "Thou fool," said the aged man, "thou canst not gaze upon the visible sun, and thou pretendest to penetrate God who is the sun of souls!" He spoke true. Pride would see God face to face, and His splendour dazzles it. Humility bows before Him, and its path is flooded by His light. The Lord teacheth His way to the humble.

I have spoken of the doubts of the intellect. But they can never be the portion of the multitude, for there are but few who reason their unbelief. If I should ask of the great majority of men whether they know what

the Bible calls the way of the Lord, they would answer that they have never seen it, and that it is impossible it should exist in the labyrinth of life. The spectacle of life and of the world, such as sin has made them, is the most frequent cause of unbelief. How believe in the way of the Lord when everything seems to be the effect of chance, when the just is chastened with the unjust, when death pitilessly strikes to the right and to the left, when prayers remain unanswered, when events cross each other in a bewildering disorder? This temptation besets the Christian especially when he is passing through trial. Then it is that God must teach him His way, and is it not evident that if he could clearly discern that Divine way, if he could see it shining in the midst of his darkness, if he could feel that he is advancing in it, and that each trial is an incentive to greater and more rapid progress, is it not evident, I ask, that he would derive immense consolation from this thought?

Now, that God may teach you this way through which He leads you, do you know what, perhaps, is lacking in you? Humility. Humility which accepts whatever God sends and which does not argue with Him. Oh, we sometimes imagine that revolt must always be haughty and threatening, but it is clever at disguising itself, it takes refuge in apparently broken hearts, it hides under a gloomy resignation, it lurks under many a mourning garment. There are hearts which refuse to be comforted of God and which will not forgive Him for having overthrown their plans, destroyed their happiness, broken their affections. Brethren, beware! Men will not confess that they are resisting God, but in reality they are braving and defying Him. And do you know what happens? The more they resist, the less they understand the purposes of God;

the blinder they become, the deeper their darkness grows, the more inextricable the chaos of life appears. What then is required that the way of the Lord may be traced out in this labyrinth, and that the light of heaven may illumine it? For this men must humble themselves, fall on their knees and no longer ask to understand.

We speak of the benefits of affliction. Yes, when it is accepted with meekness of heart. Otherwise it may harden, and alas! harden for ever. But when it is accompanied with humility, it is indeed a blessed messenger. It leads us, it brings us back to God, it teaches us to say with David: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word." And when trial is accepted in this spirit, it is almost always followed by light. The more humble a Christian becomes, the more fully God enlightens him. He gets to understand those strange and singular dispensations by which God leads him. He learns to say, not theoretically, but from experience, that all things work together for good to them that love God. The more he advances, the brighter is the light that shines from heaven upon his way, and he feels that this beautiful promise is being realised for him: "The path of the just" (why should we not say of the humble?) "is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

It is, therefore, true that the Lord teacheth the meek His way. To them He reveals His truth, to them He gives comfort in the hour of trial; but that is not enough for us. The Christian is not satisfied with being enlightened and comforted by God. He wants more than this. He wishes to work for God, to be His witness, His representative upon earth. Well, to the man who is inflamed with this noble desire, to the man who asks God to show him the best means to be used

for the advancement of His reign, the Divine Word again says: "The meek will He teach His way."

It is a marvellous fact that the God of Christianity has never selected the strong for His service, but that He has always chosen the humble, that it might appear that it was His power indeed which was made manifest in their weakness. Bring up before your memory's eye all those who have served His purposes, all those by whom He has instructed and saved men, and you will see that all have been trained in the school of humility. In none of them will you find that factitious grandeur which is the fruit of pride and enthusiasm, that studied attitude of the heroes of this world, who seek to dazzle us by their majesty. No; all the heroes of the Bible confess their agitations, their failings, their falls, they all tell us that it has pleased God to crush their strength. Here is Moses, whom the Bible calls the meekest among the sons of men, Moses, who trembles in presence of his mission; here is David, who goes down to the brook to gather stones for his sling in presence of an army in battle array, David, the humblest of all those whom God has ever invested with the responsibility of a crown; here is Peter, bearing everywhere with him the humiliating remembrance of his threefold denial; here is Paul, who is exposed to the meanest humiliations, and who continually mourns beneath the weight of his mysterious affliction. Here they are, such as God has prepared them for the conflict, armed with their weakness; and yet, to them the Lord has taught the way of success.

You then who are anxious to labour for the Lord, lay hold of this thought, for it alone will be capable of preserving you against inevitable discouragement. So long as you will rely upon your own strength and resources for success, God will destroy your confidence by

repeated failures, and then you will, perhaps, be tempted to believe that He has forsaken you, while, on the contrary, He is training and preparing you to become a willing instrument in His hands. For the performance of some excellent work you had trusted on the wealth which was yours. He will show you one, in poverty, accomplishing with his limited resources works far greater than yours. You had trusted in your talents, in your eloquence, in the penetration of your mind; it seemed to you that to these noble gifts, employed in the service of God, nothing could resist. He will show you uncultured men, men of very commonplace capacities and talents, enlightening more minds, saving more souls, gathering in a richer harvest than you. You had trusted in the power and energy of your will; He will show you characters infinitely weaker than yours, men who would be incapable of conceiving any grand design, yet by their daily fidelity attaining results which are denied you, and, by all these successive trials, He will say to you, my brother: "Thou hadst thought that my purposes could not be worked out without thy aid, and thou didst not know that I have no need of thee." But when, by this mysterious education, He will have crushed, and well-nigh annihilated you, He will raise you up again in His mercy, and those gifts which He had bestowed on you, after having all been adorned with humility, will be employed by Him to His glory.

Before I conclude I will observe how opposed to the present current of thought are the truths I have brought before you. I have said that ancient wisdom has never known humility; that is one of the teachings of Christianity which has always been folly in its sight. In our day, in contemporary unbelief, I meet an exactly similar opinion. The watchword of our epoch is this: "Rely on thyself alone, believe in thyself alone." Whilst

the boldest unbelief tells us that heaven is empty, and that there is no other god than man, the mass of those whose minds reach not to those extreme consequences, none the less proclaims, in practice, that the man who wishes to succeed must rely upon himself alone. What then will they think of Christian humility, of that strange doctrine which teaches man to sacrifice himself, to lower himself in his own eyes? They can only regard it as folly, if even they do not see in it an instrument of authority for evil, a means of maintaining man in a perpetual state of servitude and infancy.

Folly! Well, be it so. But men must know that this folly has been the source of all that is grandest and most lasting upon earth. It is right that this proud age, whose confidence is all in man, should remember that the greatest moral victories the world has ever witnessed have been won by the meek, and that to these also the final triumph has been promised.

When, eighteen centuries ago, mankind had reached the lowest stage of abjection and misery, when servitude was the universal watchword, when the civilised world had fallen so low as to bow in adoration before the image of a crowned monster, who raised humanity, who saved it, by restoring to it the dignity of the soul, the moral independence from which was to spring modern liberty? Those philosophers who exalted man, those proud stoics who believed in nought but human will and energy? No; those meek and humble believers in the Gospel, who, while bowing their humbled heads before God, had learned to raise them in presence of universal thralldom and degradation. And, in the sixteenth century, when the whole of the Christian world bent beneath the yoke of Julius II. or Alexander VI., who delivered human conscience? Those sceptics and atheists, who then, as now, affirmed that heaven is empty

and that man must depend upon himself alone for will and action? No; these mocked in private, but in public they bowed their heads low. Those who enfranchised the human soul then, were those humble Christians, who in their theology referred all to God, all to His grace, and after having humbled themselves before Him, learned to free themselves from the bondage of men, and to shake off all authority which was not Divine.

And here before our mind's eye passes that immortal scene of Worms which was as the dawn of the Reformation. Three centuries ago, at a diet held in Germany, a young emperor sat surrounded by all the splendour and glory of the realm; his were power and wealth, the homage of earth and the blessings of heaven. He held beneath his sceptre a great part of Europe, and almost the whole of the New World. The sun never set upon his states, and his flatterers beguiled him with dreams of universal dominion. When Charles V., intoxicated with his unparalleled greatness, saw a pale and haggard monk called Martin Luther enter the hall, we are told that he was unable to repress a motion of surprise and contempt. He knew not that, in this solemn day, a great struggle was about to begin, and that this unknown monk would be the victor; he knew not that, after the lapse of three centuries, the cause for which this monk was struggling would have on its side more than half of the Christian nations, while nought would be left of that earthly grandeur which dazzled even himself. Now, whence came this wondrous power which enabled Luther, alone before that assembly, alone before the whole of Europe, to affirm his faith unflinchingly, and to win that triumph to which we are indebted for our own enfranchisement? His adversaries have answered: "Monkish pride!" Ah! if ever he was proud, it

was surely not in that eventful hour. No; he had gathered his strength in that long and fervent prayer which, on the eve of that memorable day, he had uttered with tears, and in which he pronounced these simple and touching words: "Thou knowest, O my God, that I too would prefer my rest and peace. . . . Who am I that I should resist so many great lords? but it is Thy cause, not mine." Luther on his knees, Luther crushed by his solemn mission, Luther broken down before God, that is the explanation of his courage and triumph, for the Lord teacheth His way to the meek.

Let us then seek our strength where the Reformer found his; let us go to work, in meekness and self-abasement, and to Him who alone can give the victory, to Him from whom all things proceed, and to whom all things return, to Him be glory for ever and for ever. Amen.



## IV.

*FAITH AND SIGHT.*

“ For we walk by faith, not by sight.”—2 COR. v. 7.

THERE are two worlds, the visible and the invisible. But for the Fall these two would still constitute one. Had we remained pure, the visible world would be to us as the mirror of the eternal realities which the eye of the body is unable to perceive; the presence and action of God would be everywhere manifest, and we would see His adorable image reflected in nature far more distinctly than the majestic summits of the Alps in the crystal waters of Geneva on a calm day. To separate God from His works would be an impossibility; we could more easily separate the flower from the fragrance it yields, or the sun from the rays it sends forth eternally.

See how Jesus contemplates nature; for Him the invisible world is everywhere. He finds it in the spring which gushes forth at His feet, in the branches united with the vine, in the tree which covers Him with its shade, in the golden harvests, in the glowing skies, and even in the minutest details of the life of the publicans and sinners who surround Him. Everything, in his eyes, becomes a transparent image of the human soul and of its divine destinies. Beyond all which clouds our vision, He perceives the invisible world, He sees it so

clearly that it is needless for Him to believe, and we would feel greatly surprised should any one speak of the faith of Jesus. Jesus sees heaven, He lives in it, He breathes in it, He bears it with Him everywhere upon earth.

That is how it should be. Alas! you know how it is. Ask of the great majority of men what they see beyond the visible world, or rather, seek those whom visible things do not absorb entirely; for the greater number those are the only realities; all the rest is set down as wild fancies or day-dreams. To know visible things, that is their wisdom; to act upon visible things, that is their work; to enjoy visible things, that is their happiness. Beyond that, everything vanishes before their eyes. Even religion, which, above all, should be the revelation of the invisible world, is degraded by being made subservient to the interests of the present life. Some make of it an instrument of political authority; others consider it as a civil and social institution; others would reduce the Church to the simple rôle of a vast philanthropic association; others see in prayer and worship the mere satisfaction of certain wants of human nature. Underlying these various ideas, you find the more or less plainly avowed negation of the invisible world; and, whilst for the man who has remained pure, the things that are seen are but an image of the invisible, for the sinful man, on the contrary, the things which are invisible have no value except in so far as they can be made to minister to present interests, to the security of that which is transitory.

But without accusing others, let us ask ourselves what place the invisible world occupies in our own life. How difficult it is for us to lay hold of it! That we may open our eyes to its pure light, are not a more painful operation, a more laborious preparation required than

those which a blind man must undergo in order to recover his sight? And how quickly do we forget it, how easily is our attention diverted from it! What a mighty power do present preoccupations exercise upon our minds! How all eternal realities pale before them! Who knows this better than we do, we ministers of the Gospel? From our pulpits we speak to you of the things of eternity, we tell you of the approbation of God which you are to seek in preference to the praise of men, of the love of God which should consume all the worldly lusts and passions that dwell in your hearts, of the communion with God which is to be your delight in the world to come; we picture the unspeakable felicity of the redeemed, their peace, their unalterable joys. . . . And yet, must we confess it? How often do we not feel that this language surpasses our present impressions, and that it springs more from our imagination than from our soul! Oh! how easy it is to speak, and with what terrible temptations is even the preaching of the Gospel accompanied! What efforts, what unceasing watchfulness are required in order that our hearts may be continually penetrated with the truths we proclaim, that our emotion may not resemble that of the artist or poet, that the mean desire for the present success of our words may not absorb our thoughts, that we may not be wholly chained down to earth in the very moment when we pretend to open heaven to your enraptured gaze! That is the humiliating confession which now escapes my lips, but cannot you all join your personal avowals to mine? Heirs of the invisible world, what a contrast between your life and your Christian profession! Those hearts which are so unconcerned for the interests of Jesus Christ, so impassioned for their own; those minds which are so engrossed by the affairs or the news of the day, so indifferent to the progress of the reign of God; those

existences which are carried away, absorbed, consumed by what is transient, do you not know them, and do you not feel how completely the visible world keeps you under its subjection?

Such is our condition, and God who knows it, God who wishes to save us, has traced out for us a plan of education, which St. Paul sums up in these grand words: "We walk by faith, not by sight." Now, I would have you make of these words your motto, I would have you learn to refer every detail of your life to them.

"By faith and not by sight!" Before explaining these words, we cannot fail to observe how they clash with all the ideas and tendencies of the age. There exists a philosophical school which enjoys the immense advantage of knowing clearly what it aims at, and which is represented by men whose talents and character exercise an incontestable influence. This school has written upon its banner the word *positivism*. It says to man: "What does it avail thee to let thy thoughts wander through the invisible world, and to pursue those fleeting shadows men call by the name of religions? Give up all those wild fancies which have ineffectually wearied the human soul during so many ages. Believe what thou seest. Lay hold of the visible world, study it, make of matter thy servant, mend the laws and constitutions of humanity; in this alone is progress possible, in this alone is happiness secured to thee." Such is the language of this school, and what constitutes its strength, is the fact that it unhesitatingly expresses the thoughts of the great majority in the present day. Its doctrines are re-echoed by all the voices of the age; some express them in grave language, others with cynical flippancy. What is the invisible world to most of our moneyed men? What place does it occupy in their ardent and

feverish speculations? They do not so much as consider it worthy of their attacks. They do without it, they set it aside with the disdainful self-satisfaction you have seen—you, believers in the eternal realities, when, in your zeal to propagate your faith, you have so often encountered the icy indifference of the multitude whom reality fully satisfies.

Arguments would certainly not fail us if our purpose in this discourse was to avenge the invisible world for the contempt to which it is exposed. In the name of progress itself, in the name of that civilisation which men oppose to us, we would accept the conflict. Yes, we could easily demonstrate that all the grandest actions, those which have been most beneficial to mankind, have been performed by men who, in a higher or humbler sphere, have walked by faith and not by sight. Who are those who have won the great moral victories to which the Christian nations are indebted for their position at the head of the civilised world? History answers: Men who believed. Men who believed in conscience, in duty, in justice. Now neither conscience, nor duty, nor justice are visible. The things that are seen are pleasure, fortune, actual success. Yes, if humanity had walked only by sight, as men would have it do to-day, then might we blot out the noble and dramatic history of eighteen centuries of suffering, of martyrdom, of glorious progress; but we will not blot it out, and it will ever remain true that in the midst of Christian nations, and there only, is progress a reality. It will ever remain true that the nations which have dwelt longest upon earth, and have traced the deepest furrows in the paths of the future, are those which have been most enlightened by the full radiance of eternal truth. When St. Paul wrote the words of my text, the ancient world was precisely in the state to which men would lead back

the modern world; it had ceased to believe in all that was not visible and palpable; whatever was beyond this it considered as foolish and void. It believed neither in Providence, nor in prayer, nor in the hopes whose accomplishment eternity alone will see. And yet, this world which believed in nought beyond itself, what had it arrived at? On what shore had it stranded? Did it believe in progress? did it believe in justice? did it believe in liberty? had it preserved a ray of hope? Ah! who is not fully aware that never before had a more shameful abasement, a more complete degradation, a more universal disregard for the native nobility and dignity of man been witnessed? Who restored it to life? Who saved it from sinking into nothingness? Who reminded humanity of what constitutes its true greatness? Those men, those believers who opposed to the present world the world to come, and who refused to limit man's destinies to the present life. That is a striking and evident fact which alone would be sufficient to justify the Gospel against the accusations to which I have referred. Now, this fact has not been accomplished once for all. During the eighteen centuries which form the history of our religion, how often has the world been on the point of sinking back into the state in which Christianity had found it, on the point of giving up its best conquests to believe only in what may be handled and seen! At every one of these epochs, what has restored it to life has been an energetic appeal to the invisible world, the testimony of those who have walked by faith and not by sight.

It was to be so, and we should form a strange idea of Christianity if we believed that it teaches us to despise the earth and the present life. I know that many causes may have favoured this error. Monastic life, opposed by Roman Catholicism to active and social life,

and considered by it as more elevated and more perfect, the deplorable exaggerations of certain Christians who have neglected the most important duties of existence, alleging that their eternal interests required all their thoughts, have but too often furnished unbelief with weapons. But Christianity itself is innocent of these errors and excesses. Never, I repeat it, has it taught us to forget, or even to neglect the world or its duties; on the contrary, it bids us regard both, but without allowing ourselves to be completely absorbed in either. Earth is not, neither can it be the aim of the Christian, but it is the scene of his activity, the place in which his eternal future is prepared. Doubtless, the thought of eternity will hush many of the preoccupations by which we are absorbed, it will reduce to their real value all selfish joys and pleasures, all that pertains only to the present hour; but what a mighty impulse will it not give to all that is generous, noble, and useful, to all that contributes to the good of others and to the glory of God! It is maintained by many that eternity lowers the present life; but I assert, on the contrary, that it gives it an incomparable grandeur. What is man, what are all his desires, hopes, labours, affections, if everything is to disappear with the fleeting hour? What is there worth beginning here below? What cause is worthy of our sacrifices? Why should we renounce all that is visible, immediate happiness, actual enjoyment, sensual delights? Let us limit our horizon, let us ask of the passing hour all it is capable of giving us, let us make merry, for to-morrow we die. Why speak of the higher emotions, of the nobler aspirations of human nature? Those emotions, those aspirations will soon die if there is no eternity for them, just as the plant withers and perishes when deprived of air and sunlight. And, in fact, do you not hear that eternal refrain: "Vanity of

vanities," ringing incessantly in your ears, and does it not leave in the depths of your soul an ineffaceable impression of discouragement? Do you not hourly see your efforts rendered fruitless, your best intentions misjudged, your affections scorned? No, if there is nothing for me beyond this world, if this earth is my only fatherland and my only heritage, life henceforth is meaningless for me, it remains a cruel and inexplicable enigma, and I can but write upon its threshold these true but mournful words of the apostle: "Without God, without hope!"

On the contrary, open eternity to me. Tell me that life is a journey, a march onward; tell me that I am walking towards my true home. Then I am able to begin and undertake everything, then the bitter feeling of vanity disappears. I can labour, and labour in vain, if need be, sow on an unfruitful soil, pursue even in the lowest condition, the meanest and most insignificant of tasks; I know that my sacrifices, my labours, and my tears are as so many seeds which will spring forth on the day when the sun of the invisible world shall arise. I can love, love in presence of death, although I know that the gloomy angel will dim those eyes that had answered mine, that he will still that heart which had throbbed with the same emotions as my own, that he will chill that hand whose loyal grasp had encouraged and strengthened me. But in my heart dwells an immortal hope which I oppose to all these crushing realities. That hope may for a moment be dulled and apparently quenched, but a breath from heaven will suffice to scatter the ashes with which it is covered, and to produce a brighter and more cheerful light than before. Yes, it is because I do not wholly belong to the present life that I am able to work upon earth; that is what gives such a solemn importance to my short and wretched existence.



Let none, therefore, seek to deprive me of the invisible world in the name of the present interests of humanity; all within me protests against such an attempt, and history, agreeing on this point with my innermost experience, proves to me that the present life can be understood and explained only in the light of eternity.

Such would be my answer to those who disdainfully treat these grand words of St. Paul: "We walk by faith and not by sight." But let us overlook these attacks. You are Christians, these words of the apostle are your motto, you acknowledge with me that they sum up admirably the Divine plan of your destiny. And now, I have still to show that, though we accept this motto in theory, we openly deny it in reality. A few examples will be sufficient to prove that, in the direction of our life, we almost always endeavour to substitute sight for faith, and that, in this way, we constantly labour to make the purposes of God of none effect.

What, in the first place, shall we say of those who will not accept religion unless it presents itself to them under a brilliant form, and with the approbation of men, with all that speaks to the senses and imagination? How often have we not heard Roman Catholicism point to the power, antiquity, and outward splendour of the visible Church, as the most evident demonstration of Christianity! To seek truth by such signs as these, is not that walking by sight? Jesus once said to the disciples who stood gazing admiringly at the beauties of the Temple: "See ye not all these things?" What then would He say to those who cannot understand truth if it is not accompanied by a gorgeous ceremonial or an imposing hierarchy? What would He say, in presence of those believers who, when the temporal power of the Church, or her earthly possessions, are threatened, are more deeply stirred than when impiety attacks, not the

walls of the temple, but the altar, not the outward edifice, but the cross, not an earthly sovereign, but Christ Himself? "See ye not all these things?" And we, brethren, can we affirm that we have never been beset by this temptation? Has our faith never been shaken when we have seen the Church feeble, obscure and despised? Have we never desired to see her receiving the homage of the world, the support of distinguished men, the authority of numbers and of public opinion? Are we as faithful to truth when it is contemned as when it enjoys the respect and consideration of men? Well, asking these outward signs is wishing to walk by sight and not by faith. Ye who want such signs, what would you have done in the days of Jesus Christ? To believe, you require the prestige of appearance; where was it at Gethsemane, at Nazareth, in the Prætorium, on Calvary? You want the antiquity of tradition, the authority of men. Where were they when the whole of the Jewish priesthood looked upon Jesus as a blasphemer, and appealed to the law? You want the support of numbers and of public opinion. Would you have found it in the midst of that people who unanimately joined in cursing Jesus, and in crying out: "Crucify, crucify!" You want the approbation of superior minds. What would you have done, had you seen the Sadducees shaking their heads and sneering at the strange spectacle of a pretended king, of a worker of miracles, who, on the cross, had not even the strength to master His anguish? To believe, you must see. What would you have seen on the Mount of Olives, what would you have seen on Golgotha? What would that extraordinary solitude, that unparalleled humiliation, that fearful agony have taught you? No, no, it is not to sight, but to faith that truth is revealed; it is to the eyes of the soul that it has ever manifested itself.

You will readily agree with me, for, since Truth has appeared upon earth crucified and crowned with thorns, man has understood that outward glory is no longer the sign by which it is to be recognised. But we may, in another way, desire to walk by sight and not by faith.

There are Christians who are troubled in their soul because God has ceased to grant striking and undeniable signs of His intervention to the Church. They cannot explain how it is that God seems to have abandoned truth to the ordinary course of human things, how it is that its progress is not marked by continual prodigies. It would be so easy for Him to accomplish miracles! Why does He not display all His power in the support of truth? How many answers might we not give to this desire for miracles, to this want of the superhuman which ferments in the depths of so many souls? We could, first of all, show that miracles alone have never converted the heart, of which we have evident proof in the example of the Galileans who remained in their unbelief in presence of the most surprising wonders, whilst the hearers of St. Paul, without one miracle, are converted by thousands. We could, next, answer that if miracles were absolutely necessary to faith, everybody must witness some; now, this would suppose such a multiplication of prodigies, that, for this very reason, miracles would lose their supernatural character. But, let us set aside these arguments, and refer to the Scriptures. There I see that the more revelation advances, the less God manifests Himself to sight, and the more He reveals Himself to faith.

In the beginning, I see Him conversing with men through the medium of angels, I see constant signs and wonders; a pillar of cloud or of fire marks His presence; the thunder roars on Sinai. In one word, everything

speaks to the sight; but with Jesus Christ, how everything changes! Jesus teaches us that there is a sign which more clearly attests the presence of God than all external miracles, and that this sign is love. When John, the forerunner, the prophet of the old covenant, asks of Christ: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Christ, doubtless, answers by the enumeration of the prodigies He has accomplished: "The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised up;" but He ends with these sublime words: "The poor have the Gospel preached to them." Yes, that is the strongest of proofs, the most decisive of arguments in favour of the presence of the Desire of the nations. Oh, John the Baptist, thou prophet of the old covenant, thou didst expect a glorious Messiah, and thou hast not been able to recognise that His works of love proclaim Him better than miracles or external majesty! If it be so, why should we ask for miracles? It is by faith we must walk and not by sight. No; God will not open the heavens; no, there will be given no sign to this unbelieving generation, no other sign than the sign of the cross, for he whom the cross leaves insensible, he who passes before it unsubdued, he who sees not in it the presence and the infinite mercy of God, he would not be moved though a dead man should rise from the grave and stand before him. And ye who already believe, do not ask God for those visible signs of His intervention, for that would be as much as to say that a miracle attests the presence of God more clearly than the most striking proof He has ever given of His wondrous love; that would be as much as to say that, for you, there is something more convincing, more decisive than the astonishing sacrifice of Calvary, than the abyss of love over whose brink angels stoop wonderingly, because, in the splendours of heaven, in the abode of infinite

glory, they have never beheld anything so grand or so sublime !

Another way of walking by sight and not by faith is to wait, ere we believe, until Christianity has justified itself on every point in the eyes of reason. But, in that case, there would be no more need for faith, its place would be taken by evidence. Now God, who is unwilling to overcharge men with the evidence of miracles, is unwilling also to overpower them by the evidence of logical proofs ; all these proofs speak to the sight, and God wishes to be laid hold of by faith. You will never find a demonstration of Christianity which will exempt men from that impulse of the heart and of the whole being which is called faith. Miracles speak to the senses, arguments speak to the intellect, but God wishes to lay hold of our moral being,—that is, of what in us is grandest and best, He would have us give ourselves freely to Him by faith. That is why I feel no sorrow at the imperfection and incompleteness of even the best of theological systems. That which no human system can embrace, that which no formula will ever be able to contain, is the Divine, the infinite, the mysterious. But how joyfully faith soars towards it, how deeply it feels its need of what governs and surpasses it, how freely it breathes in that heavenly atmosphere ! What then shall we think of those who would reduce religion to the level of human intelligence, and deprive it of all which is above our comprehension ? As well might we look for a dawn without mystery, for a sky without infinite depths. But a religion thus measured will remain what it is, a work of men ; it will never captivate the soul, it will never inspire it with anything that reaches beyond the limited horizon of worldly morality ; it will never produce believers or apostles, for these were men who walked by faith and not by sight.

Again, we substitute sight for faith when we ask of God to mark His intervention in our life by continual deliverances, by immediate answers to our prayers. One of the many things by which Christians are often troubled is the fact that their prayers remain unanswered. If God permits this, we may rest assured that He has good reasons which we cannot understand, and, doubtless, one of these reasons is that He wishes us to walk by faith and not by sight. Imagine a life in which prayer would always be followed by immediate deliverance. What would such a life be, and who would not long to be a Christian at that price? All would become followers of Christ, in the first place, from mere motives of interest, as the Jews who pressed around the Saviour so long as He gave them bread. How many would follow Him from love? Now, it is precisely this mercenary instinct which God wishes to destroy in our souls, for He has an infinite ambition for us. He aims at making us capable of loving Him with a disinterested love. Therefore, while He assures us that each of our prayers is heard, He seldom shows us how He means to grant our requests. Recall to mind the admirable example of the Syrophenician woman. What would she have obtained had she walked by sight only? Sight would have shown her in Jesus Christ a strange coldness, an unfeeling silence—let us be plain, a scornful indifference; and yet, she triumphs over appearances; her faith reaches beyond the countenance of Christ, and what is more striking still, beyond His words, even to His very heart.

The history of the Church likewise shows us that the most glorious triumphs of faith have been won in spite of all appearances; and if we meet a Simeon who, at the close of his career, is permitted to see the accomplishment of the most ardent desire of his life, how many

there are to whom this privilege has been denied, and who have died without receiving the answer to their prayers! Did Jesus Christ Himself, ere He expired upon the cross, see the fruits of the bitter travail of His soul? His dying eyes rested on a cursing multitude, and it was not by sight that He saw the world conquered, the Church established, and heaven opened to the redeemed. Of how many departed saints have we not said, long after they have passed away, "Oh! had they but lived to see this long-desired day!" They have died without seeing it. Without seeing it! and yet they doubted not. Do you not see how grand, how sublime this is, and do you not understand that God is glorified thereby? Pray, then, Christian mother, pray on for the conversion of thy son; pray, whoever thou art, for the soul which God, at this moment, presents to thy love; pray on without ceasing, pray on without doubting, and should subjects of discouragement alone meet thy eyes, remember that we are called to walk by faith and not by sight.

These remarks, which I have applied to prayer, may also be applied to Christian activity. It is a singular but evident fact that those who have laboured most towards the progress of the kingdom of God have been men who had ceased to walk by sight. I have referred to Jesus Christ. Once again, I ask, what did He see in His ministry? What would He have done had He walked by sight? And we, brethren, what shall we do if we still desire to see, if we resemble children who, when they have buried a seed in the earth, return every instant to see whether it has not already sprung up? What become of the works undertaken in such a spirit, of the works pursued especially with a view to success? Alas! we have learned it but too well, from many a humiliating experience! No, no, God's blessing rests

only upon those who have enough confidence in His fidelity to trust Him with results, and to say with Luther: "It is Thy work, not mine." We are told that the immortal astronomer, whose penetrating genius discovered the laws of the motions of planets, saw his grand labours despised by his contemporaries. When lying upon his death-bed, and reduced to a state of extreme distress, he was asked by a friend if he did not suffer cruelly at the thought of dying without having seen his discoveries appreciated: "Friend," replied Kepler, "God has waited five thousand years till one of His creatures discovered the admirable laws which He has given to the stars, and cannot I also wait till justice be done to me?" Treasure up these words, ye who work the works of God. Act, if need be, without seeing a result, speak without being heard, love without being understood, cast your bread upon the waters, and, to win the world over to the cause of truth, walk by faith and not by sight.

There is a last lesson which may be drawn from these words. They are wrong who attempt to describe beforehand the path which the Christian is to follow. The Christian life is like an immense region which thousands of pilgrims have already travelled through; each of them has followed the way which God had traced out for him; some have found it smooth and easy, they have walked beneath a cloudless sky, and joyful hymns have been the sounds which have most often escaped their lips; others have walked through a darkness illumined by no other light than the sinister rays of terrible temptations; others have mournfully pursued their monotonous course through a dull and barren wilderness. And yet these various paths all led to the true fatherland, and no one has a right to say that the road he followed is that which all must tread; for, if this road were known, if it could be described, those who would enter upon it would walk



by sight and not by faith. Let us, therefore, accept all unforeseen circumstances; let us expect that God will destroy our plans and disappoint our hopes, and whether He sends joy or sorrow, let us walk by faith, allowing Him to lead us on. If He sends us happiness, let us enjoy it without misgiving, for happiness is a mighty power; if He sends trial, let us accept it also; but in joy as well as in sorrow, let us walk by faith. Alas! need I say that we will more probably meet with trial than with pleasure? If happiness could sanctify us, God would surely not refuse it; but does it sanctify us sufficiently, does it make us meet for the invisible world? Doubtless, when by a luminous break in the cloudy sky, prosperity descends like a divine ray on a peaceful hearth, on a united family, on beloved children, the soul of the Christian, the grateful soul easily rises from the earth which the smile of God illumines to God Himself. But how often also is it not satisfied with remaining here below! How often is it satisfied with seeking God on the earth which He enlightens with His smile! How often does it cast off faith to walk by sight only! Then the wind of trial rises, it sweeps away, it scatters that joyous home, those cherished beings. The soul seeks them upon earth where it would still see them. Alas! it finds them no more, and, earth failing it, it must needs soar heavenward. Thus faith takes the place of sight, the invisible world is enriched with the spoils of earth; the more desolate the latter grows, the more attractive heaven becomes.

This explains to us how it is that trials often burst with incredible fury against those who seemed to us to be the most holy. Formerly, perhaps, God had led them by sight; He had manifested His presence to them by evident proofs of His fatherly goodness. Thus their piety had grown, protected as it was against all rude

trials ; but that time is over. All these visible signs of Divine intervention have disappeared ; all that was pleasant to sight is withdrawn. The stronger their Christian life becomes, the more severe and joyless it appears.

When travellers undertake to climb the Alps, they first traverse deep valleys which are sheltered by the mountain from the cold blasts of the north wind ; there the air is pure and loaded with fragrance, the waters are of an unequalled transparency, and the trees are covered with sweet and luscious fruits ; in these lovely spots are many peaceful and charming retreats where it might be supposed that life must of necessity glide on in unbroken solitude and rest. As they ascend, the scenery changes ; it becomes at once grander and more austere ; here are the dark pine forests in which the howlings of the wind are oft followed by the distant noise of the avalanche ; there the deep passes and the fearful precipices ; the sky has lost its variegated tints, the air is keener, but the horizon widens. The higher they climb, the sterner becomes nature ; soon flowers, verdure, perfume, everything has disappeared ; nothing is left but a gloomy pall of snow and ice ; and, on the highest summits, all would speak of death if there were not in that wonderful silence, in that vast and boundless sky, something which tells of infinity and eternity. I have often thought this a suitable figure of human life. It is a journeying from south to north, from summer to winter ; below are visible blessings, the trusting heart which blossoms beneath the cheerful light of reciprocal love ; below, the dreams of hardy youth ; further on, the serious conflicts of maturer years ; higher on still, alas ! the heart would find nought but fields of ice, unfulfilled promises, broken affections, if faith opened not to our weary soul the unlimited horizons of the heavenly land.

It will not always be so; God does not act in the same manner towards all; He does not require of all the same outward sacrifices; He even grants to some of His children, down to their very old age, an existence continually enriched with renewed treasures and affections. But even those are subjected in some other way to His stern discipline; to them also He teaches that they must walk by faith and not by sight.

Let us, therefore, accept this education, let us bow with adoration beneath that paternal discipline which prepares us for eternity. Reflect that all believers have come under it, and that it has been especially reserved for those whom God has made the instruments of His grandest designs. As for me, I know of no more beautiful spectacle than that of a life in which the realities of the invisible world are continually and unflinchingly opposed to the realities of the visible. Here is a man, who, sustained by his faith, has undertaken a special work; he has constituted himself the champion of some neglected truth; he has resolved upon boldly attacking some prevailing iniquity, and, like us all, he hoped that his efforts would be attended with success. But success has not come; on the contrary, the more he advances the more hopeless his cause appears; numberless obstacles and difficulties spring up; painful humiliations follow; he is left alone, no man will stand by him; slighting words are uttered against him, then cruel and bitter taunts. Here and there some who would be called his friends advise him to put an end to his fruitless struggles. All in vain. That man whose name has been, now Isaiah, now Jeremiah, now St. Paul, that man walks by faith; he walks to the end; he dies, treated as a fool by human wisdom till the day when all see what he alone had believed, and when the folly of the past becomes the wisdom of the future.

I will not conclude without setting forth the contrast contained in my text. We are placed in presence of two classes of men, some who walk by sight, others who walk by faith. In the opinion of the worldling, the former alone are reasonable, the former alone have chosen the good part. The good part? Is it true? Ah! is it indeed such a happy world, that which sight reveals to us? To deem it such we must be anxious not to see. But ask those who are sharp-sighted what they discover daily in the world which at first had dazzled them. Ask them what they would often give to be permitted not to see. Alas! they are compelled to see, and the more practised is their vision, the sadder are the discoveries they make every day. They see the motives from which men act; they see the means which most surely lead to success. Under the imposing appearances which arrest the crowd, they recognise the calculating skill, the selfishness which coldly pursues its aim. Under the flowing and eager words of the world-wise, they discover a callousness of heart which appals them; under a brilliant and easy converse, they perceive calumny at work, their eye penetrates through the whited sepulchres and gazes upon the corruption they conceal. Their desire has been to walk by sight alone, and in all they meet they see too much to be happy; the nobler their soul is, the greater need their heart has of love, the more they suffer; and even where no cruel deception wounds them, they see death approaching; death, and nothing more, for sight cannot discover anything beyond—death with its cold mystery, death with its eternal silence. Is that the good part, and is it worth our while to seek it, and sacrifice our soul to it?

But you will object that the Christian, too, sees all these things. Yes, doubtless he does see them, more

clearly, perhaps, than the worldly man, for his purified vision is better able to discern evil, and his heart made for love suffers still more from selfishness. All these things he sees, but beyond the world of sight he has the world of faith. There he finds and more and more fully comprehends what he had vainly sought in the visible world. He finds truth there, truth divested of all the narrowness and party-spirit which mingled with it here below. He finds holiness there, no longer in appearance, but in reality, unmingled with pride or pharisaism. He finds justice there, full, entire, without respect of persons, and he knows that it will have its day. He finds love there, love for which his heart thirsted, and which he had so often seen allied with misery upon earth; love—he finds it in God, pure, infinite, unalloyed, he finds it in all those with whom he is united in God; he quenches his thirst at this deep and inexhaustible fountain; the more he advances the more sensible and evident these realities become, the more they appear as the only realities worthy of being loved and pursued, worthy of being lived for.

Will you say that he is mistaken, that he is pursuing a vain dream in which his imagination wanders? Will you say that he is mistaken? I appeal to all the departed saints who have walked by faith. I appeal to their dying eyes already lit up by the beams of the eternal morning. I appeal to the words of firm assurance and of triumph which they uttered with their latest breath. Have you ever heard of a man who, on his death-bed, regretted he had walked by faith? Have you ever heard of one who, in that solemn hour, declared that his hope had been deceived? Question all those who have believed in God, from the righteous men of the old covenant to St. Paul, from St. Paul to those who left us but yesterday, and whose last words we have

treasured up in our hearts; once again I ask, which of them regretted that he had pursued the invisible realities, that he had lived for eternity? Again and again have we seen men who had lived only by sight bitterly repenting, in their last hour, that they had followed mere phantoms which now escape their grasp. We have seen men to whom the world had given all it can bestow, exclaim that all is vanity. We have seen a great minister, loaded with honour, when informed on his death-bed that Louis XIV. was about to visit him, answer with these fearful words: "Go and tell that man to let me alone, for if I had done for God all I have done for him, I would not now be afraid to face eternity." Yes, in that supreme hour when illusion is an impossibility, it has a thousand times occurred that all which the world called realities has been found to be mere phantoms; it has a thousand times occurred that human glory, fortune, pleasure have vanished like a fleeting cloud behind which eternity has unfolded itself in its frightful solemnity. But that which has never been seen, that which will never be seen, is a Christian declaring on his death-bed that his God has deceived him!

Courage, then, brethren! The future, for you, is assurance, rest, joy, love. The present is passing away with its vanities, its sorrows and its tears. Courage! and let us walk on towards the future by faith and not by sight!

## V.

*O B E D I E N C E.*

“As obedient children.”—I PETER i. 14.

IN my text, the apostle lays down as a principle that it is the duty of Christians to obey, and he defines this obedience by a simple and happy expression, calling it the obedience of children. Let us take up these two thoughts, and study, in the first place, the motives of Christian obedience; secondly, its nature; and, finally, its influence upon our life.

Why must we obey? I might answer: First of all, because obedience is the universal law, the divinely-appointed law, the law which none of God's creatures can escape. My reason tells me that a created and dependent being must serve its creator, and my experience convinces me that every earthly being, without one exception, is formed for obedience. Seek throughout the world one being that comes not under this law. In material creation you will not find a single atom which is not, at every instant of its existence, governed by a general law; if it were not so, the world would be a mere chaos. Likewise in human society; if this society subsists, it is owing to a marvellous concourse of particular obediences which all contribute to the harmony of the whole. All these things: force, necessity, instinct,

interest, civil law, honour, ambition, moral law, are as many motives (why not say as many masters?) to which all beings obey. At the lowest step of the social ladder, men obey; need I demonstrate this assertion? At the summit, men obey still. The higher we rise, the greater is the weight of responsibility which we draw upon ourselves; and what is a responsible being but a being that obeys?

This law of obedience is so thoroughly divine that none can escape it. Here is a man who flatters himself he will shake off the yoke. Duty weighs heavily upon him; the very thought that he stands under an obligation to some one is distasteful to him; intoxicated with the idea of independence, he longs to leave the beaten track, to be his own master, to do his own will. He believes himself free, and he does not know that he is perhaps the slave of that public opinion which he seems to defy, and that he affects to oppose it only that he may be brought under its notice. Let us, however, suppose that he succeeds in shaking off the yoke. Let us follow him, this man who declares himself freed from the necessity of duty, and who proclaims his independence so loudly. Alas! no sooner has he walked a few steps in his way than a passion appears and says to him: "Follow me!" and he follows it; "degrade thyself!" and he degrades himself, and, when it has led him whither he would not go, when it has crushed his energies and paralysed his will, this man one day discovers that he is a mere slave, and that he has only exchanged the willing obedience to duty for the most servile abjection.

No, the Divine laws cannot be disregarded. Sooner or later they are avenged on whoever forgets them. Now, when God created us He bid us obey. To Him directly should all obedience be paid, and then harmony would reign everywhere. By sin, man has marred



this harmony, he has denied his God, but it does not necessarily follow that he escapes the necessity of obedience; he changes masters, that is all. Some, who well-nigh resemble the brute, obey mere necessity or instinct; hunger and thirst bid them "Work!" and they work; might bids them "Submit to order!" and they submit. Others, superior to the former, obey public opinion; they perform this action or that, because in the judgment of men it must be performed. This religion which, under its most common form, is the most contemptible thing in the world, may rise to the brilliant worship of honour. Above these we find the slaves of duty, but duty is incomprehensible without a God who commands and compels; for such, therefore, duty becomes a magnificent brazen idol resting upon a pedestal of clay. Finally, at the highest stage of the moral world, we find the soul that obeys the impulses of charity; but what is charity if it proceeds not from a loving God? The Christian alone directly obeys Him who is truth, right, and love. Such, brethren, is your privilege; you are no longer the slaves of passions, idols, or lifeless abstractions, but the servants of God; you alone, I dare affirm, attain the true end of existence, for you alone realise the purpose which the Creator had in view when He placed you here below. God wanted a being superior to the rest of the material creation. There were beings enough who obeyed him fatally; He wanted one who would freely respond to His love, who would freely accomplish His will. Now, what constitutes the greatness of the Christian is that he realises this intention of His Creator. That is why the Christian soul is greater than worlds. Worlds! God takes and scatters them like dust in the immensity of the heavens! They fatally obey fatal laws; but the Christian soul freely obeys the God it loves. When I say that you

are born to obey, I bring before you your vocation in its grandest and most glorious character. Oh, that this thought might take full possession of the soul of the humblest Christian in this assembly! Oh, that I might make him understand that, in accomplishing his task, however small, ungrateful, and insignificant it be, but in accomplishing it for God, he understands life in its truest and most elevated sense. True, brother, in this vast *ensemble* of creation which is like the palace of the Lord, your place is, of all, the most obscure and lowly, and the thought sometimes rises in your mind: "How doth God know me?" Yes, He knows you better than the great and the noble who fill the earth with the noise of their fame, but who in reality labour for vanity, because God is not the object of their life. He knows and loves you; He approves and encourages your struggles, your efforts, your sacrifices. Oh, you are indeed blessed, for you obey the best of masters, Him who is greater than the world, greater than the lords of the earth!

But that is not the only motive of your obedience. You are a Christian, and what are Christians but the redeemed of Jesus Christ? Take this word redeemed in its simplest, and at the same time most solemn and touching sense. God has redeemed you. You were guilty, condemned, separated from God, but you believe that, to snatch you from this fearful destiny, a wondrous act of love and sacrifice was accomplished for you eighteen centuries ago. You believe, that for you the Son of the Most High was made flesh, and that for you He became acquainted with all the infirmities and sorrows of mankind; yea, even with the anguish of condemnation and of the Father's desertion. You believe that you have been the objects of that love and of that sacrifice, and that the blood of Jesus has flowed to

make you clean. Well, you who are the redeemed of Christ, you are no longer your own; you have become the property of God Himself, by a contract which the eternal Son has signed with His blood. Let those who pretend that the cursed tree tells only of pardon without obedience pass on to their everlasting condemnation; for, whoever draws near to it with a troubled conscience discovers in it a holier, more spiritual, more perfect, more ineffaceable law than that which the hand of the Almighty had graven upon the marble of Sinai. Everything in the Gospel tells of obedience. "Obey," says conscience. "Obey," repeats that strange spectacle of the Son of God made flesh, suffering and learning obedience by the things which He suffered. "Obey," exclaims the Holy Victim agonising on the cross. "Obey," cries the blood which flows from His innocent brow and waters the earth. "Obey," says, in its turn, the patient and longsuffering mercy of a God who has borne with the sinner so long. Brethren, if obedience is not to be learned at the foot of the cross, why then have you gone thither? What is a faith which consists merely in words? Oh, fearful thought! The Gospel tells us, "Believe and thou shalt be saved." We may believe and yet be lost!

We must, therefore, obey. How must we obey? This is the second thought suggested by our text.

There are three, and only three, motives for obedience—men obey from interest, from fear, or from love. There is the obedience of the hireling, of the slave, and of the child. You know which of these the apostle expects of us; nevertheless, I must not forget the two others, for hirelings and slaves are to be found everywhere, and who knows but there may be some in this very assembly?

The obedience of the hireling, who serves God in

the hope of obtaining a reward, has often been mistaken for Christian obedience. And yet, what a difference there is between the mercenary spirit and the spirit of the Gospel! Here is a man whose life is a subject of wonder; he has renounced everything, even the most innocent pleasures, the most intimate joys; he has imposed upon himself a most miserable existence; he mortifies his body and continually adds suffering to suffering. You exclaim, "What holiness!" But as I draw near I discover that in this soul there is not one spark of true love, I perceive that this man has reasoned after this manner: "To gain heaven I must suffer and live a deserving life here below. I am willing therefore to suffer in time that I may be happy in eternity." Think you that such a man is meet for the kingdom of heaven? No, no! heaven is not to be bought with money or merits. Heaven is the portion of loving souls. What would it avail a man to perform the most extraordinary actions or the greatest austerities, or even to cast his fortune to the poor, to give up his body to be burned, if his heart loves not? What a wretched spectacle, for instance, is that of a soul which has wasted its powers in worldliness, which is incapable of loving God, but capable still of trembling before Him, of a soul which endeavours to atone by tardy sacrifices for forty or fifty years' disobedience, heaping work upon work, practising the most minute acts of the most superstitious devotion, marching on to meet a God whom it cannot love, and trying to gain heaven while it bears its own condemnation within itself. No, let us not be afraid to say it, the kingdom of heaven is not for hirelings; God rejects an obedience whose secret and supreme end is interest. To obey merely in the hope of being saved is the surest way of being lost, for this is

like sheltering one's selfishness in the very bosom of God.

You believe yourselves very far from a similar temptation. Redeemed by Christ Jesus, expecting your salvation from the grace of God and not from your works, the thought has never entered your mind that you could pay your entrance into heaven, and your astonishment would be extreme should any one tell you that in your heart there are still left some traces of the mercenary spirit. Alas! I have seen others, who, like you, would have exclaimed against such a thought as this; but suddenly affliction has burst upon their life, the blows of trial have followed one another unremittingly. What then have we seen in those hearts which had seemed to us to belong wholly to God? what have we heard from those lips which, heretofore, had been so ready to sing His love? Ah! if we have not heard cries of open rebellion, have we not heard murmurs, or at least bitter confessions of discouragement, weariness, and languor? "Is that how Thou rewardest us?" Such, in reality, were the words which these irritated hearts addressed to the Lord. "Is that how Thou acknowledgest our love and zeal?" Well! whence proceeded those murmurs but from mistaken calculations? These supposed servants of God were willing to serve Him, but on the condition that they would be happy, like the Jews who followed Christ that they might be fed. And now, because happiness has disappeared, they are angry, they rebel, they will not forgive God. If this be not the mercenary spirit, by what name will you call it? How will you style that interested hope of a servant who, in the fulfilment of duty, looks, first of all, for reward? Alas! that same spirit permeates all professions of faith; it creeps in the midst of the

churches in which mercy is most faithfully preached ; it glides like a serpent into the innermost recesses of the heart. Let each of us, therefore, examine himself, and ask himself if he has not harboured it in his own breast.

But if the Christian does not obey for the sake of reward, we are not, however, to suppose that Christian obedience is left unrewarded ; the Gospel proclaims this too plainly that we should doubt it. I know that there is no lack of stern spiritualists who would have the idea of happiness absolutely separated from that of fidelity, so that the latter might bear a grander and more austere character. Not so thinks He who knoweth our frame ; Jesus never exhorts us to sacrifice without, at the same time, holding out to us a compensation, and all His instructions on this point may be summed up in these opening words of the Sermon on the Mount : “ Blessed are they that mourn.” “ They that mourn ”—that is the sacrifice ; “ blessed ”—that is the reward. Yes, with the faithful God there are compensations for all sorrows, and while waiting for the grand day of final reparation, we may already here below find many joys, silent but profound as the love of God. If you have not felt these, it is because you have not sufficiently obeyed. Go and ask what they are, not of those Christians whose happy existence has never felt the scorching blaze of affliction, but ask it of those whose life, again and again broken and crushed, seems to have been the toy of a merciless fatality. Those will best be able to tell you that obedience always bears with it its own reward, and that, according to the triumphant expression of St. Paul, we may be glad with exceeding joy even in the midst of the greatest suffering !

God will not be served by hirelings, neither will He be served by slaves. An obedience inspired by terror,

a passive, uninspired, and loveless obedience has no value in His sight.

Servile obedience! How easy it would be for God to obtain it! For this, it were enough to open the heavens, to let loose the thunders of His wrath, to crush the rebels by the irresistible evidence of prodigy, to overthrow them by terror. Who, then, could resist Him still? What creature would be foolish enough to enter into open war with the Almighty, when one word of His mouth might plunge him into everlasting woe? God could thus have bowed beneath His yoke all rebellious wills; it has not pleased Him to do so. What is revelation, but the history of the repeated appeals made by God to the willing obedience of His creatures? An ancient poet, in a graceful figure, said that the tempests which convulse the depths of the ocean serve only to form those precious gems which lie beneath the waters. May we not, likewise, affirm that all the plans of Providence, such as they appear to us in the Scriptures, that all God's threatenings, all His chastisements, all the trials He sends have no other aim than to produce that masterpiece of creation, that triumph of Divine love,—souls that freely consecrate themselves to God? What, in fact, is the Gospel, that wondrous mystery of the Son of God humbled, reviled, crucified, but the most solemn and touching appeal to our liberty? Do we not all read on the cross the words which the founder of the Moravian Church discovered there: "This is what I have done for thee; and thou, what hast thou done for me?" Let us not hesitate to affirm that in presence of the cross servile obedience is a derision.

And yet, who has not heard it proclaimed in the name of the Gospel? Who does not know that the ideal of obedience has often been made to consist in that state of passiveness in which man allows himself to

be handled like a corpse by those under whose authority he is placed? Who does not know that the total abdication of the will, of the affections, of conscience even, has been recommended as the crowning point of holiness? Who does not know that mechanical piety whose every stage is marked beforehand, in which the Christian must act, whatever be his inward state, in which, regenerated by a baptism whose vivifying virtue he has never felt, he expects his progress and life from the external influence of sacraments, from the contact of holy objects, or from the fulfilment of minutely observed ceremonies? What miscalculation! What blasphemy! There are men who, in presence of the cross, dare to proclaim the virtues of a consecrated medal, of recited prayers, of beads told over and over again. Why then did the Son of God come upon the earth if a magical operation was sufficient to save souls? Ah! let us never weary of repeating that obedience lies not in those observances. What God demands is a loving heart, and it is not to bring forth slaves that the blood of His Son has flowed upon the cross!

Men speak of the effects of blind obedience. They tell us of the prodigies it has wrought. We certainly do not intend to deny them. Passive obedience is a formidable instrument of success. See what it obtains in war, when, in an instant, and on the signal of one man, it directs upon any given point the irresistible charge of thousands of soldiers. All despots have felt its power, and their loftiest ambition has been to obtain it. Nevertheless, with a profound conviction I say that I tremble when I see a man claiming and obtaining, were it with the best of intentions or in the best of causes, a power which God Himself will not use, for it is not the God of the Gospel who commands a servile or passive obedience, it is not in this that He will be glorified.



You tell me of the mighty power for good which results from a vow of automatic and unreserved obedience ; but have you never thought that such a vow may with the same energy lead to evil, and this without the slightest scruple, since all the responsibility is cast by him who obeys upon the person who commands ? Of those two men who, in the pale light of an evening in the sixteenth century, rise from the confessional with a peaceful brow, a calm heart, and eyes steadily fixed upon the work which awaits them, the one is about to depart, with the martyr's crown already adorning his brow, to bear the crucifix in Japan, and you exclaim : " What heroism ! " but the other will direct his steps towards Holland, there to assassinate William the Silent, and I, I shudder with horror, for, in reality, the latter is as good a man as the former, and, both martyr and murderer have simply obeyed. Let us even suppose that this blind and passive obedience be used only for the noblest of causes, the holiness of the end will not make me forget the fatal and mortal sides of the means ; and when I see that fearful instrument crushing on its passage every spontaneous burst of enthusiasm, every voluntary impulse, all the bloom of the human soul, I curse it as an instrument of death ; no, not even in the service of religious truth is it allowed to break that which is the spring of the soul, and to reduce man to a state of passiveness. What though we often see the forced obedience which rests upon monastic vows, producing works which command our respect and admiration ? the reason is plainly this : under the influence of public opinion, of light, and of liberty, the only domain in which it can still display its powers is that of sacrifice and charity ; here it meets the vital forces of the soul, and, in all noble hearts, it transforms itself into voluntary obedience. But at all times and in all places,

whenever and wherever it has escaped this control, it has become a fatal power which, in its burning zeal to bring the soul beneath the yoke of God, has produced nought but the calm of the wilderness and the peace of the grave.

With the same ardour as we have condemned interested obedience, we now, therefore, reject that which acts under the impulse of terror or of a gloomy passiveness. God, as we have already said, will be served neither by hirelings nor by slaves. Who then, will serve Him? The apostle answers: Children.

Children! How simple yet full of deep meaning is this expression! It sums up most admirably all that is contained in the subject before us: absolute dependence upon God, holy respect and tender love. It reminds us of all the motives we have for submission, and removes whatever of servility or interest might mingle with our obedience. Children of God! This glorious title, this title of nobility, we have once lost it! If we have again entered into possession of it, it is by grace; none but Jesus Christ could have restored it to us, nought but His sacrifice could have made us accept it; consequently this word reminds us of all which is most serious and thrilling in the Gospel. I will not essay to picture what there is of unparalleled holiness and tenderness in this relation between father and child; I long to tell you of the duties it implies; I long to tell you: Oh, ye who call the Lord your father, ye who have cast far away from you the calculations of the hireling and the fears of the slave, ye children of God, how do you obey?

Obey! but before I go any further, I question whether we have understood the full significance of this word. Obedience almost always implies action. Now, to act is only a part of obedience; to suffer is the other, and, for many of our fellow-men, it is the largest; for all it is the most difficult.

It is easy enough to believe that we are serving God when we are actively employed; to walk, to speak, to work, all these are means of obedience. But when we are called to wait, to remain inactive and to suffer, do we not often feel as though our life were being wasted? This is a gross error of our carnal mind which appreciates only that which can be seen and weighed. Has not the inward labour which is being pursued in our soul a far greater value than the quantity of matter which our hands might have moulded, than the distance which our feet might have trod, than the number of words which our lips might have uttered?

We obey God in suffering as well as in action; the Church has need of its sick as well as of its missionaries; its will is as positive when it bids us be silent as when it bids us speak; when it lays us upon a bed of pain as when it orders us to battle.

The Christian's life is often compared in the Scriptures to a holy war. Now, in a pitched battle, all the troops have not the same part to act. If some are sent to the attack of the foe, and are thus enabled to display their valour in the thickest of the fight, there are entire regiments which, for many a long hour, are forced to remain exposed to the deadly fire of the artillery. Motionless, sword in hand, they see the enemy's bullets tracing bloody furrows in their ranks, and at eventide, well-nigh destroyed by this murderous fire, without having struck one blow, if the battle be won, no glorious trophies will they bear away from the field of slaughter, nor will their names be heard amid the enthusiastic acclamations of the multitude. Nevertheless, who would dare to say that their part was an easy one? On the contrary, it was so difficult that the best disciplined and most undaunted troops are always those which are chosen for those inglorious posts. Young men may be expected to

display the enthusiastic ardour and the impetuous daring which are required to charge the foe, but veterans alone possess that calm and firm intrepidity which can coldly and unflinchingly brave an unhonoured death. Thus it is in the battle of life. If God places some in the vanguard, if He calls some to conflicts whose fame is spread far and wide, there are others whom He orders to wait and to suffer in silence and in seeming inactivity ; but they all contribute to the victory, all alike serve the purposes of the Lord. Well, you whom God surely calls to one or other of these tasks, how do you obey ?

Here I will be plain. Obedience is the virtue which Christians practise least in the present day. I do not like those vague generalities by which men pretend to heap upon our age all possible failings and vices. Nevertheless, I will say that, if there be a sense which is daily growing weaker, it is that of obligation. Servility is common enough, we meet it at every turn ; it has become so prevalent that we feel utterly disgusted with it. But free obedience to duty, obedience to the Divine will, that is what we lack. How could it be otherwise in an age when superior and would-be serious minds have dared to affirm that the notion of God has, till now, been the worst obstacle to the full and free development of mankind ?

Such is the current of the times ; now, bring into it some of those souls for which revolt has a mysterious and fascinating attraction, then judge of their temptation ! There are in life terrible hours in which the independence of pride awakens in us with an extraordinary power. At such times, everything in our soul conspires to resist God. Imagination wanders away at random, it pursues its audacious dreams far beyond the limits of reason ; passion springs up like a brute which starts out of its sleep and claims its prey ; the intellect assumes absolute

authority in the solution of all problems, and will aims at being completely self-dependent. Oh! these hours of fearful struggle, who has not known them? Then, from the depths of our pride, against God rise such murmurs as our lips dare not utter. Willingly would we say to Him: "Why hast Thou made of me a Christian? Why hast Thou given me that importunate conscience which leaves me not one moment's rest or peace? Why hast Thou raised in my path that Cross of Calvary upon which my eyes continually fall in the course of my wanderings? Why, when others are carelessly and joyfully walking according to the desires of their heart, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, why hast Thou given me such a full knowledge of the emptiness of all those joys that I can no longer share in them without remorse, and that, even in their very enjoyment, I am beset by the sentiment of their vanity? Oh! the fearful blasphemy of such thoughts! For is it not as though we said to the Almighty, in the anger of our hearts: "Thou cruel God, why hast Thou saved me?"

Oh, ye who have bent over those abysses of pride and have then felt I know not what fearful delight akin to the spell of dizziness; ye who in the innermost depths of your soul have heard that voice of rebellion which the very idea of submission terrifies; come, yes, come, and let us all together go to the God of the Gospel, and ask Him the reasons of that obedience which He requires of us.

Come! But where shall we find Him? At Nazareth, obeying as a servant; in Gethsemane, exclaiming, "Not my will, but Thine;" on Golgotha, draining to the very dregs, and for us alone, the bitter cup of anguish. Sinners, go to Him and plead your cause, if you dare. Complain at having to obey, in presence of a humbled Saviour; complain at having to bear your cross when He is nailed

upon His; complain at having to suffer, when He, obedient even unto death, is compelled to exclaim, as His sole reward: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

But the number of those who are led into open rebellion is comparatively small. Few men dare thus to brave God face to face; most often we find other means of escaping Him. We apparently accept His yoke, we profess to serve Him, but we reserve to ourselves the right of obeying in our own way. The Church is full of Christians who are willing to serve God, but after their own manner, and who sacrifice their nearest duties to imaginary obligations; of Christians who, under cover of the Divine will, accomplish their own designs; we see them often pursuing with a mild but unyielding obstinacy a plan which they have fully determined in their mind; we see them setting aside the observations of their brethren, the indications of events as well as the most evident signs by which God aids our weakness; then we hear them justifying their conduct by alleging the *will of God*;—the will of God! a convenient expression indeed, but so often invoked in justification of all manner of caprices and follies, that it brings a scornful smile to the lips of the worldly. Ah! let us beware lest we profane such words, or use them too freely; let us beware lest we take the counsels of our imagination or the suggestions of our crafty hearts for Divine inspirations; for when we delude ourselves, we give up sacred things to the sneers of the scoffer. What a derisive spectacle is that of a Christian who wears the livery of obedience, and who, in reality, neglects the clearest, most evident, and most natural duties of his vocation! In order to dull his conscience, he redoubles his outward zeal, he pours forth his ardour in loud affirmations, and the name of the Lord comes all the oftener to his lips that His will is the more totally

absent from his heart. Ah! when I see how frequent is this fact, I feel a fearful heart-sinking, for there is something profoundly sad in this manner of deceiving God and of imposing upon Him. Is that the policy of love? Does the heart that truly loves take pleasure in falsehood, and think you that God will be deceived by appearances of fidelity? No; your conscience is the voice of God, and, in such cases, I cannot suppose it will be silent, it must be heard. If you do not hear it, then speak to me no more of obedience, and beware lest you resemble the son in the parable who had said to his father: "I go work in thy vineyard," but whom the father found not there; beware lest the publicans and sinners go into the kingdom of God before you.

There is one more temptation which I would point out to you, and which I believe to be all the more dangerous that it proceeds neither from our pride nor from our natural cunning, and that it seems to beset the most upright and sincere natures in preference to all others. When speaking of servile submission, we have said that obedience must, above all, be spontaneous and inward; that every action which does not proceed from a free impulse of love is worthless in the sight of God. But here is the conclusion we draw from this: When God calls us to obey we wait until an inward impulse moves us, and if it does not come, then we refuse to obey. Let us take examples. God commands us to pray—our heart is cold, we say; my prayer will be useless and formal; and we do not pray. God commands us to read His Word—our heart is dejected, the Bible would tell us nothing, and we do not read. God commands us to bear witness to our faith—our heart no longer feels the Divine realities, our words would not be the true expression of our present impressions, and we do not speak. God commands us to visit the poor and the sick

—our heart is withered, we would bring them nought but fruitless and trivial consolations, and we do not visit them. Such is our temptation, such is the danger to which we are exposed, we who know so well that servile obedience has no value whatever in the eyes of God. I dare affirm that many a Christian life, which appeared to us full of strength and promise, has been shattered upon this reef.

Ah! doubtless our heart should always be prepared to do the Divine will lovingly and joyfully; but you know full well that this is not always the case. What is to be done in those painful hours? Are we to remain inactive? God forbid! At such times we must obey—obey with humility, obey without passion, without enthusiasm, without zeal, alas! but still we must obey! What! some may object, is not this passive obedience at once useless and derisive? No; if it be sincere it shall still be accepted; that will, spiritless though it be, is none the less a proof of the truth that our life is directed towards God. There are on the ocean days when not a breath of wind comes to swell the sails, or so much as produce one ripple on the surface of the waters; ships are compelled to remain motionless, and yet, from the direction in which their prow is turned, you may see whether they were returning to their native shores or whether they were bound for distant and unknown lands. Likewise, on the ocean of the Christian life, there are days when not a breath from heaven is felt in our souls; nevertheless they must continually be turned towards God, towards obedience, in order that, as soon as the wind will arise, it may speed us in that direction. It is foolish to take the impulses of the heart as the rule of life; our rule is duty, and duty always lies before us. Do you know what are the consequences of this fatal tendency? Our Christian life comes under the influence of all transitory



influences, be they good or evil; discipline being absent from it, it lacks both strength and consistency also; in every sphere of our activity we are subject to the fluctuations of ardour and discouragement; to-day all is zeal, our churches are full to overflowing, our works grow interesting, our gifts are multiplied, our poor are loved and cared for; to-morrow the glad tidings of the Gospel will be proclaimed in deserted sanctuaries, our works will be left to suffer, our poor will be neglected. Let us not be mistaken. Nothing can be done without rule. It is with Christian life as with a gushing stream—enclose it in a deep and narrow bed, and it will bear life and fecundity far and wide, it will set the most powerful machinery in motion. Allow it, on the contrary, to wander in the sands; it will soon disappear or be transformed into a fetid marsh.

We are, therefore, to obey at all times; in the day of trial as well as in the day of blessing, with tears if we cannot do so with joy, with a failing heart if ardour and enthusiasm are wanting. And who can tell but this obedience, passive and joyless in the first instance, will not soon be transformed into a cheerful accomplishment of His will? If love is the source of obedience, may we not also say that obedience is the source of love, and that we become attached to God by reason of the sacrifices we have made for Him? Experience attests this. How often have we begun painfully and with secret repugnance a sacrifice which we have achieved with tears of gratitude! How often have we fallen upon our knees, repeating words which called forth no sincere amen from our hearts; these hearts were harder than the rock, and yet, as under the blows of the prophet's rod, the waters have gushed forth, and we have risen comforted! How often have we bent our steps slowly, with a divided heart, towards the dwelling of the poor and the sick,

looking perhaps for the first obstacle which might turn us away from our path, and yet we have been given strength enough to raise his drooping heart and to show him a proof of the sympathy which he sadly needed! How often, ye preachers of the Gospel, have you entered your pulpits, wondering whence you would bring forth light, you who were then passing under a dark cloud; whence you would draw forth love when your own heart was so cold, and, behold! light and grace have descended, and you have been able to bless God that your words had stirred souls and had not returned unto Him void. How often, my brother, when assailed by a sudden temptation which found you, not only disarmed, but disposed to go over to the enemy, have you fled, but with a bowed head, bearing with you the shame and remorse of a crime, the consummation of which hung merely upon a moment of hesitation and weakness; and yet, ere you had gone far, you have felt that your feet were firm upon the rock, and you have been enabled to look with disgust upon that sin which but a moment ago had seemed so full of attraction. —Such are the fruits of obedience, the fruits which it brings forth under the blessing of God!

One word more—one word to those who do not possess truth, but are still seeking it. If they ask me what are the means of obtaining faith, or of strengthening it when once possessed, I will not hesitate to answer, Obey! Obey the call of duty, and its voice, cold and stern at first, will speak to you in accents ever more tender and persuasive; it will become truly living, and you will recognise in it the voice of God. An eloquent writer, the unhappy child of an unbelieving age, and who knew from a painful experience the influence of actions upon faith, Rousseau, wrote these beautiful words, “If thou wouldst believe in God, live in such a way that thou mayest ever need His existence.” These words, so profoundly true,

were but the echo of this declaration of Christ, "If any man will do the will of God, he will know that My doctrine is divine." You, therefore, who still doubt and hesitate, obey and you will believe; obey, first of all, the moral teaching of Christ, the holiness of which your conscience affirms, and you will believe in Christ. Obey truth, and truth will enlighten you. Until then you will discuss in vain, ever seeking but finding never, causing the needle of the balance in which you are weighing your objections to oscillate according to your fleeting impressions, and ignoring that this balance will incline on the side of a positive faith only on the day when you will have cast in the full weight of your obedience. Live in such a way that you may always need to believe that justice, holiness, and the love of God are realities, and you will always believe in them; the greater the sacrifices you will make for truth, the dearer will truth be to you. Give up for it the factitious splendour of lying vanities, and your eyes being opened, they will see it shine with a pure and serene light which will enchant them more and more. Give up for it all the coarse pleasures of the flesh, the evil joys of pride, the delightful illusions of self-love, and you will find in it compensations which you have never dreamed of. O Divine truth! thou hidest thyself from the proud reason which seeks in Thee mere food for its curiosity—for it Thou wilt ever remain an impenetrable mystery—but to those who will hear Thy voice only that they may follow it, to those who call Thee only that they may obey Thee, to those Thou revealest Thyself ever grander, more sublime, more adorable, and all the sacrifices which Thou requirest of them are nothing in comparison with the pure, profound, and infinite joy with which Thou fillest their heart!

## VI.

*THE CHRISTIAN'S SOLITUDE.*

“Ye shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”—JOHN xvi. 32.

THERE are two kinds of solitude: the outward and the inward. When no one sees, touches, or hears us, we say that we are alone; but this is not always true loneliness. He does not feel alone, the fisherman who spends night after night upon the waters of the vast ocean; if he hears no sound save the monotonous roar of the winds and waves, if no human voice strikes his ear, he thinks of his family comfortably sheltered, of his children sleeping peacefully; it is for them he toils, love for them fills his heart; he is not lonely. He does not feel alone, the soldier who watches, ready armed, during the silent hours of night, in some remote outpost; for he feels that upon him rest the honour of his standard and the safety of his comrades. She does not feel alone, the needlewoman, who, in her attic, by the light of her small lamp, plies her untiring needle with a feverish hand, for the work she hopes to finish before the dawn will procure to-morrow's bread for those she loves. No, they who love and feel themselves loved are never alone.

On the other hand, one may be surrounded by the noisiest and busiest multitude, and yet in the midst of

the throng feel more solitary than in a wilderness. There are beings whose contact awakens no chord of sympathy in our soul; their hand presses ours, but that indifferent grasp touches no secret spring in our heart; we meet their looks, but though they may be animated by a smile of politeness, no sincere or profound affection shines in them. We have all felt at certain times this inward loneliness in the midst of the crowd; there have been days when, returning from the quiet churchyard where we have buried a part of our heart and life, the noise and bustle of the world have seemed to us empty, glacial, and derisive. We may be sure that all have experienced this shudder of the heart which feels itself alone; it sometimes passes over the most worldly and most dissipated souls, over those which are wholly given to vanity; and if we could look into the intimate life of one of those apparently frivolous beings who seem to be utterly absorbed by passing events, we would often discover there a coldness of heart, a moral solitude which would appal us.

Of these two solitudes, the one visible, the other invisible, I need not say which is the hardest to bear. The solitude of the heart is the most terrible of all solitudes. To feel lost in this vast universe, knowing full well that we have none to love us, none to take the least interest in our welfare, can you conceive of a more wretched condition than this? We must admit, however, that there is a class of people who would submit with a very good grace indeed to this state of things. To be alone is not a misfortune for the selfish. On the contrary, a solitary greatness is singularly attractive for them. To have nothing in common with others, to climb a summit which is inaccessible to men, to sit there in their pride, is a most enticing destiny. Doubtless, such men will get on more rapidly in the world than their

fellows, no ties of affection will retard their progress. They will resolutely pursue their end, be it wealth or fame, crushing under their feet both rivals and friends, setting aside gratitude as well as hate,—in a word, whatever impedes their course, whatever threatens to delay them for one moment. Like the surgeon who performs the most horrible operations without a shudder, they will at any cost and by all possible means make their way here below, and if they succeed the world will say of them, "What great men!" Great, indeed? Ah! this greatness is truly the greatness of egotism, the greatness of Satan!

But the Gospel brings before us, in Jesus Christ, a greatness of another order. His is a greatness which does not trample sympathy under foot; on the contrary, it claims it, it needs it. Behold the scene of Gethsemane; see the Son of Man returning thrice to His disciples and requesting them to watch with Him. Ah! how mean is the solitary pride of the egotist in comparison with that greatness! Well, it is precisely because Jesus was Love itself that His words have a more profound and a more sorrowful significance: "Ye shall leave Me alone." We shall, in the first place, seek the causes of Christ's loneliness; secondly, we shall consider what are the consolations He finds in it, and which He sums up in the words, "I am not alone; the Father is with Me."

When a man aims at serving truth or justice here below, he must expect to be left alone, sooner or later. He will, perhaps, meet with sympathy on certain days, but it will not be in the hottest of the fight nor in his greatest need. Truth has always been despised at its origin; it has ever been a subject of shame and suffering for its first apostles. This fact, which is confirmed by universal experience, has been especially realised as regards religious truth. Religious truth, by the very fact that it

is holy, clashes with all our instincts, unveils all our miseries, brings to light whatever is most hideous and guilty in our hearts; it humbles and wounds our pride, and it may therefore expect to see all the human passions allied against it to the end of time. There are hours when its triumph seems certain, but, as the heart of man is always the same, amongst the apparent worshippers who surround it, we are soon made aware of the fact that the same hostile inclinations, the same repugnance, the same hatred of its authority, still exist towards it. No wonder, then, that when I read the history of all those who have been the witnesses of eternal justice upon earth, I see them all, at certain times, solitary, misunderstood, and despised. He was alone, Moses, when in Egypt; during forty years he mourned in the midst of his enslaved brethren; he was alone when he led them through the wilderness towards their glorious destinies. He was alone, Elijah, in the days of Ahab and Jezebel, when in his sorrow he exclaimed, "The children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant; they have slain Thy prophets; and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life." He was alone, Isaiah, when, in the bitterness of his heart, he said, "Who hath believed our report?" He was alone, John the Baptist, in his dungeon; alone when, in the darkness of a fatal night, an executioner cut off his head for the amusement of the king's revels. He was alone, St. Paul, when, in his prison at Rome, he wrote these heartrending words on his last page, "All have forsaken me!" Yes, in after time, no doubt, men have raised magnificent tombs to the memory of those great prophets of truth, they have surrounded their names with a halo of glory, they have boastingly affirmed that they accepted their heritage; but in the day of trial these heroes had been left alone.

Now, picture to yourselves, no longer sinful men such

as Moses, Elijah, or Paul; picture to yourselves the Holy One and the Just, He whose name is Truth, and beforehand you may be sure that He will be solitary in the midst of men. He is alone when He seeks the glory of God in the midst of the nation that forget Him, when He proclaims His spiritual law in the midst of a pharisaical nation, when He denounces iniquity and hypocrisy in the midst of a multitude whom the priests and scribes hold under subjection, He is alone in the midst of His enemies — alone, alas! in the midst of His disciples themselves, for they cannot comprehend His Divine mission, they never fully understand His instructions, their dreams are all of their Master's earthly glory, and their wholly human sympathy would turn Him from the painful path and the bloody sacrifice for which He has come. He is alone; He who needs so much love is reduced to ask, and to ask in vain, for a little sympathy on the part of His apostles; in the supreme hour, in the hour when His human nature falters, in the hour of His bloody sweat, not a word of encouragement does He hear, and His dying looks fall upon His disciples fleeing in the midst of a crowd whose fearful cries of irony and malediction rise to His very cross!

Such was the loneliness of Christ. Now, what happens to the Chief must of necessity happen to His disciples. He is the head, we are the body. If we are truly His, if we follow in His footsteps, if we live His life, if like Him we seek the glory of God, we may expect to be treated as He was. Christians, do not be surprised if this painful trial comes to you; do not be surprised if you often feel alone upon earth.

Here, however, I must warn you of a danger; I must point out to you a wrong path in which too many souls have wandered.

There is a solitude in which we may find ourselves



confined, but of which we alone have been the authors. We may shut ourselves up in our own ideas, in a narrow intellectual horizon, in an eccentric character; we may surround ourselves with indifference, pride, or selfishness, raise between ourselves and our fellows a wall of separation, and then bewail our solitude. Excessive grief may lead to this temptation. Under the plea that we suffer woes which none can understand, we may take refuge in a selfish sorrow, think only of our distress, and forget that we have brethren. Does this loneliness resemble that of Jesus Christ? God forbid that we should entertain such a thought! The loneliness of Christ was due to the fact that He sought the glory of God; that which I condemn is due, on the contrary, to the fact that we seek our own satisfaction; between the two there is consequently a great gulf. Let us beware lest we confound them; let us especially beware lest, in the name of the Gospel, we justify an isolation which may simply be the result of the faults of our character, of our asperity, of our odd temper, or of our pride.

It is none the less true, however, that the most loving, the most gentle, the most charitable Christian must expect, if he would be like his Master, to share the loneliness of Jesus. On the day when he has taken the firm determination of following the Lord, a separation of thoughts and affections has taken place between the world and himself, and he has been left alone. How can the Christian seek the glory of God and not feel isolated in the midst of a world in which this glory is despised? How can he live for eternity and not feel isolated in the midst of a world whose preoccupations all bear upon the things which are visible, earthly, and transitory? How can he love that which is holy and not feel isolated in the midst of so many hearts which sin carries away and satisfies? How can he labour

towards the progress of the reign of God and not feel isolated in the midst of the multitude who seek nought but their own advancement, their own glory, or their own fortune? This inward loneliness is, therefore, promised us, and we find it even in the very bosom of the Church, for even there we are not always sure of meeting with sympathy; there also we encounter worldliness, coldness of heart, narrow-mindedness, or indifference. Alas! the scene of Gethsemane has its counterpart in every age; the faithful Christian who suffers to the end for his Master often turns in vain towards his sleeping brethren, and finding none who understand him, he is forced to re-echo these words of Jesus, "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

This inevitable loneliness brings with it many temptations to which I would draw your attention. First of all, a temptation to doubt. To be alone to believe in a truth, to be alone to proclaim it, is a fearful trial for our weakness. Need I say that this trial is peculiar to the Christian in this age, in the midst of the present generation? There are times and countries in which the Christian truths form part, as it were, of the general beliefs, in which whoever accepts them is sure of universal approval; such is not our condition. God calls us to maintain with courage and resolution truths which are ignored and misconstrued by the majority of those who surround us. No wonder then if, when we feel ourselves alone in the midst of that multitude which eagerly presses around us, there are moments when a secret voice whispers in our ear, "Art thou sure that thou hast truth on thy side?" To this intellectual temptation is added a temptation to coldness of heart. The heart lives on sympathy. Nothing is more pleasant to it than the affections which others share. Its powers of love, its life, are multiplied thereby. But to be alone to love an

unseen God, to appeal to a sympathy which yields no response, what a subject of sorrow! At such times the heart is in danger of retiring within itself and of wearing itself out in melancholy. And, in truth, this twofold trial of the intellect and of the heart cannot fail to exercise a fatal influence upon our life. That we may act we must be understood. The thought that we have spectators and witnesses redoubles our natural energy. The most inconceivable labours have been accomplished by men who had united their efforts. This marvellous influence of sympathy which is so visible in our race, is felt in our assemblies where it increases tenfold the force of the preacher's words; it is felt in all our works. It is this power which has often awakened genius, or at least stimulated faculties which in solitude would have wasted away. Nothing, therefore, is better calculated to paralyse our powers than to feel alone, than to pursue an end which no one else aims at attaining with us.

Such are some of the features of the loneliness which the Christian must expect to experience, by the very reason that he follows his Master, and that, with Him, he seeks the glory and the reign of God. What then will this solitude be if to this general trial be added particular trials, if sickness and death desolate our hearth and render our loneliness still more complete? What will it be if to it be added that painful discordance of temper, that cruel shattering of all our affections of which we are so often the innocent victims? Alas! some of my hearers perhaps recognise in this their own history, and however happy we may be, the future is always so uncertain that none can tell whether we will not all one day find it to be ours. That is why we have need of consolation, and I am eager to enter upon the second part of my subject, "I am not alone, my Father is with Me." That was Christ's consolation; it must also be ours.

“I am not alone, My Father is with Me.” In this lies the strength of Jesus. What are all the desertions of earth compared to communion with God? His Father is with Him; henceforth He may be left alone by men, He enjoys the society of God. He may be rejected by men, He has God for His refuge. He may be misjudged by men, He has the Divine approbation. He may be hated of men, but these delightful words continually ring in His ears, “Thou art My well-beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased.” The Father is with Him. Ah! He should always have felt this precious communion, for He has sought, He has loved, He has accomplished nought but the Father’s will; but can we forget that there has been in His career an awful and mysterious day in which the Father Himself has failed Him? can we forget that upon the cross the Son, rejected and cursed by earth, has felt heaven close upon Him? can we forget that, forsaken by all those He had loved here below, He was forced to turn towards heaven a look of anguish, and to utter these heartrending words, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” Forget this! But it were forgetting at what price we have been redeemed, it were passing with closed eyes beside that abyss of infinite merey on whose brink the Church with the angels bend, seeking in vain to search its depths!

But if Jesus has known this terrible desertion, it was that *we* might never know it. When by faith we are united with Him, when we accept His redeeming work, we obtain the right of returning to God and of calling Him by the name of Father; then we are permitted in our turn to repeat these words, “I am no longer alone, the Father is with me.” In this lies the strength and consolation of the Christian. Then also all the temptations which are inseparable from solitude disappear in presence of that supreme consolation.

You are alone, and you doubt, perhaps ; for, as we have said, to be the solitary witness of a despised truth is a terrible trial for our weakness. Who are you that you should oppose your thought to the thoughts of the multitude, that you should believe what others deny ? Well ! in this painful anxiety I see but one refuge, and it is this thought, "The Father is with me." Yes, always rely upon the word of God, and you shall stand firm, and you shall speak without weakness. Ah ! true, if you were called to defend your own thoughts, the waves of doubt would soon sweep them away ; but when you have God on your side, nothing should silence you, nothing should stop you. Do you not see that in this consisted the power of God's prophets in every age ? (for God has ever had His prophets). When they were called to protest against some prevailing evil, what would they have done if they had had no other refuge, no other support, than what unbelief is pleased to call their natural genius ? Think you that they would have found strength enough in themselves to resist the whole world and to be alone of their opinion ? They felt that God was with them, and therefore they spoke. Neither Moses, nor Elijah, nor Paul drew from their own character that superhuman energy which made of them giants in the moral order ; they tell us so themselves. It is God who calls them, God who sends them, God who says to them, "I will speak with thy mouth." And now these lips will never close again ; to the taunts and maledictions of men they will answer, "God is with us." See also how this thought preserved them from bitterness, and how they were enabled to wait patiently until the Almighty should vindicate His right. Men speak to-day of a new virtue which they call supreme contempt, this contempt which one of our modern thinkers thus defines : "A keen and rapturous delight which man relishes for himself alone

and which is self-sufficient." It is in this contempt, they say, that the wise must seek their refuge when the truths they defend are despised here below. Ah! those who know the God of the Gospel will not accept this refuge. If the world rejects them they will seek a shelter, not in supreme contempt, but in the boundless love of the Father; and instead of serving the cause of truth with the mean passions of criticism, they will endeavour to love and enlighten those who reject and misjudge them. Let us bless God that He whose name is Truth did not, in the hour of His death, retire within the contempt of our so-called sages, and that on the cross He pronounced this sublime prayer for the very multitude who cursed and reviled Him, "Father, forgive them!" Like Him let us seek a refuge in communion with the Father, and if the world rejects us, we shall find sufficient strength there to serve the cause of truth without weakness and without bitterness, even to the end.

Let us now consider the temptations to which the heart is exposed. There is the coldness, the alarming languor which is produced by loneliness. But here again the believer may look for the most sublime compensations. If the love of man fails him, do you think that the love of God is not sufficiently unlimited to fill his heart? Is not God the very source of love? Do you think that the spring is in danger of being dried up? Do you think that God will allow a heart which the world abandons to remain empty, withered, and dry? Is it not written that whoever will have forsaken all things for His name's sake, shall receive already here below an hundredfold, and in the world to come, everlasting life? Do you think that those lives which are the most desolate, but in which God manifests His presence, do not possess a richer treasure of love than those which the world adorns with its factitious splendours? Are the

affections of the world, so lavish of high-sounding yet often deceitful effusions, to be compared with the infinite love with which God fills the heart which gives itself fully to Him? Is it being alone to have God in one's soul and to feel this soul, till then possessed by guilty passions or unworthy frivolities, becoming the sanctuary of Him who is love itself? I have seen lives growing more and more desolate on the side of earth, but at the same time growing richer and richer on the side of heaven; the more the world forsook them, the more did love gush forth in their loneliness. They seemed to say to all the delusions of life, to all its joys, to all its promises, as they vanished in the distance, "You will leave me alone, but I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

Finally, against discouragement, that greatest temptation of solitude, nothing is more powerful than the thought that the Father is with us. That fearful sense of nothingness which paralyses all our efforts when we labour in solitude, the Christian knows nothing of, for he has always an invisible witness of his life, and he is able to say with the prophet, "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Yes, his work, however insignificant, hidden and obscure it may be, were it but a prayer, a sigh, or a tear which seems lost. What deep encouragement lies in such a thought. To feel that everything in life has its special destination and value, to feel that whether we succeed or whether we fail we have none the less served the true Master, is not this what explains the indomitable perseverance of all who have entered upon this path? "The Father is with me;" consequently, what I do for Him is not one of those short-lived works that hang upon the thousand chances on which the success of all human things depends. If I am alone, this work will not perish with me, I have

added my stone to an eternal edifice which is to be continued throughout all ages; nought that I have done has been useless, nought has been lost, for it is the work of God. Therefore, though I should be called like the Fore-runner to end my career in a dungeon in which my last thoughts, my last words, would appear to be for ever buried, though death should reach me there without allowing me to leave a supreme farewell to the world, still would I say, "I am not alone, the Father is with me." Though I should be called to pine away through many a long year upon a bed of pain, with nothing living save my heart, unable to act save by prayer, though forgetful and wearied-out friendship should cease to open my door, and though none would be near to witness my dying agonies, still would I say, "No, neither my prayers nor my sufferings have been lost; I am not alone, the Father is with me." Such is the Christian's consolation. These are not mere hypotheses, mere pictures drawn from imagination; I relate simply what has been seen, what is seen wherever the Christian faith has fully possessed the heart.

If there be any here who know not this consolation of the Christian, and who do not wish to know it, to them I will say, You are afraid of becoming Christians, because when you become such, you feel that you will be alone and solitary, even in the midst of the world to which you are attached by so many ties. Do you think you will be less lonely for having refused to quit this world when God called you to do so? What then is life if not a sacrifice which goes on increasing day by day? How many afflictions in the past and in the future, how many separations still in reserve? Where are those on whom your heart relied but yesterday; where will they be to-morrow, those on whom your heart relies to-day? Death comes, reaping here and reaping there unremit-



tingly; and those only who have never loved are spared the sorrow of seeing their solitude increase year by year. Moreover, apart from the desolation caused by death, do you not sometimes feel terrified by the sight of the solitude within which selfishness and indifference have confined themselves, even in the midst of the din of the world? and is not this isolation far more awful than that produced by death?

Sooner or later, then, you will be alone to live, alone to drag on your weary existence, which will have become a burden to you, because those who will surround you will have no more need of you. Do you not see, as Bossuet said, those successors who spring into life, who advance, who push you aside, so to speak, and who seem to say, "Draw back; now is our turn?" A day will come, and it has perhaps already dawned, when you shall be alone to live. That is not all; you shall be alone to die. What, in that supreme hour, will all the praise, approbation, or most sincere affection of men avail you? Arrived at this narrow passage, you will have to cross it alone. Have you thought of this? have you prepared for that moment? And if death were all! But death is a way that leads to the just Judge. Your conscience warns you, and the Divine Word assures you of this. You will be alone to appear before the tribunal of God. Alone! and all the delusions of men, all their flatteries, all their false counsels, will vanish like a fleeting cloud. Alone! without an advocate, without a friend to plead your cause. Alone with your past life, with your rebellions, your ingrattitudes, your secret miseries, and your hidden crimes, which will all appear in the formidable light of the eternal day. Alone! And why? God had offered you His pardon and His love, but you have scorned and despised them. Ah! if your soul is precious to you, in the name of your eternal future, in the

name of your salvation, in the name of the Gospel I preach unto you, in the name of the blood of Christ shed for you, accept to-day the love which God offers you, for it is a fearful thing indeed to fall into the hands of the living God.

Do you now understand what it is to have God on one's side, to possess that love from which nothing—no, not even death—can separate us? That portion of the Christian is ours; it is yours also if you will accept it. On the mysterious threshold of eternity we may say, "I am not alone, the Father is with Me." We may say it in loneliness, in sorrow, in the most miserable situation; with these words we may welcome the King of Terrors. Why should you not say so too? Then my feeble words would not have been uttered in vain, and though you had entered this sanctuary with an empty and forlorn heart, you will bear away with you that beautiful promise, "I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

VII.

*PROVIDENCE AND FATALITY.*

“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”—MATT. x. 29-31.

ON the day when these simple and touching words were uttered, faith in Providence entered the world; till then it had been utterly unknown to men. The heathen nations admitted, it is true, certain gods who were the supposed protectors of the country and of the family; but above these, above Jupiter himself, they placed the cold, stern, and impassible figure of Destiny. It never entered the mind of any of the ancient philosophers that this world might, in reality, be led by a beneficent will towards a certain though mysterious destination; never were the ideas, now so widely spread, of general progress, of Divine education, of a providential purpose, expressed during the whole of the time in which the world walked in its own ways; nowhere will you find a page or even a line which contains them. Never did a pagan hear the pulsations of the heart of the universal Father in creation or in his own personal history; never did it enter his thoughts to seek in this God his strength in times of trial; and when he succumbed beneath the weight of

affliction, his best consolation was to persuade himself that, after all, he was simply yielding to the common destiny, and that it was impossible for him to alter its laws.

But why speak of the heathen world? Do we see nothing like this in the present day? Ah! let us not be deluded! Let us acknowledge that, notwithstanding the influence of Christianity, the belief in fatality, which has been the supreme religion of all the heathen nations, is still to-day that of a vast multitude of our fellowmen. Is it not, in reality, that which rules over all the suffering classes? Do we not hear its sorrowful or passionate expression in their most sincere effusions? But what especially strikes me, is the fact that this belief is plainly avowed by thinkers and writers whom public opinion places in the foremost rank; they openly declare that they acknowledge no other action than that of the natural laws in the history of humanity, or in their own personal existence; they reject the intervention of Providence as a dream of mankind's infancy. When these ideas are proclaimed with so much boldness, we may infer that they have long since found their way into the human soul, and we must not set them aside lightly. Let none tell me that it is improper to combat them from this pulpit; there is not one of us, however firm be his faith, but has known the obsessions of fatality; not one of us but has doubted that his life was indeed governed by a loving will, and that all his prayers were answered. This temptation is all the more terrible that, instead of presenting itself to us under a precise form, it glides and insinuates itself into the heart to chill all its impulses of love and childlike trust. Well, it is this awful phantom which haunts us continually that I would now fight hand to hand. Let us bring to this conflict all our attention, all our moral energy, all the vital powers of our soul, and

with the aid of God we shall conquer. What a triumph, brethren, if in the place of that invisible and gloomy enemy that constantly besets us, we see the beaming face of the God whose name is Love appear and rest upon our life!

The first cause which leads us to forget Providence and to believe in fatality, is the inflexibility of the laws of nature under whose subjection we are necessarily placed. If we could see nature sympathise, as it were, with our personal impressions, mourn over our sorrows, or smile on our joys, we would easily recognise in it the manifestation of a Father's love. So children think in their simplicity. For them the roaring thunder is the menacing voice of Divine justice; the earth with its bright flowers is the garden of the Lord; a fine day is a festival which the Almighty gives them to make their hearts glad; everything proves to them the presence and action of God. But modern science tends more and more to substitute for Divine action the action of the great natural laws which govern the world. Now the peculiar characteristic of these laws is that they are fatal and inflexible, that they are and remain always and everywhere the same. In the skies, for instance, far from considering the marvellous harmony of worlds as a sublime hymn raised to the honour and praise of the Creator, science sees and studies in it simply what it calls the heavenly mechanism, and I have read in one of its most widely-circulated books this impious phrase, "The heavens no longer declare the glory of God; they declare the glory of Newton and Laplace." Even those who believe in God often make of Him simply the Great First Cause who put everything in motion, and who from that moment left the natural laws to follow their own course. God gave the first impulse, or, as Pascal ironically said, the first toss, and the immense machinery was set agoing. Everything acts in the prescribed order; the worlds pursue

their eternal and silent march through infinite space, and our globe, lost in the universe as if it were a speck of dust, is only an imperceptible atom in this immensity! On this very globe the same laws, laws of death and laws of life, act without one moment's interruption. There is a law which requires that a certain number of beings should die and disappear for the preservation of the others; that every second, for instance, one man should die and one be born. All this is, all this must be; and as all this is fatal, of what avail, says the infidel, of what avail are our complaints, our prayers, and our simple faith? How, especially, can we suppose that God interferes in each existence, and that there can be a plan, a particular will, a providential purpose in those necessary, periodical, and inevitable sorrows and bereavements!

Ah! let us not be mistaken; others than the learned have asked themselves these questions. Yes, they come to the most ignorant, and often chill his heart. They come to him particularly in times of affliction, when pain or death have brutally—traitorously, shall I say?—struck those he loved best; children, perhaps, or grandchildren. They come to him when he sees nature continuing its serene and peaceful march while his own heart is sorrowful as death; they come to him when he sees the same sun which had so cheerily shone upon the path in which he had walked resting on a fondly cherished being, shine more joyously still upon his grave. . . . Oh! truly there is in nature an awful silence; truly nature is a book which in all its pages often teaches a terrible lesson of fatality.

Such is the temptation, and certainly it is a fearful one; but the Christian has a refuge against it; he believes in God, the Master of nature, in God the Creator. Creation, that first word of the Bible, that first article of the

Creed, how necessary it is to-day, and how full of light for our souls! I open that book in which so many millions before me have found peace and assurance. From the very first line I see that *God created*. Consequently, above the laws which govern the world, there is a lawgiver greater still than all the laws which He has made, and which He can destroy at pleasure; consequently, by faith in God I escape from the circle of fatality, I come out of it to take refuge in the sovereign will from which all things have proceeded.

That is why we so energetically maintain the belief in miracles, and in the first of all miracles; namely, creation. We do not do so for the mere satisfaction of that gross and vulgar need of the marvellous which is the principal attraction of all inferior minds. Christ once refused to satisfy this undue curiosity; nay, He even condemned it; but that is not the point in question. The point in question is to ascertain whether nature is supreme or subject to a master, to choose between fatality and the will of a living God. Now, let men show us another method of solving this problem than miracles—miracles which, by breaking the chain of natural causes, attest the intervention of the Creator! Miracles are therefore eminently religious. Deny miracles! At the same stroke, you weaken faith in the personal God, and your only master henceforth is necessity! Call this necessity God, if you will, but to that God you will never be able to offer either prayer or worship, you will have nothing to expect from Him. Miracles are therefore necessary in order that we may escape fatality. I will give but one example in support of this assertion: We Christians believe that eighteen centuries ago a certain grave opened, and that a dead man came out of it alive. Is this fact without importance? Is this simply one of those prodigies destined to strike the multitude

with amazement? No; for ever since this grave opened the world has believed in eternal life; the fatality of death has been broken, and nothing short of this was required to bring man to believe in immortality.

The Christian, then, believes in a God who is Master of the laws He has made, and by this very belief he escapes the grasp of fatality. True, we no longer witness miracles; true, the natural laws govern us uninterruptedly, they are even inflexible and unchangeable, and, should we oppose them, they would crush us beneath their fatal power. And why should it be otherwise? God loves order. It has been enough for Him to attest that He was the Lord of nature; but can He alter the order of His works and the admirable chain of natural causes upon which everything rests, to satisfy our least desires, which soon, in that case, would become mere fancies? He could do so, doubtless; He could hear each prayer, interfere in each event to bless or chasten. But what would be the consequence of this? All would serve Him from interest or from fear, since their actions would be immediately followed by punishment or reward. Who would obey from love? Now, God will be served neither by slaves nor by mercenaries; He will be followed by faith and not by sight. Therefore He hides himself from sight that He may reveal Himself to faith. Sight reveals to us those general laws in virtue of which His sun rises alike upon the just and upon the unjust, in virtue of which nature pursues its unalterable course. But faith reveals to us, in the midst of the general succession of causes and effects, the delicate action of His providence by which He interferes in each existence, so that He knows every one of us, and that not one of our thoughts, not one of our sighs, is lost to Him. If we judge only by sight, everything is fatal; the same accidents, the same sorrows come to all men; but if we judge by faith, we discover in every existence a plan in



virtue of which all that appears to be accidental and fortuitous realises a Divinely determined purpose. In consequence, the man whose sight would be sufficiently penetrating, would recognise that all the forces of nature, however fatal they may seem, definitively serve, in their relation with humanity, an end which is superior to nature itself—that is, the realisation of a moral, spiritual, and Divine order.

Unbelief will perhaps grant that there is in nature a vast and sublime harmony—for he were blind indeed who would fail to perceive it—but it will deny that the object of this harmony is man. It will seek to crush us beneath the sense of our littleness and of our insignificance. It will reproach us with yielding to the illusions of pride when we affirm that man is the object of the tender cares of Providence. It will, no doubt, tell us that our opinion was possible when, with the Bible, men believed that the earth was the centre of the universe; but now that it is known by all to be lost with its sun amidst millions and millions of worlds which fill infinite space like clouds of dust, how can we still suppose that humanity acts the part which the Bible ascribes to it, how can we still imagine that man has so great an importance in the designs of God? We hear this objection expressed in familiar language under another form: Well, after all, men are willing to believe in a God who governs the world by regular laws, and to hear His name associated with the great events of history. But let one of the poorest and humblest of human beings in his turn use the name of the Lord, and see the intervention of the Almighty no longer in the great events of the world, but in the humble accidents of his lowly existence; let him believe himself the object of the love and tender care of Jehovah, you may be sure that such a man will excite both the surprise and the scorn of his fellows. The most

kindly disposed will bear with his childlike trust, seeing that for him it is a source of consolation; the greater number will laugh at what will seem to them a veritable delusion. "What!" they will say, "is it not most singular to suppose that the Almighty interferes in events of such slight importance? Is it not degrading His name to mix it with the familiar details of life? Show us His intervention in the grand laws of nature or history, join His name, if you will, to the noble actions of life or to the solemnities of worship, but do not profane it by associating it with your projects, with your habitual preoccupations, with your fleetings joys or your private sorrows, to which He is absolutely indifferent."

So the world reasons. This language is not that of atheists, but of a multitude of honest and would-be Christian people who are proud of the name they bear. I feel sure that, under some form or other, you have all heard it.

Who has not been troubled by such thoughts as these? Who has not often questioned whether the attention of the Supreme Being could really be directed upon him? Ah! as for me, how often have I repeated these words of the Psalmist, "What is man that Thou shouldst be mindful of him?" How often has the spectacle of the world inspired me with a vague feeling of terror by the crushing contrast between His infinite grandeur and my own nothingness. "Is it true," I asked, "that in the immensity of creation in which our globe is but as a speck of dust—is it true that, in the imperceptible ant-hill we call humanity, those thousands of beings of whom each minute sees some die and some come into life, have each their mission, their part to act, their account to render, and their judgment to expect? Is it true that their destiny has the importance which they ascribe to it, and that God can be acquainted with the numberless accidents of

which their short-lived existence is composed? And, as regards myself, is it true that the eyes of the Most High distinguish me from the rest of my fellowmen? Is my prayer heard, and is my way known to the Lord?"

Here, again, allow me to oppose to the doubts of our hearts the reply of Revelation. True, the Scriptures tell us of the majesty of God and of our own littleness with unequalled energy; but never do they draw from this comparison a consequence favourable to fatality. Hear, for instance, the words spoken by a prophet more than twenty centuries ago. It is a passage the beautiful sublimity of which should strike with admiration even the most unpoetical imagination: "Who," says Isaiah, "hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him? Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto Him? Lift up your eyes on high! Who hath created these things? He that bringeth out their host by number, who calleth them all by names, and not one faileth."

That is the expression of the feelings by which we were oppressed a moment ago. That is the most striking picture of our littleness compared with the greatness of God. But what is the consequence which Isaiah draws from it? Hear him again: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? He shall feed

His flock like a shepherd : He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." You have heard the prophet, and you have seen from his language, that the Divine Word reasons not after the manner of men. The Lord is great, and therefore He forgets us, such is the argument of men. The Lord is great, He preserveth the simple, such is the argument of God.

Which of these two modes of reasoning is the most rational? Judge for yourselves. The question is to know whether God is lowered when we affirm that He watches over the humblest of His creatures. Now, when have men made the discovery that true greatness is incapable of caring for what seems to us insignificant? Would you call him great, the poet who, wholly pre-occupied with the plan of his epic, would judge that harmony, rhythm, and a proper choice of words are details unworthy of his attention? Would you call him great, the statesman or the general who, in his plans of administration or war, would overlook little things? Who, on the contrary, does not see that one of the most evident signs of true greatness is that it directs everything at the same time, that it embraces, in one vast and precise glance, the whole with each of the details, that it perceives at once the two extremities of the chain, without forgetting one single link? That which most excites our admiration in men of genius is not only their gigantic plans, but especially that powerful grasp by which they lay hold, with the plan itself, of all the details of its execution; it is that kind of intellectual omnipresence which makes of Michael Angelo at once the most sublime artist and the most exact mathematician; which enables Napoleon, at the very moment when he is tracing the plan of a distant campaign, to calculate without one error the allowances of his soldiers and the minutest details of their encampment; or which, in a very different

sphere, enables a great writer to find, in the very midst of the burning flame of inspiration, the most correct and suitable words in which to give expression to his thoughts. Now, raise this marvellous gift of genius to its highest power, take it in its source, in God Himself, and you will find, together with the most imposing greatness, the most attentive Providence; you will find the Supreme Being whom nothing can limit and whom nothing can escape, not even the sparrow that has dropped during the night on the frozen ground, not even the silent tears which you have perhaps shed this morning in secret. . . . Let none, therefore, seek to crush us beneath the sense of Divine greatness, for it is in that very greatness that we find our refuge against fatality!

Thus, by faith in the living God, the Christian is enabled to triumph over the sentiment of fatality in the sphere of nature.

But, if faith in Providence vacillates and dies away in so many souls, this is owing, in most cases, to another cause than that which I have brought before you. That which hides, that which may even blot out the intervention of God from the eyes of the great majority, is the spectacle of life and of the world such as sin has made them.

For example, how difficult it is to discover a providential plan in history! How can we trace out a way through the dismal confusion of events? How can we find the key to all the moral problems which they raise? What is the meaning of so many painful abortions, what was the destination of so many lost civilisations, what will be the result of so many sorrows, wars, heartrendings, and tears? Men tell us that blood is a fruitful seed. Alas! how oft has it flowed in torrents upon the earth only to leave after it the aridity of the desert! Men tell us that there can be no birth without suffering.

Alas ! how many sufferings which bring forth nothing ! Men tell us that crime is necessarily sterile ; but how many successful crimes do I see which leave after them a long and fearful posterity ! Doubtless, it is easy for the man who is blessed with a sanguine temperament to explain all these things in a superficial manner, to write in a few chapters a philosophy of history, and to declare that he sees his way clear through the night which appals me ; but all are not so easily comforted, all cannot hail as a true light the *ignis fatuus* of the imagination. For them, the history of humanity, with its monstrous crimes, with its endless sufferings, history embracing the millions of millions of beings who, outside of our ideas and beliefs, pursue their own mysterious destinies, history remains a problem which troubles them and often makes their heart bleed.

These are, some will perhaps say, the temptations of cultivated minds. No, they are not ; in another form they also beset the most ignorant and the most untaught. Is not each individual existence an abridged reproduction, so to speak, of the painful problems which agitate the nations ? The injustice that triumphs, the perfidious skill that attains its end, the suffering without cause, the unexpected blows of death, are not these the questions which have oppressed us all in the solemn hour of visitation ? From the patriot who, seeing the cause of justice fall with his standard, dies in denying God, to the workman who has often answered us with these bitter words, " If there be a God, He is the God of the rich," what is the situation in which men are not sometimes tempted to doubt the action of God on the world and on their life ? Alas ! as we have already said, if fatality was the supreme god of the ancient world, it is still that in whom the men of the present day most willingly believe. Some worship it stupidly, others rebel against it and

curse it, but over all it exercises a fatal influence. The Christian himself, under the stroke of extreme afflictions, or under the impression of iniquity, is apt to bow the knee before it and foolishly to repeat the words of Asaph, "How doth God know, and is there knowledge in the Most High?"

To all these momentous questions I will not answer lightly; I will not, therefore, tell you that faith completely illumines this darkness, or that, for the Christian, all terrible mysteries disappear from the spectacle of the world. Yes, in history, the apparent influence of fatality is immense; there is, for instance, in the hereditary transmission of disease and suffering, in the action of matter over mind, in the innate dispositions of characters and races, many problems which baffle all our wisdom; there are, in the history of men, thousands of pages whose meaning is still unknown to us; truly the ways of the Lord are enveloped in shadows which our eyes vainly seek to penetrate.

Nevertheless, through this darkness I advance, for my eyes are steadily fixed upon these words, in which I explicitly believe, "God is love." He is love, that is my most intimate conviction; I oppose it without weakness to all I see, to all I hear, nay, to all the thoughts of my intellect, to all the agitations of my heart. He is love; therefore, everything in His works concurs to a supreme harmony; therefore, the history of humanity is no longer a fruitless conflict between contrary passions, instincts, and chances. Above all these, in the midst of all these agitations, of all these discordant wills, of all these seeming accidents, a Divine plan, which leaves nothing to fatality, is being pursued. True, this plan is hidden from me, but I know it exists, and this thought is a firm support, a sure refuge for my faith. Besides, if this plan does escape me, if, when I would explain it, I

am compelled to avow my ignorance, this ignorance, after all, is very natural in a shortsighted and fallible being who, during his rapid passage upon earth, can take but a very imperfect and one-sided view of the designs of the Lord. How can a shortlived being such as I am comprehend the purposes of the eternal God? Duplessis-Mornay, in the sixteenth century, said to an infidel who denied Providence, "Wilt thou judge of a drama from one scene which thou wilt have heard only in passing? And because, in that scene, the innocent succumbs, wilt thou accuse the poet of having forgotten justice? Stay a little longer and hear the following note. When in his turn the criminal will have fallen, then thou wilt own that the discord is turned into harmony. . . . Now, seest thou not that we are children who would judge of the drama of all eternity from one particular note?" Mornay spoke true. God acts a drama of which all the scenes are ages, He in whose sight a thousand years are as a day, He who is patient, being eternal! Or, to take another illustration, will you ask of the soldier who is fighting in the hottest of the battle to expose to you his general's plan? How could he do so? If he has done his duty, if he has rushed in the midst of the fray, he has seen nought but the confusion of the charge, nought but the glitter of arms, nought but the clouds of dust and smoke, he has heard nought but cries mingling with the deafening noise of the firing and of the artillery. For him all was disorder and chaos, but from the neighbouring heights there was one eye that followed the progress of the battle, one hand that directed the slightest movements of the troops. Now, brethren, there is a combat that is being pursued throughout all ages. It is the conflict of truth, love, and justice against error, selfishness, and iniquity. It does not pertain to us, obscure soldiers cast in the hottest of the fray, to direct its course; we



must be satisfied to know that God governs; it is our duty to remain in the post which He has assigned to us, and to fight bravely to the end.

When I ponder over this Divine plan which is being pursued amid the confusion of history, there is an Old Testament scene which often presents itself to my mind. When Solomon built the Temple of the Lord upon Mount Zion, we are told in the Scriptures that all the materials which entered into the construction of this vast edifice were prepared out of Jerusalem, that the noise of the instruments of labour might not be heard within the holy city; so, for many long months, workmen were employed throughout the valleys of Judea or over the hills of Lebanon in felling cedars or hewing stones; none knew the plan of the great architect, but each had received orders to complete his task; and the day came when, at length, the Temple rose in its majestic beauty. I have often thought this a striking image of the destinies of humanity. God, who is the Supreme Architect, is erecting throughout all ages an immense edifice whose plan escapes us, but which is to become the sanctuary in which we shall adore Him. It is far from heaven, far from the Holy Zion, far from the abode of peace and glory; it is here below, in this land of exile, that the materials are being prepared, for the sounds of suffering and toil are not to reach the heavenly city; each of us must, therefore, accomplish at his post the work which has been committed to him, even though he understands not the place it is destined to occupy in the universal harmony. How could we, workers of a day, how could we penetrate the designs of the God of eternity? It is enough for us to know that our work, however humble it be, is known of the Universal Master, that it has been appointed by Him, and that He will accept it. It is enough for us to believe that the day will come when

all these materials, which seem to be dispersed in a fatal confusion, will be united in an order that will charm our intellect. Then all human sorrows, sacrifices, and afflictions will no longer appear to us useless; then we shall see all the heroic actions, all the hidden virtues of which God alone had been the witness, start from oblivion; then all that seemed to be fortuitous or fatal in the history of humanity and in our own existence will be explained; then chance will be no more, and the edifice which Divine Wisdom had slowly prepared by secular labour will rise in its sovereign beauty as the eternal sanctuary of infinite love.

That is my belief. I know not if it be yours also, but you will at least confess that, with such a belief, one can be strong in the conflicts of life and against the most terrible of temptations—against the fearful attacks of fatality.

And yet, shall I say. . . . This is not enough for me. Yes, doubtless it is an incomparable consolation to know that all things concur to the realisation of the universal plan of God, and that nothing is useless, that nothing is lost in our lives. But who can tell if this be not, after all, a magnificent theory? Who can tell if love be truly the centre and end of all the Divine dispensations? How can I believe this when so many clouds dim my sight? What I want is to hear the heart of God throb for one moment in His works. Willingly would I say with Jacob, "Tell me thy name." Willingly would I exclaim with Job, "Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" and with Isaiah, "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou wouldst come down!" Yes, between myself and the hidden God the distance is too great; that I may believe in His love, I must first see and contemplate Him.

Well, the God of the Gospel has responded to this desire of the human soul. Incarnation! that is the most

convincing proof of providence. I see a holy love appearing and shining upon our earth, a love such as mankind has never beheld, a love which is the very substance of Christ's nature, the principle of all His actions and of His whole life; and Jesus, who manifests it to the world, declares in the most positive manner that He is the Incarnation of God—that when men see Him they see the Father. Then souls go to Him attracted by an irresistible charm. . . . If you should ask them why the words of Jesus have so mightily a power over them, why His Cross, which is the supreme manifestation of His love, spreads so brilliant a light on their personal history and on that of the world, many would, doubtless, be unable to answer; but they feel most deeply that it is because on that Cross God has written His name and revealed to the world His ways. . . . Hear what that God tells us by the Cross: "Thou didst ask to know My name? My name is Justice, Holiness, and Love! Oh, humanconscience! thou didst seek Me, though thou knewest Me not, each time that thou didst love what is true, just, and good. I am Holiness and Justice, and I might have reigned amid terror, crushing whatever resisted Me; for Mine is power, Mine is sovereign dominion for ever and ever. But I am Love, and I will not reign thus; I desire to draw the hearts of men unto Myself by a free attachment, and to ask of them a voluntary obedience. That is why My Son has come upon earth in humility and abasement; but by that Cross upon which men have nailed Him I draw, and still will draw, all men unto Me. Thus My reign will come; not the reign of terror and might, for, as I taught My prophet Elijah in the wilderness of Horeb, I dwell neither in the storm which overthrows, nor in the fire which consumes, nor in the earthquake which destroys. No; My voice is heard speaking in soft and persuasive accents; to all I say, 'Come

unto Me!' I break not the bruised reed, I quench not the smoking flax. . . . I call all men unto Myself; to this tend all the plans of My providence: that is the secret of history—that is the explanation of all My purposes."

Is not that what the Cross tells us? Is not that what it teaches to the world? Ah! I know that the world does not understand this sublime instruction—that very often it rejects it. But, in spite of itself, a ray of that Divine light pierces through its gloom and illumines it. This fact is obvious. Men have believed in progress only since the establishment of Christianity, and in the midst of the Christian nations alone. Now, what is progress in its most elevated sense (for I do not refer to the refinement of luxury, enjoyment, and ease, which attests the decline of a nation as forcibly as its civilisation), what is progress but the realisation in history of a Divine plan? Striking fact! men have begun to believe in progress only when they have seen the Cross. They have begun to believe in a Divine plan only on the day when God revealed to us His name by tracing it in bloody letters on Golgotha. Whilst all the heathen or Mohammedan nations are at a stand-still or even recede, the Christian nations alone are marching on towards a glorious future, and pretend to win the rest of the universe over to their faith; is not this the result of that general belief in progress which is one of the fruits of the Gospel? The belief in providence entered the world only on the day of the Incarnation. Till then the religion of mankind had been fatalism, and, even amongst the Jews, faith in the intervention of God was maintained only by repeated miracles. But, from the day when humanity felt the heart of God throb in the heart of the Son of Man, from the hour when it beheld Him who is the revelation of the Father, it was enabled to believe that God loved it, and would never more leave it to its fate. See, in fact,

how everything changes from the moment when this glorious event of the Incarnation illumines the darkness of our night!

As I thought of our earth lost in this vast universe, I said, "Can the eyes of the Most High distinguish it?" But now, I know that, amongst so many millions of worlds, it has been the object of the predilection of the Most High; I know that it has become the abode of His Son, the scene of the revelation of His love. Henceforth can millions of worlds have the same value in His sight as this small earth on which the tears and the blood of His Son have flowed? Willingly would I say with the prophet addressing Bethlehem: "Thou earth, though thou be little among the thousands of stars, though thou be lost in the immensity of the universe, yet the most glorious of worlds art thou, for out of thee has come forth the Saviour, the Son of the Most High. Yes, in their flight through infinite space the angels hail thee, for in the whole universe they see not one spot as brilliant as thou. Though they wander among those thousands and thousands of suns whose splendours declare the glory of God, though they soar to the very limits of His dominions, though they behold the magnificence of the works of His hands, yet will they never discover anything so truly grand as Divine love offering itself in sacrifice, and the brilliant light of all these suns will pale beside the ray which flashes from the Cross. Oh, earth! be thou blessed, for out of thee has come forth the Saviour!"

Again I said: "What is the secret of the Divine will, what is the meaning of those extraordinary dispensations which blind and bewilder me?" But now God has answered me. I have seen the Cross triumphant. I know that, through all that surprises and troubles me, the reign of God is advancing, and that the earth will be brought under its subjection.

But the Cross does more than illumine the destinies of humanity at large ; it enlightens also our own individual history. The Cross teaches me what is the value of my soul in the sight of God by showing me at what price it has been redeemed. And if I have believed in that love, if I have understood what is the value of my soul, how can I still deny Providence ? Here we may call up St. Paul's argument : " He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things ? " After this great and striking proof of His love, why should I not expect the most devoted care which a Father's tenderness can bestow ? Why should I doubt the merciful intention that presides over all the Divine dispensations, even over those which baffle my reason and break my heart ? Is there an affliction whose darkness cannot be dispelled, or whose bitterness cannot be allayed by the Cross ?

So the Christian reasons. Now, observe that what I have said of nations may be as strongly, though perhaps less clearly, applied to individuals. Man's firm belief in Providence depends on his acceptance of the Cross. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ you may meet with impulses of sincere piety, with a touching submission to the will of God, with a degree of confidence in His love ; but when you see a man who firmly believes in the continual intervention of God in his existence, a man who affirms that all his sorrows enter into the Divine plan for his spiritual education, a man who is able to give thanks in the midst of affliction, you will not be mistaken if you say that this man is a Christian.

But it is precisely at this point that the doubt which we combat arms itself against us with new weapons. Men tell us that it is a senseless delusion to believe that the Church is the centre of all the Divine plans, and that humanity has been the object of a miracle of love

such as the Incarnation. They accuse of a singular pride the Christians who imagine that the heavens have been shaken for their salvation, and that all things concur to the realisation of their hopes, that is, to the glory of their God.

You accuse them of pride, and wherefore? What pride is there in believing that God, when He placed us on earth, had evidently a purpose, and that this purpose was His service? What pride is there in believing that the free obedience of a loving heart is more agreeable to God than the forced submission of all the creatures that serve Him fatally? What pride is there in believing that, in order to obtain this obedience, His love has shrunk from no sacrifice—no, not even from an unutterable abasement, not even from the immolation of the Cross? Proud, are we? when our desire is to refer all our life to Him from whom we have received all things, to listen to the voice of conscience and to take a serious view of Divine holiness! Proud, when we believe that nothing in our life is indifferent to God, and that our pride, our selfishness, and our sins grieve and offend Him! Proud, when we believe that His mercy surpasses even His justice, and when we suppose it sufficiently great to have led Him to the very sacrifice of Himself! Proud, when we believe that His fatherly tenderness is vast enough to embrace all His creatures, to know and count all their sorrows and miseries! Proud, in fine, when we live in the child-like confidence that in His purposes towards us nothing is chance, but all is charity!

But you who charge us with pride, have you sought to take into consideration all that lies concealed beneath your pretended humility? You are too insignificant, you say, to occupy the attention of God! But search the depths of your heart, and you will discover there the true reason of your meekness. Is it not that you wish

to escape this God who annoys you, and that the better to forget Him you find it necessary that He should forget you? Is it not that you wish to hide from His sight in order to live all the more freely for yourselves and do your own will? Oh, convenient humility! No wonder that it has become so popular a virtue. But shall I tell you the true name of this humility? It is pride! To steal away from God under pretence of one's insignificance, and then to find one's independence anew, to live for self and for the world, what is this in reality but the old rebellion of pride despoiled of grandeur but clothed in hypocrisy? Brethren, one thing is sure, and it is this: in the great day when all the veils which hide our secret intentions will be rent, they will be found in the ranks of the ungrateful and the rebellious, those would-be humble beings who escaped God under the plea that they were too insignificant for Him!

Ah! be humble, but be not so in appearance only. Say that you are, not too insignificant, but too great sinners to be brought under the notice of the Holy God; cast a terrified glance into that abyss which your sins have opened between Himself and you; repeat in trembling the words of the prophet: "What is man that Thou shouldst be mindful of him?" Then you will know what is humility; but, far from being led by it to escape God and to delight in your own proud independence, you will rather cast yourselves into His merciful arms, and you will find that nothing short of the blood of the Cross could have been sufficient to efface the iniquity whose depth you will thus have measured.

I have endeavoured to combat the thoughts which lead us to deny providence and to believe in fatality; nevertheless, my task is not yet complete. I have still to speak of the supreme temptation which gives to all the doubts I have mentioned the most intense and the



most terrible force. This temptation is suffering. Alas! here I am sure of being understood. Here I am sure of recounting the past or future history, or, it may be, the present history of each of you.

You were full of faith, my brother, and your Christian life was gliding happily and easily by under the approving eye of God. But behold! the day assigned to every human soul is at length dawning on your horizon, the gloomy day of trial!

You were strong, and behold! your health has vanished and your energy has fled; on your path are insurmountable obstacles which you are vainly endeavouring to overcome. You were rich, or at least in easy circumstances, but behold! your resources are dwindling away and poverty is advancing with its dismal train of humiliations and painful deceptions; your friends are falling off one by one, and their heart is growing cold. Alas! behold death striking right and left around you, and taking from you those whom God had given you in days of gladness, and without whose society life seemed to you impossible; . . . or again, behold! here is a sorrow greater than death, one of those secret sorrows which we must hide from the world because shame and dishonour are attached to them!

You struggle at first, fixing your eyes upon Him who is invisible. The great days of visitation have something Divine. In the first blow that strikes us we easily recognise the hand of the Lord; but when the morrow dawns gloomy and dull, when we must resume our march through the desert, when day succeeds day, and the trial of affliction is followed by the more terrible trial of patience, when deliverance or consolation, which for one moment had lighted up our path, dies away like a fleeting ray which leaves us in deeper gloom than before, alas! the stern yet mild figure of the Heavenly Comforter dis-

appears. You grieve bitterly, you whose piety had been so firm and so serene, you who had always been so ready to impart to others those consolations which are now lost to you.

And do you know what adds to your bitterness? It is the sight of those whom God spares and prospers, whilst He crushes you, His child. Yes, those blessings of fortune which you would have employed so generously, another will possess them and will waste them away in guilty or frivolous pleasures. That strength which you would have consecrated to God, another will enjoy it and spend it in that which is but vanity. Those affections which would have been so needful to you and for which your heart thirsted, he will enjoy them, that being who cannot so much as appreciate them. Beaming faces will surround his hearth while yours will be desolate. Yes, that man who lives for himself alone will have everything, health, joy, love, and strength; and you, whose aim was to serve the noblest of causes here below, you will be reduced to maintain your existence by the most fruitless, ungrateful, and discouraging toil; you will perhaps be chained down to a bed of suffering, incapable of action, and the unbeliever, as he passes by, will open your door to thrust this withering thought indirectly into your mind: "Where is thy God?"

That is not all. While passing through this dark valley of tribulation, you may be called, by a strange dispensation, to endure inward anguish which will add its pangs to your outward sorrows. Your soul will be dry without being athirst; the Word of God will cease to be as a spring of living water; its promises will vacillate before your troubled eyes. Doubts till then unknown will assail your intellect; prayer will become a painful duty; it will rise to God but bring down no response.

Oh, brother! less than this was required to lead you to believe in fatality!

Ah! no doubt you will not pronounce this awful word which terrifies you. What matters, if you believe in the thing? Fatality! Men may believe in it and yet call themselves Christians. After twenty or thirty years of a life in which God has multiplied the most evident signs of His goodness and tender care, men may allow themselves to be so completely blinded by ingratitude as to give utterance to these words, for which God upbraided His ancient people: "My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God!"

Hid from your God! and wherefore? You suffer, but is there anything in this to surprise you? Is not this what your Saviour has foretold? When He called you to His service, did He promise you enjoyment or a cross to bear, success or struggle, pleasure or tears? Search the Word of God. What have those who have preceded you in the narrow path experienced? What do all the cries of sorrow and anguish which rise from the pages traced by David, Isaiah, or St. Paul say to your heart? You suffer! But may not this be precisely the sign of your election? Is it not written that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven? Was less than this required to teach you your nothingness, to crush in you the pride of life, to reveal to you all the lukewarmness, weakness, and cowardly fear of your natural heart?

You suffer and the enemies of God triumph! The enemies of God! Ah! who will tell what awaits them? Is the end of the broad way in which they eagerly press so strangely alluring? Is perdition so attractive? Is the fate of a heart full of blindness and rendered utterly insensible by ease and comfort, of a heart which, proud and rebellious, goes forward to meet the judgments of

God,—is the fate of such a heart, I ask, one which can be looked upon without terror ?

You suffer, and heaven is closed, and your prayers remain unanswered ! But who can tell if the end of these inward trials is not to separate, in your faith, the pure gold from the dross which still mingles with it, the wheat from the chaff which is to be burned ? Who can tell if this silence of God is not meant to render your faith firmer and more triumphant ? . . . Besides, is it yours to determine the time of deliverance, and to measure, according to your own feeble wisdom, the ways of the Lord which are not your ways ?

All this I might tell you, and in support of each of these thoughts the Word of God would lend me multiplied declarations ; because for you, for feeble souls like yours, it has been written by the God who knoweth our frame. But time fails me, and I prefer inviting you to behold with me a spectacle which will tell you more than all my words.

Come, I will say to you, come, you who in your bitterness have said again and again : “ My way is hid from the Lord,”—come and behold in the garden of Gethsemane that innocent Being who bows down in the dust, overpowered by an inexpressible anguish. *You* suffer, but you have been guilty. . . . *He* suffers, and *He* is innocent, and sin has never touched His soul. He suffers, nevertheless, and how great must be His grief, that He who had said to all human sorrows, “ Come unto Me and I will give you rest,” should succumb crushed and broken-hearted !

You suffer and the enemies of God prosper ! *He* is about to be led as a lamb before Herod, and the vilest beings will triumph as they load Him with insults !

You suffer, and none understand you, and affection fails you ! *He* who wanted love, being Love itself, turns

towards His sleeping disciples and utters these words of sorrowful reproach: "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

You suffer, and heaven is closed to your prayers! *He* casts towards a heaven of brass a supreme look, a look of agony. *He* cries to earth, "I thirst!" and earth replies by taunts and curses; He turns towards the Father, who hides His face from Him, and He must utter this cry of fearful anguish: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

You believe all this, . . . in that Man of Sorrows you recognise your brother and you worship your God, . . . then you think that He ignores your state, and that your sorrows are unknown to Him? Why then has He come to suffer, why has He loved you unto death, even unto the death of the Cross? Why has He revealed to you a charity so astonishing and so sublime? Why is it written that Christ, having completed His work, intercedes for us with the Father? or rather, why shouldst thou still doubt, O my brother! the reality of that vast and profound sympathy which fills His heart?

No; none of thy anxieties, none of thy conflicts, none of thy prayers are unknown to Him. No; thy obscure acts of devotion, thy silent sacrifices, are not buried in the bottomless abyss of oblivion. Ye tears of the sinner, ye sorrows of the poor, ye groans of broken hearts, ye unseen sufferings, the world misunderstands or stifles you; but the angels see and hear you, and, above the noise and roar of what men call their great events, ye rise to the throne, nay, to the very heart of God! Bear this thought away with thee, afflicted one, and when sorrow oppresses thy heart, go to thy God; go, though thou understand not; go and weep in His bosom, and remember these words which Christ addressed to Peter: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter!"

One word more and I conclude. You to whom God has revealed the secret of your history and of His providence, endeavour to enlighten those who travel through the way of life with you. Alas! how many unfortunate beings there are who suffer and who believe only in fatality! How many there are who, when they see iniquity successful and triumphant, persuade themselves that if there were a God things would not take this fatal course! Well, live amongst them in such a manner that they may be brought to say that if there were no God your life and love would be inexplicable. To soothe their sorrows or dispel the temptation to revolt by which they are beset, what is required? A very little thing, perhaps—a smile, a friendly pressure of the hand, a look of affection; something, in a word, which will make them feel that, after all, everything does not conspire against them since there are hearts that love them still.

But beware especially lest you profane the consolations of the Gospel by uttering them with your lips while your heart is indifferent and cold. Do not, from the midst of your ease and comfort, lightly say to the wretch who suffers that all things work together for his greatest good; do not imprudently cast at him such words as these, for they would sear his embittered heart as vitriol burns a bleeding wound. Remember that, to prove us His love, the Son of God has not merely spoken to us from the midst of His felicity; no, He has given us His life, and that is why He alone can truly comfort. When that love, which shrinks not from sacrifice, will have penetrated your heart, then indeed will you be strong to meet suffering, and to proclaim to the world that God is love.

Let us redouble our efforts in the fulfilment of our Divine mission. In presence of all the voices which rise from the earth to proclaim fatalism, let us unweariedly repeat that the destinies of the world are in the hands of

a Father. Let us hasten by our labours, sacrifices, and prayers the advent of that glad day when the dismal darkness which has so long covered our miserable earth shall disappear, when chance shall be no more, when fatality shall vanish as a vain dream, and when the glorious morning of eternal love shall dawn!

## VIII.

*THE CHRISTIAN SANCTIFYING HIMSELF FOR  
HIS BRETHREN.*

“And for their sakes I sanctify Myself.”—JOHN xvii. 19.

CONFESS it, brethren ; the words I have just read surprise you ; you cannot conceive how it is possible that Jesus Christ should sanctify Himself. With the whole of the Christian Church, you believe in the perfect purity of His character ; you believe that sin, of which we all bear the fearful marks, has never sullied His life, and that He has manifested the holiness of God in all its fulness. He declares this Himself : “The prince of this world has nothing in Me.” “Which of you convinceth Me of sin ?” He says elsewhere. Extraordinary words these, which, if they did not express a real fact, would attest the most monstrous delusion on the part of Him who uttered them. But Jesus is so fully convinced of the perfection of His life, that He presents it as a complete manifestation of God. “He that hath seen Me,” says He, “has seen the Father.” In no human language will a stronger expression be found by which to assert one’s holiness. How, then, can He who affirms so absolutely His possession of Divine holiness speak of sanctifying Himself ?

In order to understand these words, we must, first of all, recall to mind the sense which the word sanctification



has in the Scriptures. It always signifies the setting apart of a being or of a thing for the service of God. When this word is applied to men, that is, to sinful beings, it necessarily implies the idea of conflict with sin, of a victory to be won over the flesh and the rebellious will, of a continued purification, of a laborious progress towards the right. Now, I understand that, in this sense, we hesitate to apply this word to Jesus. But it is not in this sense that Jesus employs it. Jesus has never ceased to belong wholly to God; everything in Him has been consecrated to the glory of the Father, not only His actions, but His thoughts and His most intimate feelings; the will of the Father has always been His own. But if, in order to consecrate Himself to God, Jesus has never had to combat sin in itself, let us not believe that this fact has rendered His struggle less tragical and less painful. For Jesus does not suffer for Himself alone; He has constituted Himself our representative before God, the new Adam of a new humanity, of a lost humanity which He has come to save. Well, that He may accomplish His mission, that He may offer to God, in the name of guilty man, the complete reparation which His holy law required, Jesus must suffer; He must, according to the words of the apostle, be consecrated to God by suffering. And what suffering! It consists not only in His continual contact with human selfishness and ingratitude, not only in an apparently unfruitful ministry, in the cruel opposition with which He is welcomed in Galilee as well as in Jerusalem; it consists not only in the cowardly desertion of His apostles, in the denial of Peter or the traitorous kiss of Judas; not only in the crown of thorns and the fearful agony of crucifixion. No; it consists in something more terrible than all this: the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of the Father must know the separation, the sorrow, the anguish, which were reserved for the

rebels alone ; He must feel Himself rejected of God. That is what awaits Jesus Christ ; that is what He must endure ere His mission be fully achieved ; that is the bloody consecration by which alone He may become the Saviour of mankind. Is it necessary to say that He needed it not for Himself, and that, without Gethsemane and Golgotha, His holiness would have shone forth in immaculate splendour ? But because He is love, He accepts this mission ; He is willing to receive this baptism of blood, and thus He sanctifies Himself, thus He consecrates Himself to God. Such is the meaning of these words, and if at first they have appeared to you mysterious, the only mystery they contain is that of love.

Jesus, therefore, prepares Himself for the terrible consummation of His ministry. He sees the awful vision of the unutterable woe that awaits Him pass before His eyes ; and, as He is the Son of Man, as His flesh falters in presence of suffering and His heart in presence of that unparalleled loneliness, He needs strength and encouragement. Ere He descends into the valley of anguish, He climbs for the last time the summits of prayer, and thence, as the Sovereign Shepherd of humanity, He casts a prophetic look upon all those for whom He is about to die. He sees, first of all, the disciples whom He has so deeply loved, and who, up to this time, have not so much as understood His work ; He sees them converted by His death, and making of His Cross the instrument of their triumphs. He sees His blood watering the earth, and changing the aridity of the desert into a magnificent harvest of faith, devotion, and love. He sees throughout endless ages souls changed by His Word and vivified by His death ; in the mysterious depths of the future He perceives that multitude of every people and tribe and tongue of whom His Cross has made but one family ; and you also, brethren, He sees you—you the redeemed of the nineteenth century,

uniting, in your turn, with the believers who have preceded you. And when His eye has embraced this sublime spectacle, when He has seen all those for whom He is about to sacrifice Himself for ever united in His redeeming love, Jesus is ready; His soul is armed for the final conflict; He is prepared to descend to Gethsemane and to mount to Calvary.

We now understand all that is implied by these words, "I sanctify Myself for their sakes;" and how solemn they are when uttered by the lips of Jesus, who is about to immolate Himself for the Church! Nevertheless, I believe that each of us can and must repeat them in his turn; I believe that each Christian must sanctify himself for his brethren. That is what I shall essay to demonstrate; and as the truth in question is one which principally touches our hearts, may God Himself render them adequate to the mission which He expects of us!

Let us, in the first place, set aside the errors which might impede our march.

When I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to begin anew the work of Jesus Christ. That work is unique—it is His own; the solemn words which He pronounced upon the cross, "It is finished," remain true in all ages and to the end of time; and thus the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews understands it when he writes these remarkable words: "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified." All our virtues, all our sorrows, all our sacrifices can never be substituted for the sacrifice of Christ; He alone is the Saviour, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world; to Him alone will be offered the praises of the redeemed in every age; and even those who, following His example, have died for their brethren, far from ascribing to their death and sufferings the least redeeming virtue, have always referred

their salvation to Him alone. True, the Bible tells us of many other sorrows than those of Christ; it brings before us many lives consecrated to God; it tells us the names of a multitude of martyrs who have sacrificed themselves for justice; but never does it insinuate that their devotion or their sacrifice has had an atoning power, never does it associate their names with any idea of redemption. What would St. Stephen or St. Paul have said had their sufferings and death been joined to the sacrifice of Calvary, had an expiatory virtue been ascribed to their blood? Do you not hear them revendicate the glory of the Redeemer, and tremble lest their work be confounded or associated with His? They know that Christ's work is complete, that nothing can be added to His sacrifice, that it is sufficient for time and for eternity.

Secondly, when I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to sanctify ourselves in their stead. Christ, you will perhaps say, did sanctify Himself in our stead. Granted. But if Christ suffered, it was not that He might exempt us from the necessity of being holy; it was, on the contrary, that we might become such; for it is written that without sanctification no man shall see the Lord; and Jesus thus completes the words of my text: "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, *that they also may be sanctified.*" To sanctify oneself in the stead of others! At first sight this idea appears very singular, and yet it is one of the most common of the errors with which we have to contend. It rests, above all, upon the view which Roman Catholicism takes of holiness. What, on this point, does Romanism teach? It teaches that there are two kinds of duties—obligatory virtues and virtues of perfection. The man who practises the latter alone attains holiness. To make a good use of one's fortune is an obligatory virtue; to distribute one's fortune to the poor is a virtue

of perfection. To live purely in married life is an obligatory virtue; to remain unmarried is a virtue of perfection. To fulfil one's duties in the world is an obligatory virtue; to renounce the world and retire into a convent is a virtue of perfection. In this way the whole system of morals is divided into two classes of duties—some of which are imposed to all, others which are the privilege and glory of superior souls. The great majority being unable to attain the virtues of perfection, fulfil the ordinary duties; but there are, it tells us, nobler and more elevated souls, that sanctify themselves for the rest of mankind. God takes into account their exceptional virtues, their works of supererogation (for thus Romanism calls them); they have done more than was required of them; their virtues are therefore imputed to their brethren; their holiness covers the sin of others.

None will accuse me of having cast an unfavourable light upon this doctrine. Now, you know full well that this idea is one of the most widely spread, and that we very often hear it expressed in popular language. Well, is that idea true? Is it in that sense that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren?

I energetically deny it. I deny it in the name of the Scriptures, first of all, in which I find not one line which admits of a similar interpretation. In the Scriptures there are not two systems of morals, that of the perfect and that of the great mass of mankind; there are not two weights in the balance of the Holy God. When the object of a life is the glory of God, that life is holy, were it that of the poorest of working men; when this glory is not its aim, it is reprehensible, were it that of the most brilliant of preachers or of the most glorious of martyrs. Holiness lies not in outward circumstances; it must dwell first of all in the soul. Not only to a few superior minds, but to all men did Jesus say, "Be

ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Next observe how low is the idea which this doctrine gives us of holiness. Men tell us that the exceptional virtues of some compensate for the indifference or levity of others, or, in other words, they introduce arithmetical calculations within this sacred domain of the soul. “God,” they tell us, “demands of humanity a certain sum of virtue. He cares little who settles the account, so long as the sum is paid in full. If it pleases some generous debtors to pay for the others, God will, nevertheless, be satisfied.” Satisfied, you say; but what calculation is this, and who authorises you to ascribe to the God of the Gospel so foolish a process of reasoning? Is God a hireling who can be bought over? Is it a certain sum of virtue that He requires? No; He claims hearts that love Him—hearts converted and sanctified. And if, surrounded by thousands of souls who serve Him faithfully, I alone should persist in my rebellion, think you that the fidelity of others would exempt me from the necessity of being converted and sanctified? Think you that I would be permitted to enter heaven with my impenitent and rebellious spirit? Does not your conscience protest against such a thought? and do you not clearly understand that holiness is not small change, that can be handed from one to the other, and that, as some one justly said, none can be saved by proxy?

Men boast the fruits of this doctrine. They tell us of the enthusiasm which must inevitably seize upon a soul when it sanctifies itself to atone for the sins of others. I admit that devotion is one of the noblest and most powerful incentives to holiness; for we also, though in another sense, believe that a man may pray, struggle, suffer, and die for the salvation of his brethren. But in the idea which I now combat, how suspicious this devo-

tion appears to me ! What ! here is a man who believes that he has sufficient holiness to dispense his brother with being holy ! Here is a man who believes that he can perform, not only his duty, but more than his duty ; that he can fulfil, not only the law, but more than the law ! Oh, how blind must he be who imagines that he has done all that was required of him ! Do you think that truly holy souls can ever be caught in these coarse toils of pride ? Do you not think, on the contrary, that the more sanctified they become, the more plainly does their penetrating eye measure the distance which separates them from the end ? Is it not from the purest lips that the most touching and heart-felt confessions of misery and sin are heard ? Is it not St. Paul who exclaims, “ Oh, wretched man that I am ! ” What then would he have thought had some one spoken to him of the overplus of his holiness or of his supererogatory virtues ? Methinks I hear him thundering with his powerful voice against this new pharisaism, overthrowing this fantastical scaffolding, and, upon the ruins of our pride, proclaiming anew the greatness and mercy of God.

Let us, however, if you will, admit these exceptional virtues. Let us suppose that some noble souls, without pride, and in order to save their brethren, impose upon themselves mortifications and sacrifices which were not required of them ; in a word, an extraordinary holiness, if holiness ever could be extraordinary. That is one of the sides of the picture, but there is a reverse to the medal. See what happens in countries where Roman Catholicism prevails. Behold that vast multitude of vulgar souls, charmed at being permitted to cast upon some of their fellows the burden of an impossible holiness, delighted to think that their salvation may thus be achieved by the action of others, and yielding willingly, in view of so grand a result, to the acts of outward adhesion and

passive submission which they are instructed to perform. Thus, on the one hand, you have a chosen few on whom men instinctively cast all that relates to the religious and superior life; for these, complete consecration to God, the life of faith, the search of the invisible realities, the sanctification which is the result of ascetism. On the other hand, you have the great majority of the nation, who pay off their debt towards religion with vain and empty ceremonies, but who live entirely outside of its influence; for these, lay existence, visible realities, ordinary morality. Now it is obvious that a wall of separation will gradually rise between these two societies. The clergy, representing the higher life, will keep itself aloof and retire more and more within its own ideas, within its ridiculous pretensions, within its joyless ascetism, instinctively cursing the movement of modern thought and activity, or looking upon it with mistrust. The mass of the people, casting off all nobler preoccupations, will become more and more fully absorbed in materialism; they will be satisfied with a low-toned morality whose roots will no longer plunge into the soil of the soul; their joys will be unholy; religion will become more and more unfamiliar to them; the most superficial unbelief will call forth their most scandalous applause; and this will be the just punishment of that deplorable doctrine by which the masses believe themselves relieved from the obligation of a personal faith, of a personal holiness, of a personal responsibility! Is all this true? Is this separation imaginary? Is it not visible in the science, politics, and literature of those countries, and even in the family circle, where husband and wife, brother and sister, no longer agree, when God, faith, prayer, and the very principles of the soul's life are in question? If you ask, on the contrary, why in Protestant lands there reigns a far closer and more real unity, notwithstanding apparent



diversities, I will answer: Because in these countries there are not two religions, the religion of the clergy and the religion of the people; because there are not two moralities, the morality of the perfect and the morality of the masses; because there are not two lives, the ascetic life of some and the ordinary life of the generality. But also because to all, to great and small, to people and pastors, to learned and ignorant, Christianity is presented as the all-pervading, all-sanctifying, all-elevating principle.

Therefore, with a profound conviction, I affirm that none can sanctify himself in the stead of others, and it is not in this sense that the words of my text are to be taken.

There remains a final error which I must now refute. When I say that we are to sanctify ourselves for our brethren, I do not mean that we are to do so in order to be seen of them. Whoever could have thought of such a thing? you exclaim. Oh! I know quite well that you are no pharisees. You do not wish your lives to be holy in appearance only; you do not wish them to be like whited sepulchres, beautiful outward, but within full of all uncleanness. Hypocrisy horrifies you, but it is not of hypocrisy I accuse you. This is your temptation. The Gospel tells you that you are to be the witnesses of truth. The desire of bearing testimony to one's faith, of bringing others to share in one's convictions, is one of those which have been most fully developed in our churches. We are, therefore, involuntarily preoccupied by the thought of the influence which we may exercise upon our fellows. What effect produces my life? That is a very natural question. But what is to be feared is that this preoccupation will absorb us too completely, and that reality will give way to appearance. Question your conscience on this point. Have you never done what was right merely for the sake of setting your brethren an example? Have

you never avoided sin, or even crime, not so much because crime was hateful to you, as from fear of the scandal which would have followed its perpetration? When you analyse your good works, blot out all the motives, such as the fear of being accused of lukewarmness, the necessity of stimulating others, the desire of proving to the world that the Gospel is powerful, or of raising your own particular Church in the opinion of the world; blot out all these, and then tell us what you have done simply for God. Does this calculation terrify you? Oh! pharisaism is not only at Jerusalem, beneath the long robes and phylacteries of the priests. It is here, in our hearts; there we must pursue and destroy it. Alas! we may sanctify ourselves, not because God is holy, but because there are Christians and worldlings who study us. Thus we may visit the poor, not because we love them, but that men may not accuse us of cold-heartedness. Now, let us not be afraid to say it, the holiness which aims at appearing is not true holiness. God rejects it, for He knows that it is not meant for Him; and men themselves will not be taken in by these appearances, for they instinctively feel that all holiness should be referred to God.

So far we have considered the wrong views which may be taken of the words of our text; let us now see what is its true signification, and how we may sanctify ourselves for our brethren. We may do so in this sense, that whoever sanctifies himself exercises on his fellow-men an influence of incalculable importance.

This may, at first, seem strange to you. We easily understand that a man who accomplishes some act of sacrifice and love thereby acts upon his brethren; but sanctification seems to us an entirely inward fact, which calls forth no echo whatever from the outward world. Now this is a serious error. Nothing is more utterly

false than to believe that we act upon others only when we wish to do so either by our words or by visible actions. Besides this voluntary influence there is another which is far more powerful and which is exercised by our everyday life. This influence is silent, I own ; but it is none the less important. It has been observed that, in the domain of nature, the most mighty agents are those which act most mildly and imperceptibly. A storm may, at first sight, be taken for the grandest manifestation of the power of the elements. When the clouds are swept away by an infernal force, when the sea rages in its fury, when the lightning rends the sky and dazzles us, we feel bewildered and crushed. And yet, what is the power of the storm in comparison with that of light, which rises pure and peaceful morn after morn upon our earth ? So gentle is its approach that it does not even disturb our slumbers ; and yet, beneath the silent influence of its rays, everything is revived, beautified, warmed, and renewed ; the world is, as it were, created anew by its power ; and should the sun forget to rise to-morrow, our hemisphere would become a vast and icy waste, where death alone would reign in the midst of an eternal winter. So it is in our moral life ; beside the wilful and often stormy action of our words, there is the involuntary action of our life. I affirm that of the two the latter is the more powerful, because it is simple and sincere. Of our words, alas ! we are the masters ; we arrange them at pleasure ; by our words we may express faith, tenderness, solicitude, charity . . . . But, notwithstanding these passing sounds, our life also renders its silent, true, and sincere testimony ; it is the faithful expression of our moral being, and all our art would fail to turn it from its true signification ; it follows us everywhere, whatever we may say to the contrary. I add, that this influence is all the more powerful that it is involuntary. In fact,

when men feel that our aim is to act upon them by our books, by our discourses, by our arguments, they instinctively endeavour to guard against our efforts. But, in presence of the silent teaching of our life, their prejudices disappear, their mistrust ceases, and their heart becomes accessible to its influence.

We must not, therefore, suppose that when we sanctify ourselves in secret, in silence, or alone with God, we do not act upon our brethren. Whatever we do, our life is a book which cannot fail one day to be opened, and to impart its lessons to the world. I once saw a madman running at his utmost speed in order to get rid of his shadow; more foolish still is he who thinks he can separate his life from the influence it exercises. Thus the prodigal who loses his soul in unworthy pleasures excuses himself by saying that he injures no man, as if the example of his levity, of his lost and dissipated life, did not exert a terrible power; as if all the good he might have done and has left undone was not to be cast into the balance on the judgment-day. Thus also the egotist excuses himself, and imagines that because he asks nothing of any one, because he has surrounded himself with independence, none have the right to require anything of him; as if selfishness was not a cowardly desertion of charity, and did not bear with it a withering influence. Whatever we do, our conduct tells on others. I have read of a martyr whom the executioners treated with the most revolting cruelty; they first of all cut off his tongue, because it proclaimed the love and mercy of the Lord; then his hands, because they pointed heavenwards; then they put out his eyes, because they also spoke of joy and hope; and when, bleeding and mutilated, they left him, the inimitable expression of his countenance still testified to the firm confidence which filled his heart. Thus, though we neither speak nor act,

we always show to the world what is within us, and even our silence may be eloquent. We can never tell how far extends this involuntary influence. Human lives are so completely intermingled, they are joined by so many imperceptible fibres, they are linked together by so many invisible bonds, that whatever touches them may have an unlimited importance. Just as a powerful commotion may be produced throughout the whole of the human system by the prick of a very fine needle on an almost invisible nerve, so a hidden and insignificant action may produce the most momentous results. This fact is clearly visible in the history of men. A judge falters in an important cause, or simply yields to his apathy at the very moment when all his moral energy was required, and innocent victims are condemned to long years of suffering. . . . Years ago, in the United States of America, an assembly hesitates to settle by an energetic decision the question of slavery, and torrents of blood have not yet effaced the evils which one effort on its part would have stifled in their germ. Each of us has his share of that influence of which those who occupy elevated positions in society appear to possess so great a measure; we can never tell what will be the consequences of a trifling word, of a gesture, of an insignificant action. More than this; though we bury our conduct in silence, though we put forth all our efforts to conceal it from the view of men, we never can tell the influence it may exert in the future. Just as the writer who, yielding to a shameful motive, has coldly consecrated his genius to the production of an impious or immoral book, if later he repent, will have the bitter sorrow of being unable to efface his thoughts (for, like poison, they will have become inoculated in the blood of his generation), so we are incapable of retracting the past; its voice is still heard, its power is still felt. Yes,

there may at this very hour be some human being who complains and suffers because, in the past, you have neglected a duty or been guilty of a mean action which you have buried in the depths of silence. This is an application of the mysterious and terrible law of human solidarity, by which whatever we do affects our fellow-men.

I have called this law a terrible law; but, thanks be to God, I may also call it a blessed law. For it has its bright side, that which Jesus Christ brings before us. When we sanctify ourselves, we act upon our brethren. For instance, you have made a sacrifice for God; no one knows of it; no one will ever know what efforts, what sufferings, what tears it has cost you. God alone has seen them. Nevertheless, when the struggle is over, you come to me; few words will be spoken, perhaps, but the peace and the serenity of your appeased conscience will be as an unclouded light which will reach to the depths of my soul. A virtue will come out of you. Is this an imaginary picture? Can you deny the unequalled power of holiness? Let us make a better use of it in the future. Long had I thought that to convert the world there was but one thing to be done; to organise vast systems, to create powerful societies, to collect funds. Alas! I had forgotten that, to attain this end all the more surely and rapidly, the first and most important thing was to sanctify myself by reforming my life, by humbling my heart, by struggling against the spirit of criticism, bitterness, and injustice, by pitilessly snapping the bonds of sin, by living in such a manner that my life may be examined in the full light of day. What though these struggles are unknown to the world? What though none have witnessed them? Think you they will remain fruitless? Think you that out of this renewed life will not spring forth an influence far more

powerful and persuasive than from the feverish activity of an unsanctified mind ?

I find in this thought a deep source of encouragement. Truly the work of sanctification seems to us far more difficult to accomplish than the works of charity. Lay before us a career in which devotion and sacrifice will be necessary, in which we shall be enabled to exert a direct influence upon our fellows ; this mission allures us. But to sanctify ourselves, to struggle against our natural inclinations, to crucify the flesh with its lusts, to conquer our evil habits, to repress our selfish independence, how ungrateful is this task, and how unimpassioned are our efforts to attain this end ! What strength, therefore, shall we not find in the thought that, by sanctifying ourselves, we act upon others, indirectly it may be, but in the most powerful manner, to raise, comfort, and edify them ! Ye fathers and mothers ! sanctify yourselves for the sake of your children ; think that all your words and all your instructions will never have the same peaceful authority as that which one hour's intimate communion with God will stamp upon your brow ; reflect that nothing will touch them or fill them with respect as the thought that you are yourselves taught of God. Ye Christians ! sanctify yourselves for the Church. Think that all the plans you form for its extension and life, that all your agitation, all your words and actions, will do less for the advancement of the reign of God than the sight of Christianity transforming your heart, and causing those floods of living water of which Jesus tells us in the Gospel to gush out of that barren soil.

Oh ! how grand is holiness when viewed in this light ! Do you not see the distance which separates this sanctification from the servile terror of the slave who sanctifies himself in fear that he may work out his own salvation, or from the calculations of the hireling who imposes upon

himself sacrifice after sacrifice, work after work, and who would pay off his debt to God with his sufferings? How grand and beautiful, on the contrary, does holiness appear when its motive and messenger is love! It is because I love my brethren that for their sakes I would sanctify myself. I know that in so doing I labour for their good, that I edify them as well as if I spoke to them or gave them palpable proofs of my affection.

Therefore, brethren, your inward struggles, your lowly and repeated sacrifices, your joyfully accepted sufferings, your humiliations patiently endured, are not lost in nothingness. Borne upon the wings of love, all these hidden virtues spread over the world like precious seeds which the wind scatters far and wide.

Thus disappears the feeling of bitterness and vexation which takes possession of you, especially when outward and visible activity is forbidden you. Of what avail are my sufferings? says the sick man who for years has been a prisoner in his lonely chamber. Of what use are my tears? Of what use is my life? says the poor cripple who feels herself useless and a burden to others. To all these I answer, that they have no right to say that their life is useless so long as God leaves them at their post; that they have a Divine education to undergo, and that they have never been more useful to the Church than since they have been sanctified by sorrow. How, you ask, can they serve God and prepare His reign? I could tell you that they have a special mission, that of glorifying God in suffering, and that this mission is most necessary, for nothing more forcibly attests the power of the God of the Gospel than the happiness with which He fills the most joyless life. I might also say that, in their forced inaction, they may commune with God, and that intercession for their brethren, and for the Christian Church at large, is the task which God assigns to them. But I believe there is more



even than this ; I believe that, in virtue of a real, though mysterious, law, if they have sanctified themselves by suffering, they will act powerfully upon the Church, and that all their brethren will be brought under their influence. Ask me not how this influence will be produced. I cannot tell ; but I know that it will be produced. I know that holiness, however silent, ignored, and hidden from sight it be, has an all-pervading fragrance which men cannot fail at some time or other to inhale. What can be more mysterious and more certain than solidarity ? Who can tell where it begins or where it ends ? Who can appoint its limits to the influence of a soul that sanctifies itself ? The Scriptures call the Church the body of Christ. Who would dare to affirm that this is merely a figure ? Now, is it not most evident that the state of one of the parts of the body necessarily tells upon the whole ? Christians, you who are the members of the body of Christ, when you sanctify yourselves, you act upon the Church, and you labour towards the salvation of your brethren, towards the renewal of humanity.

Let me remind you, before I conclude, of the Divine harmony, in virtue of which nothing in creation can be lost. If men of science have stated that, in physical nature, not one atom is destroyed, but that the same elements are undergoing constant transformations from age to age, how blessed is the thought that, in the world of souls, nothing will ever be lost, and that the most obscure sacrifice ever serves for the edification of the whole. When Job bitterly mourned at the door of his ruined dwelling, forsaken by his friends, a prey to the most horrible disease, an object of general disgust and terror, did he know that his complaints and prayers, transmitted to posterity, would comfort thousands of souls on every point of the globe ? When Mary Magdalene brought her broken heart at the feet of Christ, and there,

with her tears, left the shame and dishonour of her past life, did she know how many lost souls, such as hers, would everywhere follow her example?

Let us, therefore, strengthen ourselves for the obscure conflict of holiness, for the cruel humiliations, for the bitter pains, for the sufferings of the body and of the soul. Like our Lord, let us often climb the heights of prayer; from these summits let us behold all those for whom we are called to suffer, and then we shall return amidst the world, more firmly resolved to bear our cross.

## IX.

*THE SABBATH.*

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”  
—MARK ii. 27.

PHARISAISM never dies. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that it no longer presents itself under the same aspect as it did in the days of Jesus Christ. Nothing around us recalls the superstitious regard for the day of rest which characterised that epoch. When we read in the Gospel that Jesus or His disciples were blamed by the scribes for having cured a sick man or plucked ears of corn on that day, we look upon this as an impossibility and an absurdity. When we recollect the many and minute ceremonies which the Pharisees practised in connection with the Sabbath, and their strange maxims concerning the most insignificant actions performed on that day, we are tempted to smile. Not only are these superstitions foreign to us, but on this point we have rejected the formalism which prevails in certain Protestant countries; we dread the legal and judicial spirit in which the day of rest is observed in their midst. Let us frankly confess it: no one believes, to use the words of our Lord, that man was made for the Sabbath; it is not into this excess that we are in danger of falling. But are you sure that you as clearly understand the first part of our text: “The Sabbath was made for man?”

I do not hesitate to affirm that, on this matter, there is in our Christianity an indifference to whose fatal effects we are but too blind. That is why I am anxious to draw your attention to this subject. You will judge for yourselves if I exaggerate its importance. You will see if this is merely a secondary question, or if, on the contrary, it does not bear upon one of the essential conditions of the Christian life, of the worship of the Church, and of the progress of truth. We shall, first of all, inquire of the Holy Scriptures which, for us, are the only source of all religious instruction; secondly, we shall appeal to the experience of the world and of the Church, and I believe that this investigation, however rapid it needs must be, will nevertheless suffice to bring into evidence the vital importance of the subject before us.

When we consider the ideas which prevail in the Church on this point, we distinguish two currents of thought which are totally opposed one to the other. Some, placing themselves under the Sinaitic law, and founding their opinion on the eternal value of the Decalogue, would impose upon us the fourth commandment. Others, protesting in the name of Christian liberty, and affirming, with reason, that we are no longer under the law, but under grace, come to the conclusion that the observance of the Sabbath has ceased to be obligatory, and that we are to look upon this day simply as an institution of the Church, most useful and excellent in truth, but in nowise resting upon Divine authority.

It cannot be denied that this last opinion is that which predominates in our midst, and I am not surprised at this. It is certain that most of those who have exerted themselves to plead the cause of the sanctification of the Lord's Day have almost always done so without distinguishing between the Old and the New Covenant, and have thus brought us back under the yoke of legal obedi-

ence and formalism. But the reaction has taken place in the direction of Christian liberty, and, as it most often happens, it has led us too far. It were time, to-day, to ascertain whether the cause in question cannot be delivered from the false arguments which have so fatally injured it, and whether it will not again rise triumphant from the unpopularity into which it has fallen.

We are no longer under the Jewish law, and I am in no danger of bringing you back to it: in fact, this were needless, for the institution of a day of rest is anterior to the law of Sinai. I open the book of Genesis; I read the first pages of that simple and sublime record which modern unbelief is pleased to regard as a mere essay of Hebrew cosmogony; from one or two of its lines I see brightly gushing forth a light which had been unknown to the ancient world, and which illumines the profound darkness of man's destiny. There I learn that God is one, that He is a spirit, that He is free; I learn that creation is the result of His own free and unconstrained will, and not a fatal evolution of eternal substance. There I see that evil is not inherent to matter, and that liberty was the initial condition of man here below. After these grand doctrines, I find the double fact of the unity of the human species and of the institution of marriage—these granitic foundations of all Christian societies. Now, in the very midst of this narrative, of which every particular feature has its special value, we read that when God had completed the work of creation, He rested on the seventh day: "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made."

I cannot, within the limits of this discourse, discuss the various questions raised by this division of the six days' work, and by this rest of God. I shall merely say that I am not in the least perplexed by this language

which is so thoroughly Divine in its simplicity, for the gradation of the six days' work cannot fail to strike all serious minds, from the many and remarkable analogies which it presents with the most incontestable results of science; and, as regards the rest ascribed to God, I know what is the import of such an expression when employed by a writer who pictures the world as called forth out of nothingness by the mere effort of the Divine word, by a writer who has uttered these incomparable words: "Let there be light: and there was light!" I believe, therefore, that Moses has no need whatever to learn of modern scepticism that God is above rest just as well as He is above fatigue. Let us set aside these commonplace objections and keep in mind that, immediately after the creation of man, God himself set apart a certain time for rest and meditation. Now, as it is obvious that God requires no rest, it follows that the object of this institution was necessarily man, or, in other words, that the Sabbath was made for man, as Jesus Christ declares. Such is the primordial fact of the institution of the day of rest. Let those who see in Genesis nothing more than the scientific essay of an ignorant genius say that Moses has introduced into heaven his own conception of the week, and that he has made it Divine in order to render it more respectable, this is easy to understand; but that a Christian, who takes this narrative as the real and authentic history of the origins of humanity, should deny that this verse consecrates the institution of a day of rest for man, is what appears to me most strange and inadmissible.

Some, however, dispute this conclusion. They tell us that we have no right to take this repose ascribed to God by the sacred historian as a proof of the institution of a day of rest for humanity. To this objection we answer that the passage is formal, and that, if the institution . . .

clearly denoted by the words: "God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it," does not concern humanity, it has neither sense nor value; besides, the best interpreter of this passage is the very nation by whom it has been preserved. Now, in the Sinaitic law, the rest of the Sabbath is closely allied with the rest of God, and with the sanctification of the seventh day mentioned in Genesis. It is because, from the very beginning, this day had been set apart and sanctified by Jehovah Himself that it is legally consecrated on Sinai.

We are then in presence of a Divine institution; the Sabbath has been made for man, at all times and in all places of the earth. I add: for man before the Fall. Now, if man in his state of innocence required such a day as this, how much more necessary will it not be for him in his fallen condition, now that he has become the slave of the flesh, of the visible world, of the hard law of labour, now that sin continually effaces from his heart the image of his God and the remembrance of his true vocation?

In the short narratives of the lives of the patriarchs, the Sabbath is not spoken of, but mention is made of the division of time into weeks, and this custom appears to me to be allied, by direct filiation, to the Divine week of the Creation. Hear on this point the testimony of a scholar whose judgment was wholly unbiassed by his religious faith, since he boasted that God, for him, was a mere hypothesis:—"The week," says the illustrious Laplace, "from the most remote antiquity in which its origin is lost, exists uninterruptedly throughout all ages, and finds its place in the successive calendars of the various nations. It is worthy of remark that it is found identically the same on all points of the earth. It is perhaps the most ancient and incontestable monument of human science, and seems to point to one *common*

source from which all knowledge has spread over the world.”<sup>1</sup> Weigh the value of this testimony: the week is a universal and everywhere identical fact, a fact which is to be traced back to an antiquity so remote that its origin cannot be positively determined; a fact, in a word, which indicates a common source of all human knowledge. Well, this source of which Laplace had but a vague notion, we Christians know it, and we call it Revelation. When, therefore, in the lives of the patriarchs or elsewhere, we meet with allusions to the week, we do not hesitate to believe that this institution has been preserved unimpaired from the very origin of humanity. Now it is evident that the patriarchs have handed it down to posterity under its primitive form, that is, with the day of rest as its crowning point.

The first mention which is made of the Sabbath in the book of Exodus is likewise anterior to the Jewish law; and the manner in which Moses recalls this institution to the Israelites, in connection with the manna which they were to gather on the eve of that day, denotes that he is not giving them a new commandment, but rather restoring an ancient custom which had perhaps sunk into oblivion, and which the independence of the people in the wilderness allowed of establishing once more in its full force. Finally, the very terms in which this fourth commandment is expressed are singularly suggestive:—“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” Men cannot be told to remember things which they do not already know. How then is it possible to trace back to the Jewish law an institution which this law itself acknowledges to have been established twenty-five centuries before, and which it borrows from the first traditions of humanity? It is evident that long before the promulgation of the Sinaitic law, the

<sup>1</sup> *Système du Monde*, book i. ch. iii.



observance of a day of rest was known and practised, and that, even outside of the Jewish nation, it appears to us, in the views of the Creator, as a universal and permanent institution. Though age has succeeded age, this law has never been abrogated; it is still as necessary, as sacred for us in our busy life and boisterous civilisation as it was for the first believers who carried with them, beneath the desert tent, their faith in God, the primitive traditions of the world and the future of humanity.

Then comes the Jewish law, the law of Sinai, which is no longer binding upon us, because the Gospel has suppressed by transforming it. It gives to the Sabbath a political and juridical character, appropriated to the whole of the Hebrew theocracy. It enforces its observance by strict ordinances, by rigorous penalties, and death is the punishment which attends the violation of this sacred day. Let us congratulate ourselves on being freed from this yoke, but let this very severity teach us how necessary in the sight of God was this institution for the religious education of the nation whom He had chosen to be His own special people. If Paul has taught us that we are no longer the slaves of the law, it does not follow that we are to treat it lightly. How should we not be struck, for instance, with the fact that the institution of the Sabbath has found its place in the Decalogue instead of being lost amid the multiplied and minute prescriptions of the Mosaic code? I am not of those who think that the Decalogue, under its legal form, has an eternal value; I am no friend of those arbitrary distinctions by which some presume to separate it from the rest of the law, and to impose it upon mankind for ever. But, on the other hand, I cannot avoid being struck with the fact that the Decalogue is a most admirable summary of the whole of the moral law, and that each of the ordinances which it contains bears directly

upon the religious life of all who in every age have aimed at serving God upon earth. Well, when I see the commandment of the day of rest occupying so important a place in it, when I see it enjoined in so formal a manner, I draw from this the conclusion that it affects the very conditions of religious life, and that it must have an eternal value.

But the enactment itself, however strict it appears to us, failed to satisfy the sanctimonious spirit of the Jews; the Pharisees added to it their minute prescriptions; they determined exactly what actions might be performed on that day, they calculated the number of steps men might be permitted to make, and they decided that, rather than take care of the sick during its sacred hours, it were better to leave them to die, that God might be glorified by a complete inactivity.

We all know that Jesus Christ has freed us from the bondage of Pharisaism. Likewise, as St. Paul declares, He has abolished the law of precepts and ordinances. We who are redeemed by grace are no longer under the law, we no longer obey the ceremonial prescriptions of Moses; no one has the right to lay them upon us, and to all attempts of this kind we would oppose the words of the Apostle, "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." But if Christ has divested the Sabbath of its legal, outward, and formal character, does it necessarily follow that He has condemned the institution in itself? On the contrary, He restores it to its universal and permanent character by these memorable words, "The Sabbath was made for man." In this way He brings us back to its original institution; on various occasions He shows in what spirit this day is to be observed; when He allows His disciples to pluck ears of corn to satisfy their hunger, He authorises all labour which is necessary to life; when He cures, He orders

works of mercy; when He bids one bear his burden, He shows that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and that when His service is in question, we may be called, even on that day, to perform the most painful and the most unpleasant duties.

The Primitive Church inherited the spirit of her Master: she renounced the purely external Sabbath of the Jews and obeyed the injunctions of the Apostle who said to all whose conscience was likely to be disquieted by so much boldness: "Be not troubled in respect of the Sabbath days!" And, as if to indicate that she is no longer under the law, but that she has regained her spiritual liberty, the Church changes the day of rest. The day which hitherto had been consecrated to the Father is now unhesitatingly consecrated to the Son; the first day of the week is fixed upon and celebrated in memory of the resurrection of Jesus by whom all things are made new. In the Acts of the Apostles we see most clearly that this day was set apart for worship, and we may infer that this custom was immediately adopted in the Churches founded by St. Paul, from the fact that during his sojourn at Troas, the Apostle, though anxious to resume his travels, delays his departure until the following week in order to assemble the Church on the first day of the week. In the epistles we find numerous injunctions relative to works of charity which are likewise connected with that day. Finally, in the last book of the Scriptures, in the Apocalypse, we read that it was on a Sabbath day that John, then an exile in the island of Patmos, beheld the vision which he relates, and he calls this day by the name which henceforth it will never lose, the Lord's Day.

Such is the teaching of Scripture on the subject of the Sabbath. It points it out to us preserved from age to age in the midst of God's chosen people; and if,

during the Mosaic dispensation, it bears a legal and juridical character, it nevertheless survives this judaical form and reappears in the New Testament as a Divine, universal, and permanent institution. Henceforth, if we had time to follow it throughout the early years of the Church, we would see with what profound respect it was at once regarded, and we might quote more than one testimony of the astonishment which the heathen nations experienced when they saw this day set apart amongst the Primitive Christians as a day in which all manner of labour was to cease, as a day which was to be completely consecrated to God.

This will be sufficient to convince us that the observance of the Lord's Day is not only a privilege, as many Christians imagine, but a duty based on a Divine order, and that, when we willingly break this command, we not only neglect a precious prerogative, but we violate a Divine institution. May this thought penetrate our conscience and be a serious warning for us!

Let us now add the testimony of experience to the declarations of Scripture. It will show us that God knew our frame when He gave us the Sabbath.

We all know that the human body requires frequent rest; but what is less generally admitted is the necessity of a regular return of this time of repose. To depend for rest on seasons when work will be scarce, and in the meantime to pursue unremittingly an exhausting labour, that is what takes place in France, and I do not hesitate to affirm that is a fearful mistake. See what is the condition of the manufacturing populations in that country; they are enfeebled and unnerved by these excesses of labour, which, as a natural consequence, are often followed by excesses of dissipation and the enjoyment of gross pleasures. We are often surprised when we compare the physical degeneracy of the workmen in the

French centres of industry with the vigour of the English operatives. Do you not think that the observance of the Lord's Day may be one of the causes of this difference? Have you never heard how the brutal slaveowners in America, who knew so well how to extort the greatest possible amount of labour from their unhappy victims, strictly enjoined the observance of the Sabbath by their slaves, not surely that they cared for their souls, for, in most cases, they did not believe that a soul could beat in a black man's breast, but because they had observed that labour without intermission enervated, enfeebled, and finally exhausted them.

Do you know what is bodily fatigue? And if you have but rarely felt it, can you picture to yourselves what its weight must be on a feeble constitution, when day after day brings its additional burden of weariness and exhaustion? Do you know that in Paris there are thousands of needlewomen who deem themselves happy when they can toil for fourteen or fifteen hours in the day, because for them that is the only way in which they can escape want? Do you know what it would say to them, that word rest which for you is so meaningless, because, alas! you know only the tediousness of too much leisure or the annoyance of having to find out means for killing time? Now, in busy seasons, in presence of the heaps of work which they are only too happy to receive, because it will enable them to lay something by for the evil day, in those times when at least eighteen out of the twenty-four hours are consecrated to labour, who thinks of procuring for those unhappy women the rest they so sadly need? The whole of the Sabbath is given to work, save perhaps one or two hours in which the unfortunate beings, bewildered by excess of fatigue, seek a stimulus in the excesses of pleasure. Oh! give them the Sabbath, the whole of the Sabbath, with its pure and

smiling morn, with its peaceful awakening undisturbed by the ghastly phantom of forced labour, and in saving their body who can tell if you will not also save their soul?

But bodily repose is not the only benefit which the Lord's Day procures for man; above the physical nature there is the heart and the intellect, which must be developed at any cost, if we love our brethren, and if we are anxious to prevent the lower instincts from mining the very foundations of society. I boldly affirm that such a development is impossible in the present day without the Sabbath. There is a fact which can no longer be denied, the fact that labour is becoming more and more absorbing. Society tends more and more to become like a vast mechanism in whose wheels the individual is completely entangled and despoiled of his liberty; in every career a high position must be attained, not a moment is to be lost, woe to him who is behind time! In the higher professions, the young man sees himself, from his childhood, surrounded by numerous competitors; he must go on acquiring and acquiring knowledge, loading his memory with the accumulated results of the labour of all the preceding generations. In humbler spheres, in manual vocations, it had seemed at first that when the brute forces of nature would have been brought under the subjection of man, he himself would have won a greater liberty; but behold, he has become, if I may so speak, the motive agent of the machines which he guides, and this matter, of which he had thought to make his slave, has become his master! Enter one of our large factories; amidst that bewildering noise, see those hundreds of men rising and bending at every second to follow the movements of the loom or of the roller which turns and turus from morning to night; think that day after day, hour after hour, that is their life, and picture to your-

self what would become of their souls should this labour never cease ! Now, if it be but irregularly interrupted from excess of fatigue, those hours of leisure will bring with them no true repose, no salutary relaxation. But let the Sabbath come, let those sounds cease, let silence reign, and those men will breathe freely ; for a day they will remember that they are not mere living tools or machines, but that they are men ; for a day they will remember that they have a soul. You will object, perhaps, that they will profane this rest. This will doubtless happen in many cases, for they will be free, free to make a wrong use of the most precious privilege ; nevertheless I dare affirm that, after all, the full liberty left them on the Lord's Day will be their best safeguard against all gross pleasures. The Sabbaths of which the first half is consecrated to worldly gain, are those which most often close in dissipation and sin. If, on the contrary, from the first hours of the Sabbath morn, the workman or the man of business may peacefully remain with his family, if he may freely give his time to those he loves, think you not that he will draw from these purifying impressions his greatest strength against coarse temptations ? Think you not that the ties between the mother and her children will grow stronger, and that the noble life of the heart and of all lawful affections will regain the place it is, alas ! losing more and more ? Destroy the Lord's Day, and at the same stroke you destroy home-life, you shake the very foundation-stone of all society.

But if the Sabbath is the day of the family, it is, for the same reason, the day of those who have no family, of the poor, of the sick, of the destitute. Here I do not speak of the fact that, on that day, the whole family of God upon earth assembles, and that in the midst of the Church no one who believes and prays can feel a complete stranger. What I mean to say is that on this day,

when we have set aside our absorbing toil or the cares of business, our heart is better able to remember those who suffer. For instance, visit our hospitals and see with what eager impatience their inmates await the return of the Lord's Day. And why is it so? Is it not because they know that their friends will have time to visit them then; because they will feel the beneficial influence of sympathy; because to their sufferings will not be added the bitter feeling of their loneliness. And what takes place there likewise takes place wherever we meet with bodily or spiritual suffering. Yes, if the Sabbath has been made for man, it has been made especially for the poor and the sick; and were it but for this reason, we should bless the Lord who has given it to humanity.

But it is especially when we study this question from the religious point of view that we understand the full value of the Lord's Day. You are Christians! This is as much as to say that you wish to serve the God who has saved you, to proclaim Him upon earth, to win souls for Him, to prepare His reign. Well! is it necessary to demonstrate that, without Sabbath, there can be no efficacious preaching, no fruitful evangelisation, no Church life? When you are indifferent to the observance of the Lord's Day, you injure each of these causes.

"How shall they believe," says the Apostle, "if they have not heard?" And willingly I add: "How shall they believe if they can never hear the appeals of truth?" Now this is what occurs in the present day. Our working classes show an increasing and most sympathetic interest for the preaching of the Gospel. Our least efforts in that vast field have borne their fruits. God seems to call us to the accomplishment of a mission which may be immense. But, between these souls and ourselves, there is Sunday labour, and for the poor this labour is in many cases a bondage from which they



cannot free themselves. I will give but one example of this. Each year brings to our public schools thousands of children belonging to the lower classes; we often detect in those youthful souls the best dispositions, a moral delicacy, religious sentiments, which cheer us and give us hope for the future. But each year also, the fatal age marked out for apprenticeship removes them from our care and solicitude. At that age when temptations assail them, when the passions awaken, at that age when the rest of the Sabbath would be more than ever required, it is almost always pitilessly denied them. It is the apprentice who, on that day, comes out of the shop or of the work-room the last. That is how all his Sabbaths are spent, and when the best part of the day has thus been taken from him, you ask what becomes of his soul. What do you think it can become? Thus we sow, and the seed is rapidly borne away; thus upon these young souls weighs an oppression which should wring from our own hearts a cry of agony and opposition. Thus, under the influence of materialism and the selfish unconcern of those who should oppose it, the greatest of liberties, that of serving God, is withdrawn from thousands of our fellow-creatures; and when the world has stamped its fatal impress upon those childlike souls, they go on separating themselves more and more from the God whom they have scarce known, until the evil days come of which Scripture tells, the days when man, absorbed by the cares of life, says, in speaking of the religion of his childhood: "I have no pleasure in it."

How, in such circumstances, is it possible to evangelize successfully? Not only is the progress of truth rendered impossible, but religious life is necessarily endangered. Oh! I know that for the Christian all days are equally holy; I know that God is a spirit, and that man may serve Him everywhere and at any time; I

know that in every spot the faithful soul may find a sanctuary and a few moments to consecrate to Him. But if the whole of the Christian's life must be a prayer, does it follow that he must renounce his regular hours for devotion? If his life as a whole must be reflective, does it follow that he needs no special moments for meditation? The inner and spiritual life also requires a day of rest; without it piety will soon shrink into a false spirituality; we want a day of rest in which, the din of earth having ceased around us, we may hear the voice of God. As Luther said: "Thou must cease thy work if thou wouldst have God continue His own in thee." No one will accuse us of inclining towards formalism. A miserable thing in our sight is a form without life; but there is something more dangerous still. It is the complete absence of life as well as form; for an empty form is the witness of an absent thing, it is a silent protest, a warning. Now, I fear that through contempt of form we often lose the most precious blessings which the Sabbath was destined to bring us.

Cannot what I say of the individual soul be applied with still greater force to the life of the Church, to worship in common? Why in our holy assemblies is there so little zeal and sympathy? Why those late arrivals, which betray such a want of eagerness and respect for the worship itself? Why that attention so easily diverted during prayer and the reading of the Word of God? It is because our piety is without discipline and without rule; because it is too much influenced by the fancies and irregularities of our tastes and transitory dispositions; because, to return to our subject, considering as we too often do the Sabbath as an ordinary day, we allow ourselves to be borne away by the usual current of our thoughts and favourite

vanities, and then all we have left for God is a heart and mind utterly filled up, utterly absorbed, by the world.

We have consulted the world and the Church together ; with Scripture, their experience has confirmed the truth of this saying of Jesus Christ : "The Sabbath was made for man." We have seen what it costs to trample under foot a Divine institution, and what numberless blessings are thus dried up at their very source. It is time to examine ourselves and to see what practical conclusions we may draw from the principles we have stated.

As we have already said, two things are here implied : repose and consecration, liberty as regards labour and the sanctification of the soul. Now, on both these points, judge for yourselves if there is nothing to be reformed in your lives.

First of all, as regards rest. It is the necessary condition of sanctification. The tide of labour which overflows our soul must necessarily be arrested ; the deafening sounds of life must be hushed. I do not insist on this point, for I believe none of my hearers could pursue on that day their usual course of business and labour without being troubled in their conscience, and it is to this inward monitor that I now refer them. But observe, in vain would our body rest if our soul continued to be engrossed by our habitual occupations. If our thoughts remain with our books, studies, affairs, and speculations, in the eyes of God we desecrate the holy day of rest.

Further, this repose which you claim for yourselves must be assured to your brethren, especially to those who, in this respect, are the slaves of their fellows, and you know how many they are.

You will perhaps tell me that this would call for a

general reform in the state of society, and that the task is immense and impossible; I could, first of all, answer that there is no impossibility for the Christian, and that this argument cannot be accepted. I believe that when a cause is just, it imposes itself in the long run to public opinion. Now, the question is to insure the first and most sacred of all liberties, moral liberty, to thousands of defenceless beings, to thousands of children; by an inevitable consequence, it is their eternal future which is here at stake. Well, such a cause as this, taken up with enthusiasm, pleaded with perseverance, would awaken in the public conscience more sympathy than we suppose; even those who would not accept it from these higher motives would nevertheless lend it their support by reason of its marvellous utility. From the day when the poor will understand that their most precious interests are here at stake, the cause of the Sabbath will be victorious. I know that though you may obtain for them the rest of the Sabbath, you will not thereby have obtained its sanctification. I know that, even then, this day will be for thousands the day of the most riotous pleasure and dissipation. Alas! they will be free, free to lose their souls on that day; but upon them will rest that solemn responsibility. As for you, you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that in God's sight you have done your utmost to leave them on that day a chance of salvation.

But without losing sight of this grand aim, let each of us set to work from this day forth in his own sphere; let each of us leave, as far as possible, the rest of the Sabbath to those whom God has placed under our influence, and who depend upon us for their daily bread. The Christian woman who deprives the poor dressmaker of her Sunday rest for the sake of coming to church better dressed, is responsible before God for that soul

which had been entrusted to her care. What then will it be if, to shine in the world on that day, you rob your inferiors of the repose God meant them to enjoy? Here no self-exculpation; beware especially of saying that, even without this fancy of yours, their Sunday would have been taken up by labour; for then we would unhesitatingly answer you that the faults of others do not palliate your own, and that every man will bear his own burden.

So much for the repose of the Lord's Day. Now, as regards its sanctification. If we desire this day to be free from toil, it is in order that it may the more fully be consecrated to the Lord. You do not expect me to enter into the detail of the various occupations which are allowed or prohibited on that day. Moreover, it were impossible to establish this distinction. Let us leave this exact and minute casuistry to the Pharisees; I believe that, on this point, the only judge is conscience, and that each of us is to be taught of God. Christians, when you are supplied with the necessaries of life, remember, above all, that Sunday is the Lord's Day, the Lord's Day with its joys, which God forbid I should disparage! joys of home and cordial intimacy, in which the bonds which the solitude of individual labour had loosened during the week, are now cemented anew. Let the Word of God open this day, and sanctify its first hours in the midst of your family. Let public worship be for you a season of holy exercise; and instead of listening passively to the words of a man, bring your whole soul and spirit in your prayers and hymns, and remember that a fervent and serious assembly is the most solemn preaching that can be heard.

Then remember those who have need of you, those whom sickness leaves in solitude, those who are afflicted; the absent, to whom a letter would procure so much joy;

remember the feeble and the lowly ; this day is theirs also, for the poor, the sick, the sorrowing, are the representatives of the Lord here below. Try such a Sabbath, and you will see if time will hang heavily upon your hands ; you will see if in your life it will not be what to the traveller in the sands of Africa is the oasis in the wilderness.

When we have obtained for all the repose to which they are entitled, then we shall have to make of the Sabbath a day of progress and conquest for all good works, for all that ennobles the soul, for all that softens and comforts it. Henceforth may each Sabbath find us at work, vindicating for the service of God the day of which the world robs Him, and thus raising with a firm and steady hand the rampart without which the rising tide of materialism threatens to invade and overflow the world !

## X.

*TO KNOW AFTER THE SPIRIT.*

“Wherefore, henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.”—2 Cor. v. 16.

I HAVE chosen as the subject of our meditation a saying of St. Paul which perhaps astonishes you as it astonished myself until I had caught its true meaning. I confess that formerly these words affected me painfully; they seemed to me, shall I say? as the expression of a wild spiritualism. What! here is an apostle who will no longer know Christ after the flesh! But is not this forgetting the Saviour’s humanity? Is it not slighting the deep and tender sympathy which the Son of Man inspires? Are we, then, to forget His incarnation, His feeble nature, His sufferings,—all, in a word, that attracts us, all that speaks to our heart, all that comforts us? Are we henceforth to have only a glorified Christ as the object of our contemplation? Are we to seek Him only with the Father, in that perfection, in that celestial splendour which dazzles rather than allures? . . . Such were my sorrowful reflections, and unable as I was to follow the apostle in his lofty flight, I joyfully returned to the Friend of Martha and Mary, to Him who wept upon the grave of Lazarus, to the Man of Sorrows, who, in the days of His flesh, bore our griefs and all the woes of our wretched humanity.

But light has dawned upon this mystery; I have understood that St. Paul's intention was not to take anything from the Saviour's humanity, and that these words which seemed to me so overpowering are, on the contrary, full of instruction and consolation. That is what you also will acknowledge as you more fully take in their true significance.

To comprehend them we must refer to the admirable chapter from which they are drawn. Among all St. Paul's epistles, none so strikingly set forth all the depth and riches of his heart as those he addressed to the Corinthians; and the chapter in question shows us whence flows that love which has produced the most devoted life, the most powerful apostleship which the Church has ever seen. If Paul loves thus, it is because the love of Christ constraineth him; that is why he, a stranger, has come to those Corinthians, that is why he has given them his time, his heart, his life. Paul therefore declares that he loves them, and that there mingles with this affection no carnal or interested motive; consequently, in his relations with the world, he pays no regard to aught that is earthly and transient; little cares he if men be poor or rich, learned or ignorant, Jews or Gentiles; in those to whom he speaks he sees souls to be saved and nothing more. He might boast, as do the false teachers who trouble his ministry, of having known the Christ in Judea, of being His brother according to the flesh, . . . but to this he attaches but slight importance; he will know Christ only after the Spirit, that is, as his Saviour, and the Saviour of the Corinthians; that, for him, is the essential point, the true manner in which Jesus would be known.

Let us draw from this thought a lesson of primary importance.

Who among us has not envied the Jews the privilege



of having had Christ with them in the days of His flesh, or His disciples the happiness of having heard Him, or Mary and Lazarus the prerogative of having received Him under their roof? It seems to us that had we but heard Him our hearts would have been more deeply stirred; that a mere look of His would have pacified our soul; that the very sound of His voice would have produced upon us an ineffaceable impression; that, had we but once been the witnesses of His miracles, we would nevermore have suffered doubt to enter our mind; and that at sight of His Cross our moved and subdued hearts would have been wholly given up to Him.

Alas! who can tell if all this would have been realised? Who can tell if, after having seen Jesus, our faith would have been stronger? Hear our Lord Himself. A woman cries out in His presence, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee;" He answers, "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." A man, breaking through the crowd, brings Him this message, "Thy mother and Thy brethren stand without desiring to see Thee;" He replies, "My mother and My brethren are those who hear the Word of God and do it." His apostles in the upper room would retain Him; Jesus utters these words, "It is expedient for you that I go away." The disciples on the way to Emmaus, having recognised Him, exclaim, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent;" Jesus disappears from their sight. Mary Magdalene in the garden would lay hold on Him; Jesus says unto her, "Touch Me not! for I am not yet ascended to My Father." What do all these words signify, if not that it is above all by the soul, by faith, that Jesus would be known and possessed? Now, if this be the case, are we not immediately led to the consoling conclusion that neither time nor distance can prevent us from knowing Christ and feeling His presence, and that, in the nine-

teenth century, we may hear Him, possess Him, rejoice in His light, as really as did those who beheld Him with their bodily eyes, who witnessed His miracles, and heard His voice? And is not all this most strikingly obvious? Is it not certain that the Church, so long as she has had Jesus in her midst, has been feeble, timid, undecided, and fearful, and that not till Christ left her did she receive the baptism from on high, out of which she came forth radiant with youth, faith, and triumphant hope? Men said of St. Paul, "His letters are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible." May not these words be applied in a certain measure to Jesus Christ? Did His discourses, at the time when He uttered them, produce the incomparable effect which they have had since he returned to the Father? Did Jesus in the days of His flesh ever convert the thousandth part of the souls which the preaching of His apostles have brought captive to the foot of His Cross? Is it not certain that Jesus Christ absent, separated from us by eighteen centuries, lives in the world far more than He did when men saw Him with their eyes, touched Him with their hands, or heard Him with their ears? Is it not certain that now He enlightens more minds, subdues more hearts, awakens more consciences in a single day than He did during the whole of His three years' ministry?

You ask to see Him, you envy the privilege of the disciples, you say: "Blessed is the apostle who leaned his head upon His bosom; blessed is the Samaritan woman who was permitted to give Him drink; blessed is the man of Cyrene who was compelled to bear His cross!" I understand you, for the same thoughts have come to me also; but are you sure that if you had beheld Him you would have believed? Are you sure that His humiliation, His poverty, His abasement, would not have

caused you to shrink from Him? Are you sure that, seeing the Sadducees, the scribes and the sceptics of that time, rail at His appearance, you would not have felt ashamed at being well-nigh alone to confess Him, and at being obliged to side with Galileans, publicans and sinners? Are you sure that, hearing the Pharisees exclaim against His blasphemous pretensions, and invoke against Him the traditions of fifteen centuries and the venerated authority of Moses, you would not have been troubled by your scruples? Are you sure that, at sight of Jesus without a place to rest His head, exposed to ignominy and insult, abandoned of God, groaning in the dust of Gethsemane, turning towards heaven a look of bitter anguish and complaining of His Father's desertion; are you sure, in fine, that at sight of the pallor of death stealing over His features, you would not have doubted? Ah! you are not better than the disciples, you have not more zeal than Peter, more courage than John. What would you have done had you known Christ after the flesh? Who knows but you too would have fled? Who knows but you too would have denied Him, you who, enlightened by eighteen centuries of Christianity, and having seen His victorious Cross triumph over the world and over your own heart, have perhaps denied Him, or, to say the least, have doubted of Him!

Granted, however, that you had remained faithful to Him, would you have understood the work for which He had come? Would you not have been attached to His earthly person rather than to His divine mission? Would you have loved Him after the Spirit, as He wishes to be loved? Would not your love for Him have been that purely human affection which He so strongly rebuked in Peter when this apostle endeavoured to turn Him from the painful path in which the Cross awaited Him; or which He condemned in Martha when it pre-

vented her from choosing the good part and listening to His words? No; believe Jesus Christ, who said to His disciples: "It is expedient for you that I go away." It was expedient that He should go in order that His disciples' love should become what it was expected to be; in order that, instead of being chained down to earth, it should take wings and recognise the Son of God in the Son of Man. It was expedient that He should go, in order that those carnally-minded disciples should learn to believe in the eternal and invisible realities, in order that they should seek their Master's reign no longer at Jerusalem, no longer in the earthly glory or in the visible triumphs of a crowned Messiah, but in that royalty of souls which the Cross was to render possible. It was necessary that they should be deprived of His sight, of His looks, of His words, in order that their faith might be strengthened and eventually victorious; thus is the child deprived of its mother's milk that it may grow in strength and stature.

Now, brethren, we understand what St. Paul means when he declares that he no longer knows Christ after the flesh. It is not that he renounces His humanity, His abasement, His Cross, he who wishes to know nought but Christ crucified; but he means that the very humanity of Jesus must be viewed with the eyes of the Spirit, that it must be contemplated with the eyes of faith; that without this, it is indeed a touching but fruitless spectacle.

How many needful lessons might we not draw from this thought. What might we not say to those who still to-day are unwilling to know Jesus Christ otherwise than after the flesh? To give way to a purely human emotion at the remembrance of Jesus, to weep over the fate of that victim of human fanaticism, to look at the transitory side of His ministry, to honour His relics and His memory, to allow one's senses and imagination alone

to be stirred in presence of His Cross, is not that knowing Him after the flesh? Ah! not thus is He honoured when He is known after the Spirit. At the foot of the Cross, it is not upon Him men weep, but upon themselves. In His death it is not only His material sufferings they behold, but, above all, His prodigious abasement, His ineffable sacrifice. In the Son of Man it is the immolated Son of God they adore; and when they love Him after this manner, they prove it by giving Him their hearts, by consecrating to Him their lives. They do not seek Him eighteen centuries back, on the roll of the historical martyrs; they do not erect a magnificent sepulchre to the dead Christ and then refuse the living Christ a place in their hearts; they call upon Him, they invoke Him as the Saviour who reigneth for ever and ever; they associate in His work, they rejoice at His triumph, they prepare His advent; then, and then only, can they say that they truly know Christ.

I find a second and more general lesson in my text. St. Paul tells us that it is not only Jesus Christ but all men that he wishes henceforth to know after the Spirit, and not after the flesh. This thought is one which I am anxious to impress upon your minds to-day.

But in order to this, let us once again recall to mind its true significance, for on this point we must prevent a serious and fatal mistake. This saying has sometimes been interpreted in a manner which has called forth the legitimate disapprobation of many. We have seen Christians who, under pretence of an imaginary perfection, have ruthlessly snapped all the ties of flesh and blood, renounced family life, and scorned the natural affections as though they were mere human failings. For instance, we have seen sons and daughters, whose duty it had been to support an aged father or mother, leave them, and after having raised between them the

impassable wall of monastic vows, say to them,—“I know you no more!” Spiritual heroism! some exclaim, magnificent triumph of the Spirit over the flesh! . . . Is that what the gospel teaches? Is that what St. Paul wishes to insinuate? <sup>1</sup>

In the days of Jesus Christ similar facts occurred. There were sons and daughters then who, to make themselves agreeable to God, offered to Him what they should have consecrated to their father and mother. This gift they called *corban*, and St. Mark tells us that none had the right to lay claim to it. What was Christ's opinion of this? He says of such a line of conduct that it is making void the law of God. And in the same spirit St. Paul declares that the Christian who neglects either father or mother is worse than an infidel. Now, brethren, to neglect them is not merely to deny them bread, but it is especially to deny them one's heart. That is the teaching of the gospel. If, then, under pretence of renouncing the flesh, men violate or forget the natural laws, they have against them not only the voice of nature, but the voice of God Himself. Let none, therefore, come forward in the name of the gospel to justify these monstrous exaggerations of a chimerical perfection. St. Paul has already condemned them, and it is mere mockery to make them rest on his authority.

Many, doubtless, will here bring forward those numerous passages in which Jesus Christ so unsparingly condemns all who, before they resolve on following Him, consult flesh and blood; they will remind me of these inexorable words: “Let the dead bury their dead,” or of these, which are stranger still: “If any one come to Me, and hate not his father, his mother, his wife, his chil-

<sup>1</sup> My intention, in this passage, is not to condemn monastic life in a summary manner and under all its forms. I merely wish to show how fantastical and irreligious is the contempt of natural affections.

dren, his brothers, his sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." But what is the point in question in these last precepts? The point in question is to choose between duty and the delights of the heart, between the law of God and the sweet affections of home. Now, for the believer the choice cannot be doubtful; when God speaks he must obey; no affection, were it the closest and most sacred, should come between God and our souls. Here I venture to affirm that our conscience yields a full assent to the teaching of Christ. But how completely at variance is this instruction with the system which condemns the life of the heart and the joys of existence as evil in themselves, and which incites the Christian to a hard and unfeeling spirituality. No, let us say it boldly, the life of the heart, the natural affections, the body itself, all these things have in them nothing impure; all that is human can be sanctified and consecrated to God.

What then are we to understand by these words of the apostle, "Henceforth know we no man after the flesh"? Methinks their meaning is very plain. In every man there are two natures, the outward and the inward: the man according to the flesh is the outward being; the man according to the spirit is the immortal soul. In the eyes of the flesh you are poor or rich, writers or magistrates, merchants, artisans, or servants; in the eyes of the spirit you are children of God. Well, St. Paul declares that henceforth what he would see, what he would know in every man, is the spiritual and immortal being. Do you not see how new, how grand, how sublime is this thought? and do not these words of the apostle fill you with emotion?

To see in every man an immortal soul, that is what Christianity alone could teach us. Before Jesus Christ, what were the poor, the slaves, the publicans? Now, in

the eyes of Jesus, the soul of the vilest of harlots weighs as much in the balance as that of a Cæsar. In the eyes of Jesus, earthly grandeur is nothing; not so much as a word does He condescend to give to it; but let Mary pour her box of perfume upon His feet, in token of her repentance, and He declares that this deed will never be forgotten, even to the end of time. In the eyes of Jesus, what are the artificial distinctions of this world? What He sees everywhere is sinners to be saved, to all He speaks the same language, to all He grants the same love, none appears to Him unworthy of His attention; and in many cases, it is upon the humblest and lowliest that He lavishes His most sublime instructions.

It is at Christ's school, therefore, that Paul has learned to know men no longer according to appearance; there he has learned to see in such as Festus or Agrippa nought but lost souls, to whom, unmindful of crown or sceptre, he will preach the truth that saves. There he has learned to evangelise such as Aquila or Lydia with the same love as if the souls of the proconsul Sergius or the governor Publius were at stake; there he has learned that henceforth there is neither Greek nor barbarian, neither bond nor free, but that all are alike before God.

Thus it is we must know men, thus it is we must love them. The world has its distinctions of rank, learning, and fortune, which I, certainly, would not destroy; they are necessary; overthrow them to-day, and to-morrow they reappear, for they form part of the very conditions upon which modern society rests. Let us respect them, and beware lest, under pretence of Christianity, we impose upon superiorities of rank or fortune a level which each of us would unquestionably lower to meet his own individual condition. But pray, let us also learn to know men by their grand and immortal sides, to know them according to the spirit and not according to



the flesh. As for me, I know of nothing more wretched than the manner in which a certain class of people judge of humanity. According to their idea, men are mere labels, representing this or that rank, title, or fortune. Between them is established a sort of conventional language which never reaches beyond the outward and superficial being. Apart from social life, apart from the relations between superior and inferior, master and servant, buyer and seller, they see nothing; all is artificial, substance as well as form, religion as well as morals; all is empty, delusive, and false. It would never enter the thoughts of most world-wise men to discover a soul beneath that social polish; their words will never reach the soul of those they meet, never will they call forth one of those sincere emotions which spring from the depths of the human being. Such is the life of thousands of our fellow-men. Ah! how I love to get out of that factitious and vitiated atmosphere, to breathe the vivifying air of the gospel; there what I see in my fellow-creature is, above all, a man; nay, more, a sister-soul. Give me the most ignorant and depraved being, one of those wretches to whom the world would never condescend to grant even one moment's affection and sympathy; if, as I look upon him, I think of Jesus Christ, I am reminded that he is my brother by what in him is most profound and imperishable, by his soul; and how then could I refuse to respect him?

Oh, how grand would life be if we could see humanity as Jesus Christ saw it, if we could judge of men, not from the outward being, but from the inward! What discoveries would we not often make in natures which seem to us most ungrateful and uncommunicative! That is what Jesus did. He brought out the immortal soul, He discerned it in the depths of the lowest and most depraved life; and the soul responded to His call, for His voice had in it the

mysterious attraction of love. What would an ordinary observer, or even a profound philosopher, have seen in that remote corner of Galilee where Jesus exercised His ministry? An honest and ignorant population, and nothing more. He would have judged only according to the flesh. But Jesus has brought out from its midst some of the finest and grandest characters which the world has ever known, such men and women as St. Peter, Mary, and St. John. And why? Because He discovered these souls and loved them. Let us follow His example; let us say with the apostle, that from this time forth we will know our brethren by their soul, that is by their eternal nature.

You are a mother, for instance. How do you know your children? Alas! you may hitherto have seen in them mere idols, to which you have wholly given up your heart. Know them henceforth after the spirit, see in them souls with which God has entrusted you; you will love them all the more for this, and you will not incur the fearful responsibility of losing them, it may be, for the higher and eternal life.

Let the same thought permeate all your affections, and, as far as possible, all your relations with your fellow-men. You are Christians; oh! love no man without loving his soul; give not your heart to that which cannot be eternal; above the world of appearance see the world of reality, the only world which is acknowledged of God. Train your minds to discern in every man what God Himself discovers in him; then you will never be guilty either of cowardly complaisance for those who are above you, or of a contempt which is more cowardly still for those who are your inferiors; then, according to the expression of St. Peter, you will honour all men, because in each of them you will perceive a soul, that is, a sanctuary of the living God, a ruined or restored sanctuary, perhaps, but nevertheless a sanctuary,

which it will be impossible to approach without a feeling of respect.

Brethren, all things are passing away and escaping our grasp ; all that is but flesh is destined to decay and vanish. Everything warns us of the danger of giving our hearts to that which is mere appearance. Appearance, great God ! will *that* save us ? Ah ! what, in the last day, will all the splendours of the flesh avail us ? Of what service, I ask, will all the praise, approbation, and incense of men be to us then ? God will judge us only according to the spirit. To how many of those who had been surrounded with earthly honours will He say : “ Depart from Me, I know you not ” ? To how many of those who were despised upon earth will He address these blessed words : “ Enter into My joy ” ? Since, therefore, this supreme judgment is to be the end of all, let us Christians henceforward estimate everything by the holy and fearful light of that great and awful day.

XI.

*THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST.*

“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.”

—MATT. xxviii. 20.

IF I did not believe in the divinity of Christ, I acknowledge that these words would fill me with astonishment. In fact, imagine a man, the greatest and holiest of men, imagine an angel or an archangel, terminating, as Jesus now does, the mission which he had received to evangelize the earth; what would be, what should be his closing words? The holier his character, the higher his rank in the scale of beings, the loftier also would be his idea of the greatness of God, the more would he fear to lessen it by usurping a portion whatever of the adoration and love which are due to God alone; eager to direct towards God the thoughts which hitherto had rested on His messenger, he would hasten to efface the traces of his own name and to lead his disciples to the feet of the Almighty, saying, with John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

What, on the contrary, does Jesus Christ say? “I am with you unto the end of the world.” Have you reflected upon all which these words imply? The Chief Shepherd wishes to express in a last farewell all that is best fitted to comfort and strengthen the soul of His disciples; He

wishes to prepare them, powerless though they be, for the conquest of the world, and in order to make them meet for this work He directs them, not only to the Father, but also to Himself; He sets Himself before them as the object of their faith, as the centre of their thoughts, as the perpetual source of their hopes, of their strength, and of their consolation. "Go, for I am with you; with you every day, with you unto the end." Therefore, suppose a man, a being whatever, thus daring to usurp such a part, and to set himself, unto the end of time, in the place of the living God! If these words are not spoken by the lips of a God, let us have the courage to say it, He who utters them is a usurper. Henceforth we must not speak of His humility, we must not hold Him up to the admiration of men, for He has yielded to the seduction of an unpardonable pride.

As for us who accept this promise as that of the Master we adore, let us endeavour to comprehend its depth and its import; and as we meditate upon the presence of the Lord in the midst of His people, God grant we may feel its powerful reality in our hearts! That will be, let us not doubt it, the best demonstration of our text.

"I am with you always." Would you see the immediate accomplishment of these words? Consider the very men to whom the Lord addressed them on the Mount of Olives. I venture to affirm, though this thought may appear strange to you, that the apostles were never so conscious of the presence of Christ as after the day in which He left them.

Before that, it is true, their eyes saw Him; they witnessed His miracles and were subdued by them. They had seen Him with a gesture calming the angry sea, or recalling Lazarus to the land of the living; they had seen the loaves multiplying in His hands and satisfying the hungry multitude. And yet, did they believe? Alas!

their faith was so feeble that the humiliation of their Master and the momentary triumph of His enemies sufficed to disperse them like cowards, to cause them to flee or to deny Jesus before a simple servant.

How is it, then, that, after Pentecost, these men, who hitherto had been so timid and fearful, boldly take their stand in the market-place, that these fishermen of Galilee are not afraid to contend with the ablest sophists of Jerusalem, that they confound them, that they cause such men as Festus and Agrippa to tremble upon the judgment-seat, that, threatened with torture, they brave it and openly rejoice in shame and suffering? Whence comes this strength? From the fact that they are no longer alone, for Jesus revealed by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with them. When they saw Him with their eyes and touched Him with their hands, Jesus was less present with them than when they beheld Him only in spirit and with the eyes of the soul.

Before that, it is true, when they followed Him upon earth, their ears heard Him. Oh, incomparable privilege! What conversations were theirs, and how profound must have been the impression they produced upon their souls! How clear and luminous must Divine realities have appeared to them when viewed in the light of the simple parables which the Master Himself explained to them! How completely they must have been subdued by the supreme authority of those words which fell, so to speak, from the heights of heaven itself upon their consciences, imprinting there the seal of their Divine origin! And yet, see how they question the Master after His sublime instructions! What slowness to believe! What prejudices! What gross and carnal reasonings! How imperfectly do they understand the teachings of Jesus, and how quickly do they forget them!

How is it that later on everything becomes clear to

them, and that, instead of disciples slow to believe, we see masters at whose feet Saul of Tarsus and Apollos are seated as docile children? How is it that the words of Jesus appear to them striking with evidence, and that, understanding them now for the first time, they in their turn astonish the multitudes and keep them hanging upon their lips? How is it that those Galileans, whose narrow and vulgar prejudices make us smile, are able to translate the thoughts of their Master in their discourses and letters with such depth of intelligence and unction that the Church of to-day, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, may still bend and drink at the inexhaustible fountain of life and holiness which they have caused to gush forth in the world? What is the reason of all this? Ah! it is that they are no longer alone. . . . Jesus is with them. The strange words which He had addressed to them in His last conversations are now realised. "It is expedient for you that I go away," He had said. On that departure depended the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The Day of Pentecost has now come, and that great and all-explaining miracle has been wrought, that miracle without which Christianity is an incomprehensible fact. By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit those men have been so thoroughly transformed that we no longer recognise them. Jesus has revealed Himself to them with a grandeur which they had not even dreamed of. Yes, when they heard Him in the Temple or on the shores of the Lake of Tiberias, Jesus spoke less to their soul; His thoughts, His sentiments, His love were more strange to them. Now, for the first time, they know Him, they hear Him, they understand Him. Thus is the promise accomplished: "Lo, I am with you always!"

I will give you of this a proof still more convincing, for it affects us more nearly and impresses us as a fact.

Do you know any being who is more continually present with mankind than Jesus Christ? Eighteen centuries separate us from Him, and yet to-day, in all parts of the globe, there are thousands of men in whose hearts He holds the deepest and most sacred place. There are thousands of men for whom fellowship with Christ is so inexhaustible a source of strength, peace, and joy, that so long as they will possess Jesus, were they in the most complete destitution, they will be happy; while, should Jesus fail them, their existence, otherwise unclouded, would be for them without hope. There are men who this very morning, while listening to the voice of preachers and missionaries, have received Jesus Christ, loved Jesus Christ, and adored Jesus Christ, and who would tell you that, of all the inward events which have marked their life, none has been more solemn or more stirring than the entry of the Prince of Peace into their heart and life; so that I can affirm that Jesus in the days of His flesh, surrounded by multitudes, was less present in the midst of men than He is to-day; that Jesus Christ absent, separated from us by eighteen centuries, enlightens more minds, converts more hearts, awakens more consciences, and gains more disciples to His cause than He did when He astonished the world by His miracles and when the crowds hailed Him with cries of "Hosannah!" What an admirable realisation of these words: "Lo, I am with you alway!" Observe, brethren, that this is a peculiar and distinguishing feature of Christianity. The other religions have never laid claim to anything like this. They have instituted rites and ceremonies; they have said: "Observe them and you will be saved," they have had prophets who have pretended to be the interpreters of the Divine will, they have had their Buddhas and their Mahomets. But Christ alone has dared to lay claim to this moral prodigy of being present in the most



intimate and most sacred home of the soul, and He alone has succeeded. This feature is so strange that it struck the greatest military genius of the age, and that, in his exile at St. Helena, Napoleon, comparing his reign with that of Christ, one day uttered the following words: "I have inspired with passion thousands who have laid down their lives for me; but for this my presence, the electric influence of my eye, my accent, a word from my lips, was always needed, then I kindled the sacred flame in their breasts . . . Christ alone has succeeded in raising the hearts of men to the invisible, even to the sacrifice of time and space. He alone from age to age demands that which is most difficult to obtain, that which many a sage vainly demands of his friends, many a father of his children, many a wife of her husband, many a brother of his brother; in a word, the heart. That is what He seeks for Himself. He claims it most absolutely, and He succeeds at once. What a miracle! Throughout time and space, the human soul with all its faculties becomes an appendice of the existence of Christ. All who sincerely believe in Him feel this admirable and supernatural love, this inexplicable phenomenon which is beyond the powers of mortal man, this sacred fire whose intensity cannot be lessened and whose duration cannot be limited by the great destroyer Time. That is what I, Napoleon, most admire, for I have often reflected upon it. And that is for me the most incontestable proof of the divinity of Christ."

We must, therefore, acknowledge that Jesus is true to His promise, that He is present in the midst of His people. Let us now endeavour to determine the nature of that eternal presence.

In the first place, that presence is *spiritual*. Some deny this, and tell us that they only can feel the presence of Christ who find it in the consecrated host, in the holy

victim descending upon the altar at the word of the priest.

You all know the bewitching charms by which this opinion is surrounded. Here is a cathedral open for a solemn communion. The crowds gather into it and press even to the very altar; the service begins; the Liturgy slowly unfolds the successive acts of the religious drama. Incense fills the air, the majestic notes of the organ peal forth beneath the arched roof, and the imagination becomes insensibly softened by this grand spectacle. All at once there is a dead silence, the priest utters a creative word, and the host is transformed into the adorable God. Immediately the choir strikes up the solemn chants of *Ave verum corpus* or *Salutaris hostia*. The Christ has descended, and the soul, overpowered by these inward emotions and sensible impressions, loses itself in a religious fervour.

A short distance off, in an upper chamber, a few believers are gathered together. Here nothing speaks to the senses or inflames the imagination; such, no doubt, in its primitive simplicity, did the worship of the Church at its birth appear to the heathen world. In this assembly there are men who have placed their hope in Jesus Christ, and who, trusting in His promises, have come to call upon His name. His Word resounds in its sublime simplicity such as the publicans of Galilee heard it eighteen centuries ago. It seeks the unpardoned sinner in the refuge where he has sheltered his misery. His conscience is seized, and no outward impression is there to dispel or alter the emotion he feels. In this place, let souls thus stirred repent and address to the Saviour a cry of firm confidence, they will soon hear His pardoning voice, and, celebrating their deliverance, they will exclaim: "The Lord indeed was with us."

Well, of these two emotions, which was the true?

Where was the Lord, upon the altar or in the upper chamber? He was wherever sincere believers invoked His name, and doubtless many souls that ardently called upon Him have found Him at the altar while communicating there; but will you deny that the believers in the upper chamber, who have been enlightened, sanctified, comforted by His Word, and who have tasted His grace, will you deny that they also have felt His presence? Now, if they have felt it, it is because that presence is spiritual; it is because, at the altar, as well as in the upper room, it depends neither upon a material rite nor upon a magical word; it is because it manifests itself wherever souls are found that hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth.

But if we affirm that the presence of Jesus Christ is spiritual, that it manifests itself to the soul and not to the senses, you must not think, however, that we look upon it as a vague and imaginary thing. The Christ whose presence we claim is not an ideal being, the offspring of our transitory emotions, a sort of humanitarian Messiah, whom each successive generation has remoulded in its own image, and to whom it has ascribed the language of its own particular aspirations. The Christ upon whose name we call is the Christ of the Gospels and of the Epistles, the Christ of St. Peter, of St. Paul, and St. John; such as they beheld Him, we behold Him now; the words which fell from His lips now reach our ears; He is ever the same, in Him there is no shadow of change. His disciples of the nineteenth century hear and understand Him just as well as those of the first. St. Paul claimed this fundamental equality for all when, renouncing the advantages which his Jewish origin and his relationship with Jesus according to the flesh might have given him over his proselytes, he says: "Though we have known Christ after the

flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." In fact, it is by His Word that Jesus communicates Himself to all; it is by His Word that men may lay hold upon Him, see Him, and hear Him without fear of ever being deceived.

Is that all? Is it only by His Word that Jesus reveals to us His presence? No; for in that case He would share this characteristic with every man of genius who leaves behind him the luminous traces of his thoughts. In fact, we may safely say of Plato or Cæsar, of Mahomet or Voltaire, that, though long since dead, they still speak; though separated from our period by the distance of centuries, they still act more powerfully upon the world than the great majority of the living.

Now there is infinitely more than this in the presence of Christ. Beneath the written Word there is the living Word; there is the invisible Saviour, who manifests Himself to the heart in such a manner that when I say He is present, I employ this expression in its most simple and literal meaning, as a child would do. It is in this sense that we may speak of the *real* presence of Christ, and it is indeed that presence which He has promised to the Church. Here the thought which I had expressed at the beginning of this discourse comes back to me with new force. Suppose a Christ who will be a mere creature, and, however great you may picture Him, His presence will be but a figure, a vain metaphor, for on no account will you be able to ascribe to Him the Omnipresence which belongs to God alone. He will be present in your midst by His memory, by His example, by the words which He will have left you, that is all; as to calling upon Him or believing that He draws near to you, and interferes in your destinies, this will be out of the question. On the contrary, accept

the Christ of the gospel, God the Saviour, and you will believe in His presence in the true sense of the word. Henceforth how everything changes in the Church and in your own life. The place in which you have called upon Him becomes a sanctuary for you, although it may have neither priest nor altar; the holy communion is no longer a vain and formal memorial, but the rendezvous where you meet the Saviour of your souls; all that the Scriptures reveal to you of the Father's love, and of the kindness of the Good Shepherd who seeks His wandering sheep, and guards His faithful flock, ceases to be an allegory, and becomes a reality which is accomplished in your life. He is present in your existence, present in happiness as well as in affliction, present in your solitary chamber as well as in the sanctuary, present in your busy hours as well as in the inactivity of sickness, yes, present, though invisible, until the day when you shall see Him "face to face," and when you shall find in His presence fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

Such is the teaching of the gospel concerning the presence of Jesus in the midst of His people. That presence, in the words before us, is particularly promised to the Church: "Go, instruct all nations; *and* lo, I am with you always." But I will not be unfaithful to my text if I affirm that the same promise is addressed to each Christian soul. Let us devote a few moments to the study of these words in their twofold application.

Jesus is present in the Church; "I am with you always." The Church, ah! that is indeed the skiff which is in constant danger of being swallowed up by the angry sea, but which always weathers the storm, for she bears Jesus Christ. See her in the first years of her life. What a formidable coalition! What dangers, what hatred, what threats! All the powers of earth are

leagued against her—science, priesthood, royalty, wealth, and, above all, corruption. The Church is about to disappear. No, on the contrary, it is then that she conquers the most souls, it is then that she sends her missionaries far and wide, it is then that she rises out of each of these baptisms of blood decked with fresh youth, strength, and immortality. Jesus is with her. But later she will aim at becoming a temporal power, she will cover herself with the royal purple; pompous and magnificent she will wear the triple crown, and it will seem as though she had denied her crucified King. What, then, do I see? What becomes of that Church? It is in the very hour when her triumph seems sure that her strength forsakes her. It is then that all the cities in which Paul had preached, in which the first prayers and hymns had been heard, are brought under the yoke of the infidels; it is then that the Cross, uprooted in Asia and Africa, seems on the point of disappearing from Europe itself. Nothing short of this formidable trial was required to teach the Church that her strength is derived from no earthly support, but that it lies entirely in the invisible presence of her Divine Head.

“I am with you alway.” He has raised her, that Church, each time that, fainting and overpowered, she has called upon Him. And He will always raise her. I see other storms threatening her to-day. I see a proud and scornful unbelief like a freezing wind sweeping down upon her from the heights of science; I see it uniting with materialism, which rises from the low grounds. The storm is approaching, it falls upon the vessel of the Church, it rends her sails and shivers her masts. I hear faithless disciples exclaiming, “Master, Master, we perish!” We perish, brethren, and why? Is He not there, He who has promised His presence? Do you think that He who triumphed over the old world is unable to conquer

the new? Do you think that He who from the Cross confounded the wisdom of Greece and the materialism of Rome, will be incapable of confounding the sophists and scoffers of modern times? He is with us. Do you think that unbelief is powerful enough to blot out that grand figure? Do you think it will ever succeed in ridding itself of Jesus Christ? As for me, I am tranquil; I wait until I see all the human explanations and systems break against the person of Christ as the waves of the sea dash powerlessly against the granite rocks of our coasts. I know that they will probably shake our reasonings, trouble our theology, break up all the human props by which we, men of little faith, had thought to sustain Him who sustains all things. But I am tranquil, for the Christ is with us. Yes, the storm is terrific, and sometimes we are utterly overpowered by it. . . . Yes, we are feeble, feeble in science, in faith, in holiness; yes, in our ranks there are defections which distress us, and betrayals which make our hearts bleed. . . . Oh, my God! on the side of the earth everything fails us, but Thou art with us, and that is enough. . . . Thou hast conquered by means which confound us, Thou hast conquered under the shame of Nazareth, of Gethsemane, of Golgotha. Divine Head of the Church, Thou hast given us the humiliation, wilt Thou not also give us the victory?

“I am with you always.” But methinks I hear an objection which rises in the minds of many who hear me. They admit that Jesus Christ may be present in a humbled and persecuted Church, for He has foretold that humiliations and attacks would be its lot upon earth; but that which causes them to doubt the reality of His presence is the sight of the inward condition of the Church itself. They see the Christian family divided; they see the different communions separated by an ever-

widening gulf, in presence of the world which rejoices at this state of things. They see, in the very Churches to which we belong, the most deplorable dissensions. Or, what is sadder still, they see religious indifference spreading over souls like a dull and icy mist; prayer, zeal, and faith are gradually dying away in the approaching night; nothing is heard save the monotonous sounds of a formal worship. Here and there, on the gloomy background of the general darkness, a few devoted lives stand out solitarily and cast forth a light which, alas! is soon quenched. Oh! how is it possible then to believe in the presence of Christ?

Yet we must believe in it, and our belief must be all the stronger that nothing seems to proclaim it. We must believe in it, because when Jesus promised His presence to the Church, He knew that it would be made up of men such as we are, and He foresaw its faintings, its languor, and its falls.

Some of you, perhaps, have of the Church a magnificent ideal. You picture it to yourselves freed from the bondage of the world, conquering by faith and love. I rejoice at this if that hope fills you with a holy ambition, if you endeavour to realise that dream of your soul; but, on the contrary, I grieve, if, feeding your mind upon the picture of that imaginary Church, you cease to believe that the Lord is in the real Church to which you belong, and whose wounds and sufferings you deplore with so much reason. Remember what was the Church at its origin, when it was composed only of disciples directly chosen by Jesus Himself. What do I see in the upper room? . . . Disciples who will soon desert their Master, a Peter who will deny and a Judas who will betray Him. Is it for nought that the Word of God has placed that spectacle under our eyes? Remember those apostolical churches to which the Epistles were addressed. What



agitations, what dissensions, what falls, what scandals! And yet the Lord was there. . . . Yes, those pangs of anguish which the state of the Church causes you have been felt at other epochs. At the close of the Middle Ages, in that fifteenth century when such thick darkness enveloped the world, when, from the pontifical throne to the lowest monastery, the most frightful scandals dishonoured the Gospel, it seemed for a moment as though all beliefs were about to be swallowed up in universal doubt. Then many a pious soul, shut up within the convent cell, wept and groaned. "O Christ!" they cried, "where art Thou? Has Thy glory disappeared for ever? Return and visit Thy Church once more." Many books of that period bear traces of those bitter tears. And yet Christ was there, and the hour was drawing near when His Gospel, translated by the hand of a monk, would enlighten the world. . . . And who can tell, O men of little faith! that we are not on the eve of one of those solemn epochs in which the all-producing Spirit will renew the earth? Those secular structures which are crumbling into dust, that religious agitation which seizes upon so many minds, those new empires which open to the Gospel, and especially that universal yearning after a revival, those increasing aspirations of the Christian world which seems anew to believe in the efficacy of prayer,—are not those so many proofs of the presence of the invisible Head of the Church? are not those so many voices by which He tells us, "Lo, I am with you always"?

He is ever with us; He is here. He descends wherever two or three hearts call upon Him. Consequently, when I enter a Christian pulpit, I who would gladly sit in the lowest place among the least; when, from the midst of my weakness, I give testimony to the truth, and when, at the thought of the many human, petty, and

miserable feelings which mingle with this solemn mission, I would fain close my lips, then this wondrous promise raises my courage: "The Lord is here." He is here, and that is the source of all our strength and hope. He is here, He who calls Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is here, He the supreme Preacher. He is here, He the Master of hearts and consciences. He is here, and we may direct our souls to Him; and when our feeble and powerless voice becomes obedient to His, when our wisdom becomes His wisdom, our testimony His testimony, our word His word, then whatever we bind upon earth is bound in heaven; then to those to whom we remit sins, their sins will be remitted; then our authority becomes the grandest and most solemn thing in the world; for, above the man, above the preacher who will soon disappear, there is the Christ, who reigns for ever and ever. "Lo, I am with you always."

This promise, therefore, is made to the Church, but it is also made to each individual soul; it is to each of us that Christ has promised His presence, and His presence unto the end. Alas! how small is the number of those who realise this most consoling of all promises; and if I could read in your hearts, how many doubts would be raised by this one question: "Is the Lord with you?"

How can He be with us, many who hear me will perhaps say, since He leaves us exposed to so many afflictions, since trials are allowed to fall continually upon us? Where are those cares of His providence which attest His presence? Where are those unexpected deliverances, those prayers answered, those signs by which men recognise that He is with them? Behold, we had placed in Him all our confidence, and, in many cases, everything has failed us. Misfortune has followed us

unremittingly, and we have been distinguished from the rest of our fellow-men only by the blows which have struck us again and again.

When we hear words like these, when we see how many souls are led to doubt through trial, when we perceive how murmuring—that forerunner of unbelief—easily comes to our lips, can we still deny that there is in our heart a mercenary instinct which seeks its own interest even in love? And when, I answer, have you seen in the Gospel that, in calling us to His service, Jesus Christ has promised us the blessings of earth, the favour of men, whatever our heart desires? Hear Him, rather, declaring that through much affliction heaven is entered, and that through sorrow He will make us partakers of His holiness. You find in the blows that strike you the proof that God forgets you; and I, on the contrary, resting upon the Scriptures, find in them the proof that He loves you, and wishes to save you. This is so true that if you could point out to me a man whom no affliction has ever reached, a man whose entire existence has been one tissue of unbroken prosperity, I would tremble at the thought of such a man's future, for it would seem to me as if God had abandoned him. Trial is the Divine educator. "Blessed are they that mourn," saith the Lord. Yes, as Isaiah says, their name is written on the palm of His hand, when that hand strikes as well as when it blesses. You desired to settle upon the earth, to sit down in cool and shady places, to drink peacefully at the spring which gushed forth at your feet. "March on!" says the Divine Voice, and the shadow is dispelled by the burning rays of the sun, and the stream is dried up. Onward through the wilderness! Onward thou, the redeemed of the Lord! Stranger and traveller! take up the pilgrim's staff once more; follow that mysterious voice; it calls thee; it is the voice of the Lord. He calls

thee whither He Himself has preceded thee. He *is* with thee *always*.

Yes, you will answer, yes, affliction may be a proof of the presence of the Lord. We understand this, for it often sanctifies. But is it so with that mysterious state through which I am now passing? Can I believe that the Lord is there when my soul is dried up, and when nothing can restore life to it, when my faith cannot take its flight, when the realities of heaven float before my eyes like dim phantoms, and when the promises of God no longer awake the slightest joy in my soul? Ah! the presence of the Lord! I have felt it once, and then how easy was everything to me! Then faith gave me wings, prayer rose ardent from my heart; but to-day, even those words which you are explaining are meaningless to my soul.

Meaningless! Are you sure of this? What then is that sadness which fills your soul when you utter these words? Meaningless! O disciples of Emmaus, you think that the Lord has left you for ever, and you are unconscious of the truth that He is journeying by your side till the blessed moment when He will reveal to you His presence. Meaningless! O you who think you have lost your God, and who grope for Him, as it were, do you not hear what He says to you by the mouth of Pascal: "Thou wouldst not seek Me thus if thou hadst not already found Me?" But this presence leaves you in darkness! Listen!

In the gloomy days of winter, no tree waves its verdant top in our fields, no flower gives its perfume to the winds; everything in nature seems to be dead. Yet will you say that the sun has not risen? No; although it has disappeared behind a curtain of clouds, its powerful action is felt everywhere, and without this sun which you do not see, nought would remain but an icy shroud, and the

frightful obscurity of an endless night. Brethren, the soul also has its winters, in which the Sun of Righteousness sheds upon it only a pale and feeble glimmer, in which heaven is veiled, in which obedience brings no joy, in which the biting wind of discouragement pierces and freezes us through and through. I know that these seasons are often forgotten in those theories of the Christian life framed after a system, and according to which everything for the believer should be joy, peace, and light. But question those who have pictured the heart of man such as the Spirit of God has revealed it to them. Question David and Isaiah. None were ever so completely honoured with the presence of God as they; and yet, do you know of any book in which the languor, the misery, the anguish, the terror of the soul that feels itself forsaken of God is more vividly portrayed than in those written by their hands? What language is better fitted than theirs to express the struggles and griefs of your hours of sadness? Well, those are the men whom the Spirit of God has chosen to be His interpreters. You who suffer like them, what right have you to say that God is forsaking you?

Here we are on the brink of an abyss. I have endeavoured to reassure your souls; in order to dispel them, I have brought before you the causes which prevent you from feeling the presence of the Lord. Have I said all? have I said that which it was particularly necessary I should say? No, I have not named the true, the great cause which hides Jesus Christ from our sight. You who complain that heaven vaguely floats before your troubled gaze, and that the figure of Christ is growing dim and disappears, seek to ascertain whence come the clouds which conceal it from you. Whence rise they if not from the impure fountain of sin? That secret but ardent worship of your own glory, that feverish pursuit

of fortune or of an exalted position, that current of affairs by which your soul is carried away, that hate and bitterness in which your heart shamefully delights, that cowardly compliance with the opinion of others, that love of dissipation, of dress and of worldly frivolity, those tolerated and fondly cherished passions, those guilty bonds which you are unwilling to break, these are the clouds which blind you and which prevent you from realising the presence of the Lord.

Do you recollect, on the contrary, those calm and blessed hours in which, like the apostles on Mount Tabor, you have beheld the Saviour face to face? How lovely did His Divine countenance then appear to you, and with what rapture did your eyes rest upon it! But those hours had not appeared in your life like an unexpected flash of lightning; prayer had prepared them, fidelity had produced them. Then indeed you felt the truth of these words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Sanctification, this then is the narrow path which leads to the summits where Christ manifests Himself to the soul. No, it is not, as some have believed, to imaginations lost in ecstasy that this vision of God, the sweetness of which saints have sung, has been promised; it is to sanctified souls. You who complain at having lost the Saviour, do you not see that He is there, waiting for you in the spot where you well know must be completed the sacrifice which you have hitherto refused to make? He is waiting for you, not in the midst of your comforts and joys, but in the stern solitude of abnegation. He is waiting for you in the narrow way which you have left, and in which you had met Him once; waiting at the bedside of the poor whom you have forsaken. Be faithful and you will see that He is faithful too, and that He is true to His promise: "I am with you always."

I cannot set aside these sublime words without pointing out to you the consolations and the duties which flow from them.

“I am with you,” says the Lord, “with you always, with you unto the end.”

Is there upon earth anything more beautiful than faithful love? When an attachment which has sprung from two hearts with the sap of youth has outlived all the hopes, all the enchantments of life in its spring-time; when, strengthened by joys, and still more by common afflictions and tears, it has gone on increasing; when neither the changes of taste and fortune, nor the vexations of everyday life, nor the deceptions of experience, have been able to weaken it; and when, at the age when everything seems to decay, affection still casts a bright and joyous light, is there not in this spectacle something which raises and honours our wretched humanity?

But, great God! how rare is that spectacle! How many of our affections have found an early grave! One has left us with the intoxication of youth; another has fled before poverty or some other sorrow of life. The more we advance on our way, the fewer they become. And those we loved the best and on whom we relied for the future, where are they? How many bereavements in the past, and in the future how many separations still! Oh, if we could but possess a love upon which our heart might rest as on a rock; if always, at every hour, we could feel its powerful reality, what strength and what consolation would this bring to our life! “Behold, I am with you always,” is Jesus Christ’s reply. Yes, always; for in Him there is no shadow of variation. Such as He appeared to us for the first time on our path, He still is to-day. We have, perhaps, followed to their last resting-place the beings we loved, and upon their tombs we have graven these words: “There is no lasting affection here

below ;” but when we were leaving the graveyard to return to the city of the living, the invisible Friend bent down and whispered in our ear : “ Behold, I am with you always.” Nothing has kept Him away ; poverty has not banished Him, like so many others ; sickness, bereavement, anguish, which so soon weary earthly friendships, have brought Him to our side with greater eagerness. Nor will death itself alienate Him, for He has said : “ I am with you unto the end.” Yes, when I shall walk through the valley of darkness, through the valley of the shadow of death ; when earth will have no more consolation or hope for me, He will be there, even there. Then take thy flight, O my soul ! and since all earthly things grow dim and change, attach thyself for ever to Him from whom nothing will be able to separate thee. And you, my brother, my sister, who are journeying alone in the unheeding crowd ; you who, in the midst of an agitated life, so keenly feel the inward void which nought that is earthly can fill, let this promise gladden your hearts : “ Behold, I am with you always.”

Those are the consolations ; here are the duties. Brethren, if Jesus were here to-day, where would He lead you ? Into that worldly and frivolous society which is perhaps waiting for you ? Beside those whose lives grieve Him ? Could you, in His presence, still share in their guilty pleasures ? Could you find any joy in the company of men who would regard Him with indifference ? Could you meanly crave their approbation ? Could you run in the way of temptation, seek that which flatters your vanity or your passions, read that book which will taint your soul ? In a word, could you persevere a single day longer in a life which God condemns ? Let your conscience answer !

If Jesus were here to-day, where would He lead you ? Where did He go when He was upon earth ? Where



would He conduct you now? To humble and obscure duties. Not to the broad way of pride, but to the narrow way of obedience; not to enjoyment, but to sacrifice; not to glory, but to humility; not to an earthly crown, but to the Cross. He would lead you to the poor, to the sick, who are, it may be, waiting for you; to that broken heart that has need of you; to all those sorrows which He would have you understand and comfort. Go, brethren, wherever He calls you. To-day in humiliation, to-morrow in glory; but in humiliation as well as in glory, with Him, ever with Him!

## XII.

*A COURT PREACHER.*

“For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife: for John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.”—MATT. xiv. 3, 4.

AT the very threshold of the Gospel we meet the stern and grand figure of the forerunner of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist is the man of the desert. Until the day when he commences his mission, he has dwelt in solitude in the wilderness; far from the artificial society of men, far from the cold, empty, and formal religion which reigned in Jerusalem, he has developed himself; in the unbroken silence of the boundless waste, in the presence of Jehovah alone, his soul has grown strong. No wonder then that, when he appears, when his voice is heard for the first time, men recognise in him a being on whom the world has no power, and who can all the more efficiently act upon it that he is so thoroughly detached from it.

Do you see him, with his gaunt and emaciated frame, the result of frequent and protracted fasts, bronzed by the Eastern sun, and clothed like the poorest of the poor? Do you hear his burning, terrible, and implacable words falling like a sharp axe upon all the iniquities which come under his notice? Nothing stops him. He speaks

the truth to all: to great and lowly, to rich and poor, to priests and publicans. At one blow he shivers all that is mere appearance, hypocrisy, or vain ostentation, and unveils the corruption that lies in the depth of the human heart. To all he proclaims the holy and terrible God, the Judge whom none can escape; he points to the horizon where the coming day of vengeance already dawns; he crushes the souls that resist, and promises pardon only to the sinner who, terror-stricken, humbly craves the baptism of repentance.

Truly that mission was grand and formidable. Think of all the hatred which was silently gathering against him. But here is a danger for the prophet which is far more real still—it is the peril of success. His instructions are listened to everywhere and seem to be gladly received; his name produces a magical sensation throughout the country. All are shaken by his voice; the desert is covered with long trains of pilgrims, who come from Galilee, from Judea, and especially from Jerusalem. The priests at first murmur and rage; the stronger minds, the Sadducees, simply sneer; but the movement increases and becomes irresistible. Priests and Sadducees must needs join in it and come to the Jordan in their turn. Herod himself is stirred; he, the accomplished sceptic and libertine, is astonished at the appearance of this strange preacher; he is anxious to hear him. He calls him, says the historian Josephus, to his palace of Machærus, and there he surrounds him with marks of esteem and distinction.

Now, it is easy enough to attack the world so long as one is a complete stranger to it; it is easy to humble the great of the earth so long as one is wholly independent of them; it is easy to point out the miseries and vices of a class of individuals from whom one expects nothing. But inquire of history; in each of its pages it will tell

you how fearful is the snare of success, of popularity, of public favour and flattery, and how many brave and noble souls have foundered upon this reef. What then are the future destinies of that prophet, who, at thirty years of age, has seen, in the space of a few weeks, a whole nation humble itself at his word, and a king himself load him with favours? That is the picture which I would place before your eyes to-day. I would show you in John the Baptist a court preacher such as the world had never seen before; with you I would learn from his example what it is to be a witness of the truth in the world.

In the court of Herod the prophet had witnessed the most shameful disorder. The king lived in open adultery with his brother's wife. This brother, named Philip, had formerly been disgraced and deprived of all command. Herodias, his wife, had been unwilling to share his degradation; as ambitious as she was depraved, she had deserted him to attach herself to Herod. She had soon been raised to the rank of queen, and now exhibited upon the throne all the scandal of her misconduct.

This Herod (surnamed Antipas) was not the monster of iniquity which popular imagination has made of him; he was a weak and sensual man, given up to his passions, but susceptible of nobler feelings. When he had taken an interest in John, he had not acted a part; the words of the prophet had stirred his soul. Mark tells us that they had troubled him.<sup>1</sup> "He heard him gladly," he adds, but without reforming his conduct. His conscience spoke, doubtless, reproaching him with his shameful life, and with the demoralising example he gave his people. But he reassured himself with the thought that he was

<sup>1</sup> See Mark vi. 20: "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man, and a holy, and protected him; and when he heard him, *he was often troubled*, and heard him gladly." Here I have followed the text adopted by M. A. Rilliet (*ἠπρόρει*, instead of *ἐπρόει*).

protecting a man of God, a holy prophet, and that, at any hour, he could ask counsel of him.

Men who are completely hardened are rare; the greater part, while enjoying the delights of sin, hope to give it up sooner or later. There are times when the shame of evil seizes them, when they are weary of their life, when they are supremely disgusted with themselves, when they are terrified, it may be. Nothing, then, reassures them more fully than the feeling that they have within their reach a means of salvation, a refuge. You do not know all that passes in the heart of man, all that lies concealed beneath the veil of frivolity, all that conscience speaks in the hours when dissipation is impossible. Herod, the debauchee, is glad to have John the Baptist near him. Ah! is he not aware that he is entering upon a perilous path? Does he not know that the warnings of God are not to be trifled with, and that if they touch not the heart they harden it? Does he not know that if the Divine light does not enlighten, it blinds; that we must either love it or hate it more and more, and that in this terrible game of chance we are risking our eternal future? In short, does he not see that, when he offers the prophet a refuge, it is a prison he is preparing for him, until, at last, he will give him an executioner?

What will John the Baptist do? What would he have done had he taken counsel only of human prudence? And we, what should we have done in his place? Only think; he is in favour with Herod. What greater mistake could he make than openly to oppose the monarch who protects him? It is best, many a wise counsellor would doubtless have said, it is best to use caution, and to take into consideration characters and circumstances. Recollect how Herod had been brought up, and what demoralising influences had surrounded him. Remember the pollution which his father's court had presented to

his youth. Reflect upon the force of habit, upon the intoxication of royalty. Besides, a great result has already been obtained. Herod has given you his confidence. Should you not acknowledge the hand of God Himself in your sudden and unexpected exaltation? Does not God call you thereby to exercise the widest and best influence, to act the part of intercessor for your oppressed people, to render the yoke of the stranger more easy to bear? Ah! who can tell if He does not mean you to assure an efficient protection for His worship? Who can tell if you are not destined to be the instrument He will use to raise His altars, and prepare the approaching reign of the Messiah? In order to obtain such grand results, can you not put up with much? Will you, by a hasty or impatient word, overthrow the designs of God?

Yes, such has been the reasoning of court preachers at almost every epoch. Thus they spoke in the court of Constantine, and that was why they fell so low as to deify this murderer of his own son. Thus they spoke, alas! in the sixteenth century at the court of Henry VIII., whilst that monarch sullied the English Reformation with his infamies. Thus they spoke at the court of Philip of Hesse, and thus was Luther led, in an hour of weakness, to palliate, in a most cowardly manner, the vices of that prince. Thus they spoke in the court of Louis XIV., where Bossuet, who on this point had been so severe against Luther himself, found scarce a courageous word to utter in presence of scandals far more crying still. Thus Massillon quieted his conscience at the Regent's court. . . . Thus, on the free soil of America, in presence of negro slavery, and of all the infamy which accompanied it, thousands of ministers of the Gospel long remained silent or spoke only of peace, endurance, moderation, until at length a fearful thunder-clap roused their sleeping consciences.

. . . Oh! deplorable seduction of the world's favour! That is why dishonoured religion has had *Te Deums* in honour of all the happy strokes of skilful policy, absolutions for all manner of scandals; that is why it is still so miserably compromised in all the complications of human politics, when alone, and without any other support than its intrinsic truth, it would, perhaps, have won the world over to Jesus Christ.

Ah! not thus did they act, those men of the ancient dispensation whom God called to be His witnesses. Not that royal favour was refused to them, for oft would a high price have willingly been paid by kings and princes to obtain their silence. . . . Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's court, but it was to say to that monarch, "Let the Lord's people go." Nathan came to the court of David, but it was to denounce his adultery and his murder in these bold words: "Thou art the man." Elijah was introduced into the court of Ahab, but it was to say to him, "It is thou that troublest Israel." Micah was sent to the same prince, but it was to warn him of his approaching fall. Jehu came to the court of Jehoram, but it was with this question: "What peace is there with the wicked?" Daniel and Nehemiah lived at the court of the greatest of Eastern monarchs, but it was to be the witnesses of justice, and to mourn over the fate of the people of God.

Well, thou heir of all these prophets, O John the Baptist! what wilt thou say to that Herod who loads thee with his favours? Hear the narrative of Scripture. "John said to the king, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." What simple yet firm words! There is no hesitancy, no ambiguity. The prophet might have alleged the honour of the prince, the scandal caused by his conduct, the interest of the throne, all those reasons of utility which, in many cases, prove so effective. But that is not what preoccupies him. "It

is not lawful for thee." John looks directly to God ; it is His glory which forces him to speak. He might have fulfilled his mission in another way, and have saved his life. He might have quitted the palace with display, denounced in presence of all the scandals of Herodias, and excited against her the anger of the multitude. Then a wonderful popularity would have been the reward of the brave denunciator. Thus doubtless would have acted many a tribune of the people, and this kind of courage is not rare. At all times the vices of the great have been the principal cause of the discontent of the masses ; at all times those who have aimed at ingratiating themselves with the people have attained their end by simply touching that chord. But seek the true motive of this virtuous indignation, what will you often find it to be ? The mere selfish desire of self-advancement. Such men are vigorous in their attacks, expecting thereby to prove their independence towards the great, but they more often prove their servility by the very manner in which they make themselves the echoes of popular passion. But John the Baptist in presence of the people has been silent concerning the corruption which has distressed his heart. His attitude is unstudied, he is utterly unmindful of the effect he will produce ; alone, before Herod, frankly and loyally he tells him, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife."

Note one more feature in his fidelity : there are many harsh and pitiless characters who have no difficulty whatever in casting at their fellows the most bitter truths. Some would perhaps be inclined to place John the Baptist in this category. This were indeed a great mistake. Notwithstanding his authority, John possessed extreme delicacy of sentiment, and I know not if religious history contains any more touching words than those which he uttered when his disciples left him to follow



Jesus Christ, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom, but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled; He must increase, but I must decrease." Oh, when I think of that sublime humility, how deeply struck am I with these noble words, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife"! He knows that this speech will change the king's favour into hate. It matters not. "It is not lawful." He knows that henceforth his life is imperilled. He knows that Herodias thirsts for his blood. Again, it matters not. "It is not lawful." You who have experienced how much of cowardly fear lurks in the human heart, tell us if you know of a nobler heroism than this, and learn of John the Baptist what it is to bear testimony to the truth.

That, brethren, is the lesson which this narrative is meant to teach us. The examples which the Scriptures set before us are not vain pictures, destined simply to stir our imagination; they are appeals and warnings addressed to all Christians. To all, I say, and I insist upon that word. When men are called to bear testimony to the truth, they are not slow in saying or thinking that this is the business of preachers. They most willingly lay this duty upon them. Alas! how few there are who discharge it faithfully, with a view, not to please, but to warn consciences; not to succeed, but to alarm souls unto salvation! And yet we must acknowledge that in our day this mission is not very perilous. All the world knows that he who ascends the pulpit must not do so simply to flatter and deceive souls. If he boldly denounces evil, everybody will readily admit that he has strictly performed his duty. People will forgive him; nay, more, they expect this of him. They willingly encourage him, and the most worldly-minded will listen

with interest to words which no one would have the right to utter elsewhere; they will even find in them a keen delight, an actual interest, which will contrast with the ordinary and monotonous tone of the traditional sermon. Noble courage, forsooth, is that which consists in saying from the pulpit what all the world expects of us! This costs but little effort, brethren; but may not that be the very reason why our words produce so little effect? We mourn over the apparent inutility of preaching. When we reflect that, Sabbath after Sabbath, in hundreds of churches, the Holy Word is heard, we are confounded at the inanity of the results obtained by so great a display of efforts and energy. What may be the cause of this sorrowful fact, but that preaching being for most men a mere matter of habit and conventionalism, it astonishes and alarms no one? It is understood that one day in the week a man is empowered for the space of one hour to attack the morals of his time, and to tell his hearers that they are bringing upon themselves the wrath of God. This language is considered as most natural in his mouth. Should anybody else venture to use it, men would take offence, but it is universally admitted that all license is granted to the pulpit. This is a state of things which we cannot accept. We want something more than mere preaching. We want, apart from the pulpit, firm, frank, courageous men, who will not be afraid openly to speak the truth. Is it in a discourse, and by means of vague and general figures, that John the Baptist pictures the scandals of Herod's court? Had it been so, he might perhaps have been forgiven. The courtiers would have said, "He has spoken as a prophet should; he has done his duty;" and, doubtless, they would have thought no more of it. But that which troubles and disquiets and irritates, that which is unpardonable, is that an intruder should directly, face to face, without the slightest orato-

rical preparation, say to Herod, as of old Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man." That, brethren, is what I call being a witness of the truth. Well, it is your business as well as mine to bear that testimony. Whoever believes in the truth receives from it a Divine investiture, a true consecration; he immediately becomes its witness in the sphere where God has placed him—in public life if God calls him there, in his profession, in the circle of society to which he belongs, or at least in his family. In presence of evil silence is forbidden him. Men must know what is his idea of it; and if his age, his character, or his position enjoin reserve on his part, even then everything in him should proclaim the truth so forcibly that all who are brought into contact with him will be compelled to hear it.

That is the preaching which our age requires, which all classes of society have need of; and I add at once, because my text leads me to it, that is the preaching which the higher classes of society must hear. We have seen by what temptations Herod was surrounded, and how well-nigh impossible it was for a word of warning and salvation to reach his ear. Let us not be mistaken. That is the danger of all elevated positions, of all superiorities of rank, fortune, or intellect. . . . Men speak much to-day of raising the masses, of evangelising the masses, of moralising the masses. . . . Ah! let them beware lest they lose themselves while pretending to save others!

You are all unanimous in condemning sin when it manifests itself under a gross and cynical form; but there is in the higher spheres of the world I know not what almost unconscious art of veiling evil under graceful appearances and of divesting it of its repulsive character. The very language spoken there helps to render this disguise perfect; the expressions are so delicately moulded

that they can insinuate everything without ever becoming offensive, and sportingly, as it were, pour poison into the troubled heart. In these circles men breathe a voluptuous atmosphere of flattery and seduction which dulls and deceives conscience; the firmest, the purest, cannot avoid it. Vainly do they hope to escape its demoralising influence; vainly do they pretend to remain firm, to judge of things with impartiality, to discover what those praises, those smiles, that conventional language, what all this art of putting a gloss upon reality is worth. However skilful and clear-sighted they may believe themselves, they are caught in the snare, sooner or later. Religion itself, which should enlighten conscience, is perverted and disfigured by the worldly spirit; in its turn it becomes a matter of fashion and infatuation. Those who are its official representatives and who have charge of souls are often particularly anxious to avoid pointing out the danger. They are happy when they see persons who occupy a high position in society come to them, accept their authority, and bend beneath the yoke of the Church, and they fear to repel them by too much severity. Consequently, provided they obtain from them certain acts of outward submission, provided that, at certain epochs, they perform what the world is pleased to call religious duties, provided that, at such times, their fervour manifests itself by liberal alms, these leaders of souls willingly declare themselves satisfied, and gladly preach an easy devotion which adapts itself marvellously well to the most decided worldliness. . . . How can conscience escape becoming corrupted under such fatal influences? Is it a matter for wonder that the upper classes often place before us the spectacle of the greatest moral depravity joined to the deepest religious fervour, to the enthusiastic effusions of the most superstitious zeal? . . . The masses, guided by their vulgar common-sense, see in this

mere hypocrisy; and yet it is but seldom that these outward manifestations are the result of premeditated deception. . . . Alas! the evil lies in the fact that men believe they are sincere; they are carried away by their very emotions; they pray, they weep, they repent on certain days; they take as a return to God the sensual excitement produced by some special sermon, by some imposing ceremony, by some heart-stirring strains of church music, and thus, deluding themselves, they become more and more incapable of conversion, repentance, and holiness. . . . If you think I exaggerate, allow me to refer you to your own personal experience, and let your conscience itself answer.

You have just met with evil under its grossest and most repulsive form; before you has passed one of those beings whom intemperance has branded with shame; your eyes have rested upon that countenance on which vice has imprinted its degrading seal; you have shuddered at this sight; your heart has been divided between disgust and pity, and your thoughts have wandered sorrowfully to those low grounds of society upon which no ray of pure light ever shines.

But on the eve of the same day you have joined in a brilliant worldly entertainment. Here all is light, smiles, and beauty. Eyes grow bright; conversation flows, merry and sparkling. . . . But do you not very soon become conscious of being carried away by a strange excitement? What speaks the voice of conscience amid this bewitching society, where whatever is calculated to stir up the passions of eye and heart, to charm and excite the senses, is gathered together? Again, what does that voice speak when at the theatre you hear the thunder of applause which hails one of those plays in which guilty passion is portrayed with all its attractions, in which it expresses itself with so much spirit, emotion,

and delicacy that it succeeds in captivating every heart? . . . Christian soul! what now hast thou become? Ah! in that heavy and unwholesome atmosphere thou hast faltered. Moral intoxication has seized thee. . . . Now, in the sight of God, tell me which is the most guilty, that wretch upon whom thou hast cast a look of disgust, and who, it may be, has never received either light, or instruction, or vivifying inspiration, or thou who hast been warned in so many ways, thou who hast been enlightened by the Gospel, thou on whom the Lord seems to have lavished all His mercies?

Another example: Here is an unfortunate man who is being led into prison. . . . The crowd looks on. It is a thief! Honest folk are anxious to see the expression of a thief. . . . A most curious sight for them is that of one of the representatives of those lost classes with whom all social relations will henceforth be impossible. . . . See the surprise, the contempt, the anger depicted on so many countenances! Among them all how few there are that express the slightest pity!

But here, at the other extremity of the social scale, is an immense fortune springing up as by enchantment. True, strange rumours are afloat concerning its origin. True, in its production means have been employed which every honest conscience condemns. Much skill and clear-sightedness alone have kept those proceedings from falling under the stroke of the law, but bad faith and deceit have been manifest. . . . Yet what will people say? Will any one venture to protest energetically against such an iniquity? No, and that is what alarms me most. People will speak much, for a time they will cry out loudly against the scandal, then all will be hushed as by magic, and you will see the crowds bowing before fortune and hastening to share in its sumptuous entertainments. . . . And if from those richly loaded tables a few

crumbs should fall for works of piety, you will see religious men keep silence and counsel you to do the same! But tell me, before God, which has been the most guilty,—the unhappy man to whom everything, light, instruction, moral and religious influence have been denied, and who, urged by misery, has, in an evil hour, yielded to temptation, . . . or the man who had been given everything, good examples, education, comfortable circumstances, abundance even, and who escapes public dishonour only by dint of dexterity?

Am I wrong, therefore, when I affirm that there are positions which stun and intoxicate and in which men become inaccessible to the truth? . . . The world cries out loudly against the pharisaism of believers, but what can be more pharisaical than its judgments? . . . It crushes vice when it presents itself under its coarse and vulgar aspects. . . . It forgives everything to the skill which knows how to save appearances. . . . It kneels to success and popularity!

Why should I recall these things? For the melancholy pleasure of pointing out evil and provoking scandal? God forbid! Moreover, this were unnecessary. All I have said has been spoken before, and far more boldly, by the world itself. Think you that the worldly do not judge one another? Think you that they are not skilled in rendering in secret that which they flatter in public? Think you that they ignore all that lies concealed beneath these apparent virtues? Think you that calumny spares anything, and that it will not invent evil rather than remain inactive? Evil! Ah! the world will proclaim it loudly with joy and delight. . . . But what you will never hear in the world is that firm, faithful, and courageous voice which goes straight to the sinner, like John the Baptist to Herod, and tells him plainly, "It is not lawful for thee to do that."

Now that is precisely what God requires of us. Not loud indignation, not terrific denunciations, but that humble and firm testimony. . . . That is what God requires of you in the sphere in which He has placed you, each time that you are brought into contact with evil, each time that your conscience warns you, each time that your silence would be a cowardly shrinking from duty.

Look around you. . . . Here, among those who are dear to you, is a soul walking lightly and unconcernedly in the way of temptation; it seems to sport with danger. What does it need? A serious word. And who can speak that word with more effect than you who see its peril clearly, you whose voice would surely be heard? Here is a brother, a friend, whose troubled conscience wavers and is on the point of yielding. That man knows your character. If you do not speak, he will allege your silence in justification of his fall. Fathers and mothers who hear me, those I speak of are perhaps your children. Those souls which are rushing onward to perdition will be required of you. What answer will you then give to the Supreme Judge?

But we shall suffer for our frankness, you will doubtless object. I know it well; but who has discovered the secret of loving truly without suffering? Love, such as it is understood in the present day, is in many cases nothing more than a soft tenderness. Ah! come and learn of John the Baptist how you are to love. Learn of him that you must be willing to forget yourselves, to speak that which is displeasing, that which wounds, that which irritates, but also that which saves. By this is true love to be recognised. False love ever seeks its own satisfaction; it will never consent to alienate a heart in order to save it. True love, which seeks the happiness of others and not its own interest, is willing to be misunderstood, slighted, forgotten. Teach us then, O ye Christian



mothers, all the suffering you must have undergone ere you have brought into true life those whom God had given you. . . . Tell us all that your unwavering fidelity has cost you in the day when it has seemed to estrange from you those hearts whose affection had been your only reward and your only joy. Tell us, O Monica, all the submission and patience, all the secret prayers and hidden tears, which have given to the Church its St. Augustine. Teach us, O St. Paul, what it is to love without seeking one's interest, thou who hast written these beautiful words: "Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved," and who wert willing to be accursed provided Israel were saved. Or rather, tell it us, Thou who wert charity incarnate, Thou who camest upon earth to give peace, liberty, happiness, and salvation to men, and who didst obtain as Thy sole reward the most monstrous ingratitude. Ah! Thou knewest what it is to love when with slow steps Thou didst advance on the sorrowful path at the end of which the cross awaited Thee. Thou knewest it in the day when Thou didst utter these sublime words: "O Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, and ye would not!" Thou knewest it when, in the gloomy night of Thy agony, those whom Thou didst love the best were unable to watch one hour with Thee. Thou knewest it when from Thy cross, where love had nailed Thee, Thou didst meet nought but angry looks, Thou didst hear nought but words of blasphemy and malediction. Alas! it is by the intensity of the hatred which the world bore Thee that Thy love must be measured.

We have seen the fidelity of the Forerunner. Let us now consider his reward.

I will not attempt to portray the closing scene of his life. Everything in it bears the stamp of horror. That iniquitous revel, that impure woman presiding at the

banquet, that graceful dance and the applause of the guests, then suddenly that reeking head brought upon a charger and delivered by an executioner into the hands of a maiden who gives it to her mother. That hellish blending of hate and joy, of dance and murder, of blood and voluptuousness, all this brings a shudder to the soul and fills it with terror.

Shall I say it, brethren? Oft when I have read the Scriptures, and especially the lives of those who were the noblest witnesses of God upon earth, I have been tempted to accuse God of an inexplicable severity. What! for us so easy and comfortable an existence, so many blessings, consolations, alleviations to our sorrows, and for them who were so resolute, so faithful, a life so terrible, and often, yes, often a death so fearful! See how they die: Isaiah sawed by Manasseh, Zachariah slaughtered beside the altar, Stephen stoned, James beheaded, Peter crucified, Paul reduced to exclaim, "All have forsaken me." These are a few of them. Count all the others, if you can, in that innumerable army of martyrs. What then are Thy ways, great God, that Thou shouldest have reserved such a reward for them? And yet, of all these deaths, the most awful in my eyes is that of the Baptist. . . . Picture to yourselves that man in his dungeon, beneath a palace where all is light and merriment. Hark! In the stillness of night the heavy tread of a brutal soldier is heard descending. The door swings on its hinges. There is the dull sound of a falling sword, and all is over. Was he surprised in his sleep? Was he engaged in prayer? Was he permitted to utter a parting word? We cannot tell. A dead silence and nothing more. Thus perished he whom Jesus called the greatest of the prophets.

Ah! in presence of a death like this, if we had no hope save in this visible world, we might well exclaim,

“Vanity! vanity! that is what this obscure death, this life-course ended at thirty years of age, this useless sacrifice, this fruitless fidelity tell of. A stroke of the sword has finished all. Herod triumphs and the prophet is dead.”

Dead! Are you quite sure of this? . . . Ask the authors of this crime. If John the Baptist imprisoned troubled their impure festival with his invisible presence; if from the depths of his dungeon his voice sounded in their ears as a perpetual reproof, John the Baptist, once dead, will appear to them more formidable still. Hear what Herod says! In vain has he seen him beheaded. A few months have passed away, a new prophet appears. “It is Elijah!” say some. “It is Jesus of Nazareth!” say others. “No,” replies Herod; “it is John!” He sees him again standing before him, and haunting him everywhere with his avenging presence. . . . He sees his eyes following him. He hears his voice saying, “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife.” Though dead, John speaks to his guilty conscience still, and that terrible voice no Herodias can silence now.

Dead! Men do not die when they have served God. To-day John speaks to us still; to-day his example has stirred our hearts; to-day one of us, perhaps, having beheld his martyrdom anew, will save some perishing soul, and, despising the seductions of the world, will become the unfaltering witness of truth.

Dead! No, in the cause which he has served nothing is useless, and if the most obscure sacrifice loses not its reward, what then will be the recompense of a martyrdom such as his? If the Church has lived and grown, it has been owing to such sacrifices as these. When, glittering in the sunlight, we see the tall spire of some gigantic cathedral which remains standing as the silent witness of the faith of past generations, do we think of the enormous blocks buried within its depths? No

mortal eye sees them, but without those hidden foundations the edifice would crumble at the first blast of the storm. . . . Well, if to-day there is in the world a Christian Church, if there is a refuge accessible to all the sorrows of earth, an asylum in which the soul can for ever escape the oppressions of earth, a spiritual home where faith, hope, and love for ever abide. If we ourselves have found a place there, it is because at its foundation there are acts of devotion without number, obscure deaths, unknown sufferings, silent sacrifices which none can ever count.

Yes, it is by deaths like those that the reign of truth advances, and in the battle which we are waging with error and sin, they are of more importance than thousands of frivolous, vain, and fruitless lives. . . . When an army marches on to the attack of a fortress, the soldiers in the foremost ranks, alas! must fall by hundreds in the ditches that surround it; . . . but over those heaps of slain the rest will pass on to victory. Brethren, if to-day faith in the future, in the triumph of truth, is possible to us, it is because those heroes of olden times, those noble martyrs of the Divine cause, have suffered and died.

Dead! . . . But is it death to rejoin all those who were the witnesses of God upon earth? Is it death to enter eternal glory, and to unite with the company of the purest, noblest, and holiest souls that have lived here below? Is it death to meet one's God, and to exchange the sufferings of the present time for the ineffable glory of the world to come? Is it death to feel that we are the objects of a boundless love, and to live the true life for all eternity? . . . Ah! if that be death, then shall we say with Scripture, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

## XIII.

*WASTED LIVES.*

“Why stand ye here all the day idle?”—MATT. xx. 6.

HAVE you never reflected with profound sorrow upon the vast number of useless existences there are upon earth? Have you never thought of those thousands of beings who allow all their powers, thoughts, affections, energy, to be scattered by frivolity and lost in nothingness, just as the rain of heaven is absorbed by the sands of the desert? Those beings live on without so much as asking themselves whither they go or why they have been placed here below. Whilst St. Paul sees in the human life the grandest and most solemn thing in the world; whilst for him days, and even hours, are of the weightiest moment; whilst he saves, whilst he “redeems” time, whilst in order to accomplish his task he creates it, so to speak, by his marvellous employment of every instant, they allow their life to be frittered away without ever understanding its value. When we see them instinctively submitting to their destiny, when we see that not a thought, not an action in those lives has eternity as its object, we are inclined to smile at all the beautiful things that have been said on the greatness of the human soul, on its noble and unbounded aspirations. We look upon all this as hyperbolical and declamatory; we are even

tempted to question whether these beings have a soul at all; and when, having lived their little day on earth, they become the prey of death, willingly would we apply to them the words of our text: "Why have ye stood there all the day idle?"

Let us be just, however. Many of them might answer as did the labourers of the parable, "Because no man hath hired us." No one has pointed out to them the true end of life. No one has told them why they were here below.

None of those who hear me to-day will be able to offer this excuse. Not one of you will be able to allege his ignorance in justification of his wasted life. At whatever hour of life we may have been called, we all know that God claims us for His service. Let us then for a few short moments forget others and think only of ourselves. Let us see if we are not of those who waste in idleness the time which has been given them, and whilst we speak of the days and hours which are continually being frittered away, grant, O God, that this hour at least may not be lost!

I take as my starting-point a principle which is at the foundation of all the teaching of the Gospel. It is this: Every life which does not willingly make of the service of God its principal object is a useless life. I say *willingly*, for, in a general sense, every life has the service of God as its object, since God in His admirable wisdom often causes good to come out of evil, and makes even the blasphemies of His foes and the crimes of the most depraved beings subservient to His ends. Of this He has given us a striking example in saving humanity by the death of Christ, that is, by the most odious of crimes. None, however, will suppose that Pilate or Judas served God. The service in question is, therefore, a voluntary service, and in this sense I affirm that every

life of which the principal aim is not the service of God is a useless life. Besides, I acknowledge that among those who serve Him there are many stages. Some know Him in the fulness of His love and holiness, such as Jesus Christ has revealed Him; others still grope for Him, as it were, and though they know Him but imperfectly, endeavour notwithstanding to serve Him. They serve Him in the person of their brethren "whom they see," as St. John says, until they obtain a full knowledge of the invisible God; they remind us of those heathen of whom St. Paul speaks, who, having no law, yet seek to accomplish the works of the law. God, who knoweth the heart, will judge such men according to His righteousness. He alone knows what will be their eternal future; but, however imperfect their knowledge may be, if from the midst of their darkness they have aimed at serving God, we have no right to say that their life has been lost and that they have remained idle here below.

But when, taking the Gospel as our guide, we affirm that a life which is in no degree whatever referred to God is a wasted life, I know what objections such an affirmation raises on the part of the world. Men point us to lives of which God is certainly not the object, but which, nevertheless, are active, fruitful in services rendered to humanity, to lives which leave after them a long trail of light and glory, and they ask us if we still dare to call these useless lives.

I understand this objection, but it does not shake the principle I have laid down. It is most natural that men should consider as useful those existences which outwardly have been well employed, for man can only judge from appearance. But God looks to the heart. He judges of a life from the principle which has governed it, and therefore His judgment differs from ours. I shall explain my thought by one or two examples.

Here is a man whose passage has traced a deep furrow upon the earth; his is an intellect which has made grand discoveries, an energetic will which has obtained the noblest results. We who enjoy the fruits of his labours, we exalt his name, we bless his memory. But let me suppose that the only motive of his labours has been personal interest, the selfish seeking of his own glory. . . . In the eyes of God that life is wasted. According to the stern saying of Christ, it has already its reward upon earth, but it is lost for heaven.

I go further and take an extreme example; God grant it may never be realised! Here is an apostle of the Gospel, a preacher of the truth, who, having received at the hands of God intelligence to understand the Divine truths, the power of speech to translate them, and warmth of feeling to communicate them, exerts upon his contemporaries that mighty influence which produces a religious revival. Who would dare to call such a life useless? We religiously preserve its memory in our hearts—we bless it. But let me suppose that this man, while seeming to serve God, has served only his own glory; that, while defending the interests of Jesus Christ, he has sought only his own interest. In the eyes of God his life has been wasted as far as he himself is concerned. In saving others he has lost himself. He must be numbered among those who at the last day will say, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils?" and to whom it will be answered, "Depart from me; I never knew you."

Now let us choose an opposite example. Here is a poor labourer, whose life has been absorbed by a crushing labour. . . . But no! That example would not be sufficiently telling. . . . Here is a lame man, condemned to pine away year after year upon a bed of pain. What can he do here below? Nothing, nothing whatever.



Everything fails him, energy, strength, wealth. Thus will his monotonous life glide away; thus, for him, will day succeed day, until the hour when, without a friend to accompany his mortal remains, he will rejoin in the common grave so many other beings as soon forgotten as himself. . . . What will remain of this life? Not one apparent work, not one visible service rendered to humanity. That is what men call an abortive existence, a lost and wasted life. . . . Well, if in that man's soul the love of God has been the inspiring sentiment, if he has obeyed God in suffering, if his heart, the only organ of his shattered frame in which life was not wholly extinct, has been filled with love and faith, that life will weigh more in the balance of the righteous Judge than all those that have made most noise in the world, but of which selfishness has been the ruling principle.

That is how we are to estimate human life, not according to its outward acts only, but according to the principle by which it is governed. Now this principle, God alone knows it; far from us, therefore, be the thought of judging others! Once again, let us look only to ourselves.

But is not this view of the true aim of our life at the same time a revelation of its greatness? How grand is that life of which God Himself is the object! how grand it is even for the poorest, for the most wretched, for the most destitute! Ah! let worldlings fritter it away in unworthy frivolity; let them, according to their own criminal expression, *kill* the time which God, in His goodness, has given them. You, my brother, cannot do so; you know what is human life; you know that its end is the service of God; for you it has a most solemn importance; in the Scriptures you have learned that it is a time of trial, the time for scattering the seed, the harvest of which we shall reap in the eternal day. . . . To this sublime instruction your conscience has responded, and

anything inferior to it would fail to satisfy you. . . . And it is not your conscience alone that tells you what is the value of life. You know what it is worth since the Son of God has honoured it by taking it upon Himself, since, by showing what it can be, He has imparted to it a Divine greatness. . . . You know what it is worth since, by dying for you upon the cross, He has taught you what, in His sight, is the value of your soul. . . . You know what it is worth, and the very name you bear, you who call yourselves the redeemed of God, reminds you of it with incomparable force. You know what it is worth, for you have understood that you are called—O sublime destiny!—to become co-workers with God. Well, that life which the Gospel has made so noble and so beautiful, what use do you make of it? Such is the question which God asks of each of you to-day.

Alas! at this very moment a painful and ironical contrast strikes my mind. I have recalled the beauty and greatness of life such as the Gospel has made it, and involuntarily I compare it with that of many of those who now hear me. Answer, where is the beauty of those lives which frivolity fills up from morn to night, and what signifies the value of time for those who waste the precious hours in that which is but vanity?

I know what answer you will make. You will tell me that it is impossible to have continually in view the serious object of life; that the soul must have its hours of relaxation and repose; that, moreover, we dwell in the midst of a world with which we cannot break, and which lays upon us its obligations, whether we will or no. Yes, you are always ready to speak of the obligations you owe to the world, but you seem to forget that your first obligations are towards God. The relaxation you require consists, you say, in the most innocent recreations. Recreations! Ah! is it not most sure, on the contrary,

that worldliness invades everything so completely that at length no place is left for God in your life! Recreations! Ah! who does not see that worldly life is like the abysses of which the Book of Proverbs tells, which constantly cry out, "More, more!" until they have devoured all? Think of the many hours it claims, not only of those spent at your entertainments, but of those which precede them—of those hours devoted to the selection of a fitting costume, for instance. . . . Think of those hours which follow them, of that stupor which leaves the soul so weary, of those dreams which trouble and bewilder it. Thus your days are consumed, . . . thus your time glides away with the most frightful rapidity, and with terror you sometimes question what share will be left for God. But no; there are works of piety. Works of piety! Is that the name you give them? Yes, I see many works the aim of which is the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor, the instruction of the ignorant, the salvation of souls; I see that you are not slow in performing them; I see that they are the fashion; but vainly do I seek in them the share of God. Where is it, for instance, in those bazaars on behalf of the poor which are sometimes transformed into veritable shows, where all the petty passions of the world seem to have assembled? Where is it in those days, commenced at so late an hour, and from which the sweet and pure influences of early prayer are absent—in those days without serious reading or meditation? Where is it in those profaned Sabbaths? Where is it, alas! even in this hour of worship, to which you bring but a divided attention, and during which your eyes often close with weariness, because the dawn had found you still in the ball-room?

Those, some will say, are extreme examples. Let us admit it, if you will, and comfort ourselves with the thought that, wholly mistaken as regards those who hear

me, I have traced out mere imaginary pictures. Will this be sufficient to reassure us? No; it is possible to condemn wild dissipation and excessive worldly agitation more strongly even than I have done, and nevertheless consume one's life in frivolity. In fact, there is a frivolity which I will call serious, for want of a better name, and which often reigns in circles where too shocking a dissipation is very loudly condemned.

You belong to a society the general tone of which is serious; no scandal ever disturbs its habitual aspect; all its pleasures are correct, decorous, moderate. And yet, if any one should ask you how your days are spent, you would be at a loss what to answer. Think of all those honourable but superficial relations, of all those visits paid and received, of all those conversations in which not a word is exchanged that speaks to the soul, of those books read without aim or method, and which leave not one spark of light for the mind, nor one fruitful emotion for the soul. A society such as this, you think, is most innocent. You are not losing your soul in it, I admit, but can you say that you are living the true life? Do you not see that insensibly, and for want of a higher inspiration which would stimulate you to love and sacrifice, were it at the risk of suffering, you are allowing your soul to become thoroughly engrossed by trivial occupations, by insignificant habits, by soulless pleasures, by relations of pure etiquette which weaken and consume it gradually but fatally? Can you conceive of anything more tyrannical than this laborious idleness? Is there in the wide world a vocation which takes up so many hours and produces so little result? And is it surprising that so many wandering but ardent souls, wishing *to live* at any cost, should shake off the yoke of that heavy and dismal servitude?

Here we must make a reflection. The great majority

of our fellow-men are condemned to the most irksome and wearing manual toil. A very limited number have received of God fortune, and with fortune leisure. To this minority belong most of those who are here to-day. Well, think you that this very leisure does not impose the most serious obligations upon you? Think you that you are permitted to waste it in idleness? Are you not called, as it were, to think for those who, below you, have no time for reflection; to look after the higher interests of their souls, to which they can scarcely give a few moments' attention themselves? When we speak of the working classes and of their sufferings, I often hear their improvidence, their prejudices, their hatred of the upper classes thundered against. People bewail their condition, wish them more instruction, a higher degree of morality, more religion especially; they tell them of the blessedness of home life, of the happiness of a peaceful fireside, of the innocent joys of reciprocated love. I will not examine whether these accusations and these lessons might not well be reversed and cast back with gloomy and bitter wrath at those who lavish them so profusely, and who often belie them by the most scandalous life. . . . No, I accept these facts, and I ask myself how this reform of the working classes is to be accomplished. Will you leave the care of it to those who are worn out by manual toil? Will you call to this work those agitators, those ambitious individuals who lay bare the wounds and sufferings of the masses only to make a show of philanthropy and in order to obtain popularity? . . . This work is yours, brethren. The leisure which God has given you lays upon you the most sacred duties towards those who have no spare hours. You are therefore enlisted by Divine command in all the grand, noble, and generous causes. Well, how do you answer this call?

I do not know your life, but I have only to cast a

glance round me to state sorrowfully that it is precisely those who have most leisure who most complain of the want of time. Why is this? Because when the soul is no longer stimulated by pressing and urgent needs, it gives itself up to its favourite pursuits, and thus surrounds itself with tyrannical occupations and habits, which little by little entangle it in an inextricable network.

Follow him, this man of leisure. You will see him dreaming for a whole day, of what? Of those noble works I have told you of? . . . Oh, no! Of a picture, of a curious piece of furniture, of a rare object which is wanting in his collections, of the embellishment of his dwelling, of a fancy which he has long been wishing to gratify! Those are his noble thoughts! To realise them, you will see him wandering about from place to place, taking no end of proceedings, leading a busy life,—so busy, alas! that we shall scarcely be able to obtain a few moments' conversation with him to tell him of some work which needs aid or of some wretched man who is dying for want of bread. . . . Thus his days and years glide by, and because this existence is outwardly irreproachable, you will not allow me to call it a wasted life, a life which is useless to God and to humanity!

You, my brother, cannot take your share of this reproach, of course; you cast a glance of pity upon those miserable victims of idleness. No one can accuse you of frittering your life away; labour fills it from morn to night. No recreation ever draws you for a moment away from it. . . . Day after day finds you at it. Fixing your eye steadfastly upon the aim to be reached, upon the wealth to be acquired, upon the important part to be acted, you pursue it with an ardour which nothing can abate and which goes on increasing with years. All other preoccupations vanish before this all-absorbing thought. So much perseverance and skill have not

been fruitless. You have been encouraged by success. Who can tell the secret joy which fills your heart at times when you see your affairs prosper and your wealth increase? . . . Yours is a useful life. . . . Who would dare to tell you that it has been wasted? . . . Brother, God Himself will tell you so at the last day if in that life you continue to refuse Him the first place which is His. . . . God Himself will tell you what the lord of the parable said to the labourers: "Why hast thou stood here all the day idle?" And, in truth, you have done nothing so long as you have thought only of yourself, so long as you have not served God.

But how is it possible to serve God, you answer, in an absorbing profession which has no religious character whatever, and of which every part has earth as its object? Brethren, I have said God looks to the heart, to the intention; and if you consecrate your life to Him, truly it will never be lost, even though nothing in your activity would be visibly referred to His service. What God asks of you is not to abandon your calling, but to perform each of the duties it lays upon you faithfully. True, there are certain professions which no Christian should ever accept, because in them conscience is forced to yield to intrigue and falsehood; there are certain associations to which no Christian should ever submit. But should such be the case, this man's soul must be saved at any cost; he must shake off that yoke at any sacrifice, yea, even at the sacrifice of what is most precious to him upon earth. But this is the exception. There are very few callings in which God cannot be served. Be, therefore, what you are—statesmen, magistrates, merchants, artists, workmen, servants—and in each of these vocations be Christians; in each of them you may by your integrity, uprightness, and love of justice show what is the all-governing principle of your life.

What though, on account of the multiplicity of the duties they involve, these callings should absorb you completely and leave you no time for directly religious works? You might still arrive at the close of your career sure that your life has not been wasted. . . . But is not this supposing an impossibility?

Is it true that you can never labour directly for God? Is it true that your active life is so completely absorbing as to leave you not one moment that you may devote to the interests of the reign of God, to the consolation of those who suffer, to that vast work of restoration and salvation which is intrusted to the Church? If truly you love God, will you not be all the more anxious to find Him again that your everyday occupations forcibly draw your thoughts away from Him? Ah! let us beware of false excuses. Let us beware of saying that time fails us, when we know so well how to find hours for pleasure, and perhaps for sin. Time, it has been said, is not composed of hours and minutes only, but of love and will. He that loves much finds means to do much.

I now come to those of my hearers whose life is outwardly engaged in the service of God. They cannot recognise themselves in any of the situations which I have depicted. The excessive dissipation of worldliness appears to them criminal; the frivolity of a superficial existence is repugnant to their feelings, and for a long time their awakened conscience has told them that they must serve God above all else. In truth, you see them enlisted under the banner of Christian works. But the fact that they are thus enlisted does not necessarily imply that they are actively engaged. Idleness and languor may exist under pious appearances, and a seemingly religious life may glide away without leaving any traces behind it. Shall I surprise you when I affirm that of all masters God is the one whom men serve with



most indolence and irresolution? I question whether any worldly undertaking would, I do not say prosper, but simply subsist, if it were led with the inconsistency and want of method which we bring to the service of God. Have you ever remarked with what facility we complain at the slightest vexations, at the most trifling sacrifices which our vocation of Christians involves? Have you ever counted all the moments which we waste in speaking of our busy life, all the hours which are taken up by incurably frivolous conversation, in which we slip here and there, and for conscience' sake, a few sanctimonious phrases? At the close of many an apparently well-employed day, have we not been seized with the feeling that our strength had been consumed in vain words and that "no virtue had come out of us"? Have we not been terrified when we have seen how skilfully, nay, how craftily, we lull our conscience to sleep by vain resolutions of future activity? "To-morrow," we say, "to-morrow!" And the morrow finds us more feeble, more undecided than ever. Ah! when I behold the Son of Man in that marvellous career of three years' duration, from which has sprung the regeneration of the world, I am struck with the solemn importance which He who oft embraces centuries at one glance attaches to the days and hours which are assigned to Him for action here below. See how, as He advances towards the end, He remembers that time is short, that the day is declining, that the night cometh in which no man can work. Thus His life appeared to Him, and that is why each of the hours of which it was composed has weighed more than thousands of existences in the history of humanity.

But though I lay before you the value of life and the necessity for action as points of the most vital importance, think not, however, that I would urge you, above all things, to a merely outward and visible activity. Nothing

is farther from my thoughts than this. No, life cannot be measured by a certain amount of works accomplished in a given space of time; no, the most spiritual of all religions has not been given to the world to submit it to the yoke of a low utilitarianism. The important, the essential point is that the soul act; and if it be idle, then all outward works may be useless. Nay, more. There are times when external activity may be a snare and a delusion. In such cases, what are we to do? We must retire in solitude; we must reflect; we must, leaving the crowd and His disciples themselves, follow Jesus upon the mountain, and there pour out our soul in prayer. Do not be mistaken; thus to give up regular activity for a time is to act more really than ever. Therefore, judge them not, I pray you, those Christians who refuse, it may be, to unite their external efforts with yours, and who do not labour in the same manner as you. Who can tell if this is not their appointed hour for solitude and meditation? Who can tell if, far from you, they will not do more good than with you? What matters how they act, so long as they are with the Lord?

Ah! worldly activity, multiplied meetings, numerous associations, works supported, have we not often placed too much confidence in them all? And, after having exhausted our powers in those collective works, have we not often heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Why have ye stood here all the day idle?" Why? Alas! because no one acted in reality; because no one made of these works his work; because no one brought to their performance an undivided heart. We thought we had strengthened ourselves by uniting ten or twenty individual wills for the attainment of some particular end, and we had merely associated our failings, our moral infidelities. Not in contact with one another will they transform themselves into vital forces, love, or holy energy.

Let us then beware lest we allow ourselves to be deceived by an empty appearance of life, and let us remember the son in the parable who said to his father, "I go work to-day in thy vineyard," but whom the father found not there.

I have told you how we waste the time which God gives us; I have still to show what are the consequences of this inactivity.

The first and most direct is the decline of faith. There is a fact which must have struck you in the Gospel; it is that God never demonstrates religious truths by proofs of an intellectual order. Never will reasoning alone lead to faith. Something else is required for this—action on the part of the soul. "*Do the will of God and ye shall know of my doctrine whether it be of God,*" said Jesus Christ. This is so evident, that if we say, rightly, that action is the result of faith, we may, with still greater reason, add that faith is the result of action. . . . Yes, serve God in humility, in holiness and love; serve Him, and I affirm that you will feel your faith in Him strengthened. . . . What have been the epochs of strong faith? Those in which the Church has been active, and especially those in which it has suffered. . . . When has unbelief invaded it? In the days of its prosperity, when it had complacently settled upon earth, when it had neglected its sublime mission. That which is true of the Church is also true of individuals. . . . Let indolence seize upon you in the midst of ease and worldly life; one day your faith will disappear, and in darkness you will seek it with terror, but in vain!

To this first consequence is added another: the less we act, the less capable of action we become. Our soul is, as it were, pendent between two rival forces, each of which aspires at absorbing and ruling it—selfishness and charity; it must yield to one or other of these; there is

no middle course. But in the path of charity there is activity and climbing, while the path of selfishness is an easy descent; whence it follows that when it ceases to act, our soul takes rapid strides downwards towards selfishness. This explains why the Christian's inactivity is not only guilty, but corrupting and fatal to his own soul, and why the first punishment of whoever does not serve God is the continually increasing inability to serve Him; for, just as in the physical world, the swiftness of a falling body grows greater as it nears the earth, so the soul follows the same fearful progression as it descends towards selfishness.

In consequence, obedience becomes ever more difficult, sacrifice ever more impossible; it costs the soul an effort to give up the most insignificant of its interests. "Each of its comforts," says Vinet, "each of its habits, henceforth becomes a sacred thing;" the will of God alone loses its holy character. . . . Thus, as a tree which the frost has injured, many a life which seemed full of promise withers and decays. Then, finally, age comes—age that gives the last icy touch to the heart which the love of God no longer warms with its flame, and before us is the distressing spectacle of a selfish old age and of a hardened soul.

You will not fall so low as this, brethren. Such a future terrifies you; God will spare it you. Nevertheless, reflect seriously upon this: even supposing you might, by your future activity, make up for your past inaction, you will always feel its effects. Let us remember that each hour of our life has its special duties, which are not those of that which precedes or of that which follows it. You will always feel what it is to have neglected the first. Just as, when the years which should have been devoted to study have been frittered away, a man may endeavour by the most intense application to make up

for lost time, there however always remain some essential points on which he feels himself weak—points of which the foundation is wanting, and which it will henceforth be impossible for him to acquire; so, in the Christian life, the most unwearied activity in the present cannot compensate for inaction in the past. In the days of your youth you refused to bend beneath the yoke of God; later you will know what it costs to break with inveterate habits. You have refused to govern your passions or your pride when that submission would have been easy; you will learn by hard struggles and shameful defeats all there is of vitality in those enemies which you have spared too long. You have been unwilling, when still it was time, to renounce the approbation of the world and the rapturous delight of flattered self-love. Well, in the day when you will be called, in presence of men, to bear testimony to the truth and to proclaim a noble independence, you will be feeble, undecided, and you will perhaps have recourse to some cowardly compromise. You have, when a favourable opportunity has been afforded you, neglected to strengthen your faith by that constant communion with the Divine Word, by that careful study which alone reveals to us its intimate truths; will you be able to do so when attacked by hostile criticism, when engaged in the all-consuming activity of life? Who feels this terrible consequence more strongly than the pastor whom God has intrusted with the care of enlightening and establishing souls! . . . Suppose that for many years he has neglected to work—to work in carefully studying the truths he preached, in weighing the objections of his adversaries, in strengthening the souls which God had confided to him; . . . to work, especially, in interceding for them. Suddenly his conscience is roused. Unbelief has invaded his flock. Here it comes, bold, learned, proud. In terror he mourns. He is anxious to work. He acts,

alas! but then it is he understands that a new ministry cannot be produced without preparation, that one cannot acquire in a day that which the slow and patient toil of years alone could have given. Then it is he sees that the most pressing appeals and the most feverish activity are not to be compared with an unwavering fidelity. Then it is that, feeling himself incapable of defending clearly and powerfully those truths he loves, and for which he would give his life, he exclaims with sorrow, "Why have I stood here all the day idle?"

Idle! Ah! brethren, if the Christian's inactivity be so hurtful to his own soul, how guilty must it appear to us when we reflect upon the state of the world in the midst of which he is placed! Were we surrounded with angels, still should we act in order to prove our gratitude to God. But where are we? In a world where God is forgotten and despised; in a world where men suffer; in a world where men are rushing on to perdition. These two adverse powers, selfishness and charity, are at war in the world as well as in our own heart. Whoever sides not with right, by this very reason sides with evil. . . . The weakness of the good does more harm in the world than the perversity of the wicked. Men who coldly and resolutely choose evil are rare, but that which gives them the appearance of strength, and soon, alas! its reality, is the connivance of cowards, the seeming assent of those who dread the struggle. As those stones which, rolling down from the summits of the Alps, drag whole rocks along with them and soon produce the formidable avalanche which nothing can resist, so evil, though often feeble at the outset, is increased and strengthened by our inactivity and our cowardly indolence. . . . Who can tell how far our responsibility reaches? See that soul going astray under your eyes; what has failed it? A word which, on a certain day, you should have spoken. And that other

soul yonder, what has irritated and scandalised it? Our moral apathy, our want of zeal; in a word, our indolence. Calculate all those consequences, if you can. . . . You cannot fail being appalled at them. Alas! those sorrows, those iniquities, those crimes which sadden you, may, in a certain measure, be laid at your door. You should have acted, and you have remained idle; you should have resisted, and you have had neither a firm word nor a resolute attitude, . . . and you have wasted your strength and your soul in unworthy frivolities. . . . Ah! when I see our torpor and our dull indifference in presence of the evil which surrounds us on all sides, I am reminded of the Apostles asleep in Gethsemane, and the sorrowful words of the Man of Sorrows come back to my memory: "Could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

And here again, do not delude yourselves with the thought that your present activity will atone for all. Ah! doubtless, warned by remorse, you will now think of those who are suffering and losing themselves before your eyes. You will set to work, and the occasions for sacrifice will astonish you by their number. But whatever you may do to-day will not blot out your past inactivity. It is beautiful to struggle against present injustice, but your courage will not efface one iniquity which you will formerly have allowed to subsist. It is sweet to minister to the wants of the needy, but the bread you now give will not satisfy the miserable beings beside whom you have so often passed unconcerned. Ah! painful thought! To be willing to work and to be able no longer to do so! To stretch out our hands towards that past which escapes us, and on which we have lost our power! To remember those souls whom we have caused to go astray, those afflicted ones whom we have sent away sorrowing, despairing perhaps; those sufferings which have vainly knocked at the door of our hearts!

. . . And what then will it be when death itself will separate us from those to whom we have refused our love? Ah! the dead are inexorable! Yes, the masses are right, the dead come back to earth. They come back to those who have neglected them; they come back, and their menacing voice accuses our cowardice. They come back and tell us, "Why were you idle in the day when you might have warned us? Why did your lips remain silent? Why have we claimed your love in vain?" Oh, ye dear but terrible images, ye images of those whom we have neglected! alarm us unto salvation, and teach us what use we are to make of the time which God still gives us here below.

It is time to conclude, but it is also time to turn our looks towards Him who alone can forgive and atone for all. If we have lamented over our useless lives; it is time to persuade ourselves that the God of the Gospel is a merciful God, who raises, converts, and regenerates. The time of mourning is over; now is the time to hope. And why should I not tell you the thought that comes to me as I contemplate this assembly? Who are we here? A few hundreds of souls. Now, do you know all there may be amongst us of hitherto wasted powers, intellect, moral energy, love, devotion? Do you know what those precious seeds might become, and what a magnificent harvest they might bring forth? Yes, if this call could but be heard, if these souls could but be stirred!

Who can tell the grand future which God might lay in store for you if your life, so miserably consumed in unmeaning preoccupations and selfish pleasures, could at length take its flight towards a sublime end! Who can tell, O my young sister! all the treasures of tenderness and sympathy, of hope and consolation, that would spring from your heart which the breath of the world threatens to dry up more and more? Who can tell, O my brother!



the good it might be given you to do, if, firm and faithful in the humble position which is yours, you concentrated upon some work of justice or charity those powers of your soul which are being consumed in nothingness! Ah, though you were a labourer of the eleventh hour, who till now had remained idle, still would it be time, and in your well-nigh withered soul everything still might come to life again under the eye of God.

In a word, who can tell all that might come forth out of this assembly? Who will tell us all that the breath of spring causes to germinate and grow on the most ungrateful and sterile soil? Who can foresee all the blessings, all the powers of life and salvation which you might produce? And why should it not be so? Why, when God is willing to act, should we remain idle? Let us be up and doing, brethren, it is time! . . . And Thou, whose breath causes the wilderness to blossom as the rose, Thou who hast called Thyself the resurrection and the life, pour upon us the renewing Spirit, and may we all submit to Thy Divine influence! Amen.

## XIV.

## FOOLISHNESS AND POWER.

“For the preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness ; but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God” (1 COR. i. 18).

FOOLISHNESS! Power! Those are the two names which St. Paul gives to the preaching of the Cross. My purpose is to study these two ideas successively, and then to point out to you the close and deep connection which exists between them.

The preaching of the Cross is *foolishness*. Note that it is not an enemy of the Gospel, but an apostle, who tells us so. Christianity has not waited to hear this reproach from the lips of the world; it has not left this satisfaction to its foes. It has laid hold of this insult and claimed it the first as its lawful property. And let none tell us that this is a figure of speech, a hasty expression which escapes the apostle. The Gospel is sparing of those high-flown epithets, of those rhetorical figures; and, moreover, the same thought lies at the foundation of all Jesus Christ's instructions. Jesus has presented His doctrine as a thing which the world would denounce as senseless; He has spoken plainly of the incompatibility which existed between the ideas of men and the lessons He taught; He has foretold that His disciples would meet with opposition, hatred, and scorn.

This is, let us say it in passing, a strange way of trying to win men to one's cause; it is so strange that it would be foolish if it did not betoken a Divine inspiration. Generally when a man wishes to succeed, he promises himself and his disciples success. Every general knows full well that in order to conquer he must predict victory to his soldiers; in the intellectual order it is the same: the philosopher, the head of a school, endeavours to prove that his system answers all the needs of the age, and will satisfy all its aspirations; he points to the minds that are ready to accept it, and to the proselytes who will rally round his standard. And we ourselves, how often, yielding to this universal enthusiasm, have we not proclaimed the approaching triumph of our beliefs. Jesus Christ alone tells His disciples: "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake," and it is this thought that Paul takes up when he speaks with so much assurance of the folly of the Cross.

To the Cross, in particular, it appertained to receive this distinction and this reproach, for in it the whole of Christianity is summed up. It is its central point; in it especially appears all that in the Gospel is strange and contrary to human wisdom. The preaching of the Cross was to be foolishness; it has been such, and St. Paul's language is not exaggerated.

In the first place, considering it only from an external point of view, the death of Christ, such as it has been recorded in the Gospels, that ignominious and troubled death, must have seemed a strange means of assuring success to His cause. . . . To-day, I know, the Cross has become the most glorious of symbols; it waves above all the Christian nations, and just as the loftiest and most magnificent monuments raise it high in the air, so, in the moral order, it has become the highest expression of love and sacrifice. So radiant a halo surrounds

it, so wondrous a splendour radiates from it, that our dazzled eyes can conceive of nothing more sublimely grand. But let not this deceive us; the Cross, in the days of Christ, was a mere instrument of torture, no other glory surrounded it than that which to-day is attached to the gallows or the scaffold. It was not even employed for free-born criminals; a particular infamy was associated with this accursed tree upon which slaves only were crucified; I ask, therefore, to aim at triumphing by means of a similar symbol, was not this simply raising against Christianity a storm of opposition and antipathy? What must the Jews have thought of it, they who had always indulged in their fond dreams of a glorious Messiah; or the Greeks, accustomed to worship the stern majesty and the calm beauty of their deities; or the Romans, who bowed only before triumphant might? It is easy to understand that the crucified Christ should have become the object of all their scorn; and it was, in fact, against the Cross that all the great scoffers of heathendom directed their keenest darts.

Some will perhaps tell us that after all it was natural that the Cross should triumph, because there is in martyrdom a secret power which attracts and captivates the soul. But those who reason in this way forget that it is precisely since Christianity and at the shadow of the Cross that men have learnt to distinguish, to elevate, to honour all the victims of oppression. Before it, the conquered were always in the wrong, and this was most natural, since fatalism was the true and supreme divinity of the ancient world. Further, I would understand the effect which a calm, serene, and triumphant martyrdom might produce. But why, then, if the evangelists and apostles wished to succeed, do they seem to delight in pointing out, in their narratives of Christ's death, all the signs of agitation and anguish which are peculiar to it?

Why bring before us again and again the dismal scene of Gethsemane, the sweat of blood, the hand that trembles at the touch of the mysterious cup, the terror and the bitter sorrow of Jesus? Why picture that agonising look which, from His Cross, He turns towards heaven which is closed upon Him? why remind us of that despairing cry He utters, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Is it then a sight so well calculated to inspire souls with confidence and peace? Is it by such pictures that men are to be attracted and subdued? This is so contrary to all our instincts that it has ever been a stumbling-block for human reason. The last century furnishes us with a very striking proof of this. A philosopher, who in the midst of much vice and folly had preserved his faith in God and a lively admiration for the Gospel, J. J. Rousseau, wrote on Jesus Christ a page which has been a thousand times quoted, that famous page in which he compares Socrates with Jesus, and in which we read these words: "Yes, if the life and death of Socrates are those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God;" and portraying this death from his own imagination rather than from the narratives of the Gospel, Rousseau depicts it calm, divine, triumphant. Well, when Voltaire read this famous page, he wrote in the margin: "You forget His bloody sweat!" This note of Voltaire's was prompted by hate; but in this case hate had been clear-sighted, and Voltaire was not wrong; the death of Christ has been a troubled death; the Gospel has dared to say it, and it has presented this troubled death to the human conscience as its great peace-restorer. Well, to aim at success by such means, in the eyes of reason, was it not foolishness?

That is not all. So far we have beheld only the external features of the death on the Cross. But need I say that St. Paul saw in it more than this? He saw in

it the pledge of man's reconciliation with God; he saw in it an act of reparation, a sacrifice offered to Divine justice by the new Adam of a new humanity. For him the death on the Cross was not a mere martyrdom, it was a wondrous drama, the very centre of Divine revelation, the object of the admiration of the elect and the angels to all eternity. Now, of all the teachings of the apostles, this is perhaps the point which most shocks and scandalises the reason of a generation upon whom the rights of Divine holiness seem to have lost all their power.

To-day the Cross, considered merely from the external point of view, has become the most glorious of symbols, the crown of thorns is surrounded by an incomparable majesty. Nobility of soul, imagination, nay, mere poetic sentiment, must be strangely absent from the being who would not understand this charm. But when, faithful to the teaching of the apostles, we affirm that in the death of Christ there has been a sacrifice offered to God Himself, when we say that it is in His character of representative of humanity that He allowed Himself to be nailed upon the Cross, when we explain His unutterable sufferings by the inexpressible anguish which our sins caused Him, then we see surprise and the scornful smile reappear, then the word foolishness, under a milder form perhaps, rises to the lips of the wise. . . . The world, you say, has become Christian. Oh! how could I ignore this? Yes, the world has taken the mantle of Christianity, it has adopted its language, but its spirit is so utterly foreign to it, that true Christianity always astonishes and scandalises it. If you doubt this, suppose for an instant that St. Paul has returned to the world. Suppose him preaching in the large towns of Europe—in Paris, for instance, that modern Athens—the Son of God crucified. Do you not think that, for the greater number, his God would still be the unknown God? How would

he be received by our thinkers, our writers, and our critics, I mean by those who boast that they are the true interpreters of the age and the guides of modern thought? How would they judge the holy rudeness and the astonishing doctrine of a man who would refuse to know anything beyond Christ and Him crucified? Ah! if we who are not men like St. Paul, if we who have neither the courage nor the fidelity of the great apostle, if we who know how to sweeten by our wisdom and our combinations the bitter savour of the Cross, if we escape not reproach, polite ridicule, the scorn of modern wisdom, how would the apostle be treated, he who, to save souls, took not counsel of flesh and blood, he who disdained the approbation and smiles of men, he who brought them the truth without reticence and without weakness? We cannot doubt it; St. Paul would say to the present generation what he said to the Corinthians in his Epistle; the preaching of the Cross would, in his lips, be foolishness now just as well as it was then.

But this foolishness is a *power*, and the mightiest power which the world has ever seen at work. Paul knew this from experience. It was the Cross that had conquered him, and no mean conquest, in truth, was that by which the proud, intrepid, fiery soul of the Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, had been subdued. Not only had this Cross subdued him, but it had been his surest instrument of triumph; and in his Epistle to the Colossians, he pictures, in sublimest language, all the powers of this world brought into captivity at the foot of the Cross.

Will any one say that St. Paul ascribed too much power to the Cross? Well, suppose the apostles marching on to the conquest of the world without it. Suppose them teaching the most reasonable of doctrines, preaching and practising the purest of morals; do more—suppose them accomplishing the most marvellous works, curing

the sick, feeding the multitudes, raising the dead—think you they would have succeeded? Assuredly no. And this I affirm with the utmost confidence, for that supposition has been realised. A man who was not an apostle but the Master of the Apostles, had preached to the world the most perfect of doctrines, the purest of morals; He had realised His teaching by revealing in His Person a holiness before which we bow in adoration. . . . He had performed works such as the world had never seen before, and this Man, at the close of His three years and a half's ministry, scarce could number a handful of irresolute and fearful disciples. What then was required that He might convert the world? Death: "Except a corn of wheat die, it cannot *bring forth* fruit." Death, and the death of the Cross: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." If without the Cross Jesus Christ Himself had spoken for nought, what without it would the disciples have done? It has truly been the power which has transformed the world. Men tell us that the morality of the Gospel would have been sufficient to save the world. Morality! And who does not know that in heathendom itself, in the days of the primitive Church, it had cast its brightest lustre? Morality! Never had it been more honoured and exalted than by such philosophers as Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius; but also, never had it been more powerless to convert even those who preached it with so much eloquence. But whilst in their schools they disserted upon duty, without, however, changing one heart, the Cross had risen bright and blessed . . . ; it had lighted up the most gloomy darkness and the lowest depths of ancient society, and there, from amongst the poor, the lowly, the slaves, it had called forth thousands of souls who were willing to die for the sake of truth and justice, and who, in the circus and amidst



the most cruel torments, proclaimed pardon, hope, and life eternal. That is what the Cross then did, and what it alone could do. Count all its triumphs since then! Tell us how many sinners it has snatched from pollution, how many troubled hearts it has saved from despair, and this from age to age; for all the clouds which the unbelief of men has raised round it may have dimmed its brightness for a moment, but they have not quenched its light. . . . Ask of our missionaries what they would do without the Cross? and what discourses, what arguments, what morals would produce the same results as the simple narrative of the death of Jesus Christ? But what! without the Cross would there be any missionaries at all? Do men leave their native shores and peril their lives simply to preach morality? Has deism ever essayed to evangelise the world? But why go such lengths? Let us examine ourselves, for if we are truly Christians, it is through the Cross that we have become such. Till we had beheld it, we had perhaps felt many pure and sweet religious emotions, we had perhaps felt the attraction of truth; but to make of us new creatures, to inspire us with new thoughts, new affections, new hopes, the Cross, and nothing short of the Cross, was required.

To judge of its power, we must see it struggling with the human soul in the hours of sorest trial. For instance, here is one of those sorrows against which all manner of consolations dash as the waves against a rock—one of those sorrows which express themselves in revolt and blasphemy. Armed with the Cross, I fear not to encounter it; for there is upon this Cross a sorrow greater, deeper, more distressing still, but in which we feel the tender sympathy of a God. . . . Or give me a criminal conscience—a conscience tortured by remorse, and trembling before the approaching judgment of God—with the Cross I can meet it, for from it flows a pardon in which love

unites with holiness. Since the first sinner converted by the Cross—since the repentant malefactor—count all the souls it has saved, all the broken hearts it has comforted, all the sufferings it has appeased, all the agonies it has helped to endure! Truly the Cross is the greatest power in the world, the only power which has remained standing in the midst of the heaped-up ruins of eighteen centuries, the only power which conquers still. Where is the Christian who does not hail, in hope, the day when it will have subdued the world? and who does not believe in its final triumph? This, for us, is a mere question of time.

Therefore, now as in the day when it was first uttered, this saying of St. Paul's remains true, and the Cross is at once foolishness and power. How shall we conciliate these two ideas? If the Cross be foolishness for the world, how is it the only power by which the world can be conquered? That is what we have still to show.

Pascal has explained this in one of his incomparable pages. "There are three orders of power," he says, "and there are only three: material power, intellectual power, and moral power." To bring man under subjection, one of these three powers must be employed. Supposing God wishes to bring back the human soul to Himself, let us see which of these means will be the most worthy of Him.

In the first place, there is material power. It has this peculiar character, that it is irresistible and fatal. God might have subdued men by that power. That is what they seem to demand of Him, all who express surprise at His toleration of revolt, injustice, and sin in the world, when it were so easy for Him to destroy them by a word of His mouth. God might annihilate them; for this He would have only to open heaven, to crush our pride, to sweep us away as by a second deluge. The voice which said: "Let there be light!" and there was light, would

have merely to bid life die away on this imperceptible globe where our pride so complacently displays itself. Now, the God of the Gospel desires another triumph than this ; He will not reign over slaves.

But, above material power, there is intellectual power. This, too, is irresistible. It bears with it an inflexible evidence. Lay down an axiom of logic or geometry, and, if I can understand it, I am forced to admit it. God might have subdued man by this power. He might, by irrefutable reasonings, have demonstrated religious truth, the way that leads to Him. This is what the wise ask of Him. He has not done so, and why ? First of all, because the reasonings of the mind neither change nor touch the heart, and because God will be known only that He may be loved ; again, because if God had revealed Himself to the mind, the intelligent alone would have been saved. What a revelation, or rather, what a monstrous injustice ! In this way, the great majority of our fellow-men, fatally condemned to ignorance, would at the same time have been condemned never to know God. God seeks another triumph than this, and we have to bless Him for it.

There remains a third order of power, moral power. By this I mean the power that acts upon the heart and conscience. Here we enter the domain of liberty. Whilst material or logical power forced themselves upon us fatally, here, in the moral order, we are free to admit or deny, to accept or refuse truth ; but observe at the same time that here only we are fully responsible. I cannot be blamed if I yield to material constraint, and if physical strength fails me for resistance ; neither can I be blamed if my intellect is too feeble to understand the value of this or that argument ; but I am bound to obey moral truth, and I am responsible for the condition of my heart and conscience. Well ! if all this be true, I understand

the power of the Cross; for the Cross, brethren, is the grandest moral power in the world. It is the power of God, for more clearly than any doctrine it reveals the love and holiness of God; yes, but on condition that we see in it what the apostle did.

You have been told of the love of God, and you have tried to believe in it, but have you found this easy? You have been told of God as the God of nature; the admirable wisdom and the touching kindness which all His works manifest has been pointed out to you. Ah! I will not deny the emotions which then have seized upon your mind, and which have drawn your heart towards Him. And how, in truth, could we, in a spring day such as this, see nature decked out in joy and beauty without feeling a hymn of gratitude rise from our hearts towards the Author of all things? How, then, could we refuse to believe that all nature sings of the love of God? Yes, but when, in a day like this, you will be called to follow, with a slow and heavy step, a bier containing the mortal remains of the being you loved best; when, oh ye fathers who now hear me, you will be forced to hear the damp earth falling on the grave of your child while all will be joy and gladness in nature, while its thousand voices will sing of life and hope, while the sun will fill the earth with floods of pure and radiant light; answer, will nature then reveal to you the love of God? Will it reveal God to so many beings who suffer, to those sick and hungry ones; and do you not feel how cruel and derisive is this mere supposition?

You have been told of the love of God, and the admirable ways of His paternal Providence have been pointed out to you in your own life as well as in history. God forbid that I should refuse to acknowledge them! How often have they not been made manifest in the

magnificent triumph of some just cause, in the prosperity of a united family, in the peaceful happiness, the reward of a noble existence? Yes, but what does it say to your heart, this doctrine of Providence, when trial sweeps over you again and again, when misfortune seems to call unto misfortune, when your prayers remain unanswered, when your fireside grows desolate, when your health declines, and when, beside you, a faithless, loveless being, who lives for self alone, sees his desires gratified, and his cup of prosperity overflow? What does it say to you when, touched by some cruel and undeserved iniquity, you see your right ruthlessly trampled under foot? Is it easy then to believe in the love of God?

But if, through the darkness by which I am enveloped, I might but reach God Himself, if I might but hear the pulsations of His heart, if I might but feel that in Him dwells an unfathomable love and sympathy of which each of His creatures may be the object, that not one is forgotten, that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without His permission, that all my tears and sighs are numbered, what strength, what consolation, would I not derive from such a thought. But who is there that can know God? He is the mighty and invisible God; no eye hath seen Him, nor can any ever behold Him. . . . No; we had never known Him had not the only Son, in the bosom of the Father, revealed Him unto us. But here is a new revelation, beside which all other lights pale and vanish. Here upon earth is a Being who affirms that when they see Him men see the Father, and that He is the visible manifestation of the hidden God. Here in Him is a love such as the world had never beheld, a love which enlightens, raises, comforts, and which spreads in the midst of humanity a lustre so bright that henceforth the world shall dwell in its light. . . . Behold that love condescending to sacrifice, to the

most mysterious sacrifice, to unutterable sorrows; behold it exposed to the world's gaze on the Cross of Calvary! . . . You had asked to see God; well, where will He be if not here, and what revelation of His love can He give you if this does not suffice? What works, what miracles, what prodigies, will enable you to comprehend His essence more fully than the sight of the Cross? And though you might witness the sight of His most ineffable perfections, of His eternity, of His Omnipotence, and live; though you might survey all His works, in those thousands of worlds which His hand has scattered in space, would you discover anything grander than the love He has revealed to us in His Son?

To choose such a method for bringing man back to Himself is, if I may so speak, the *chef d'œuvre* of love. I have told you that God will subdue men neither by force of constraint nor by force of evidence; that He wishes to respect our liberty, and that He requires of us a voluntary obedience. Now, is not that precisely what the Cross has produced, and what it is producing every day? Does it not appeal to all that is best, noblest, and grandest in man? When you yield to the attraction of the Cross, are you prompted by the interested instinct of the mercenary, or by the servile fear of the slave? Are you not rather won by the purest of motives, by gratitude, and are you not thus led to give yourselves unreservedly to God? Could God have chosen a more powerful means of bringing His wandering creature back to Himself? By what prodigy could He more successfully have called forth that willing people He sought?

Yes, St. Paul is right; the Cross is the power of God, because upon it appeared the most striking and sublime manifestation of love, and that is why men have believed in the love of God only since they have beheld it on the Cross of Calvary; that is why it is

unknown wherever the Cross has not been preached; that is why, without the Cross, the apostles would never have set forth to preach that love; why without the Cross there would be no missionaries, and why those who, while speaking of the love of God, overthrow the Cross, are like the savages who fell a tree that they may gather its fruits. And that is also what constitutes the eternal power of the Cross. . . . Think you that man, having once seen God in the manifestation of that wondrous love, will ever deny Him? Think you that he will ever exchange that centre of warmth and life for the icy abstractions of a religion of the mind? No, no, I am tranquil; notwithstanding all the efforts of those who shake it, the Cross will remain standing, for it is planted in the heart of humanity to such depths that none will ever be able to uproot it.

But is this all? Does the Cross speak to our heart only? Does it not speak also to our conscience? Does it reveal only the love of God? Does it not also reveal His holiness? Yes, and that again is what makes it the power of God.

I have supposed the apostles setting forth to conquer the world without the Cross. Well, suppose them preaching Divine mercy without it. Think you men would have listened? Think you their message would have been accepted? But, some will object, men have believed in pardon without knowing the Cross. Has not David sung of the blessedness and peace of a pardoned soul? Oh! I will not deny this. Yes, doubtless God, at all times, by a direct and personal intervention, may have revealed His mercy to the repentant sinner; but do not forget that this same God required at the same time that the whole nation and David himself should every year assemble in His temple for the feast of expiations. Now, who would dare to say that this was

a vain show? and by what right should any one separate, in the Old Testament, what God Himself has joined? Ah! I admit that all truly pure souls knew full well that the blood of bulls and goats could not purify, and David himself sets over against those sacrifices that of the contrite heart. Nevertheless, this betokens a fact which is generally acknowledged, namely, that the holiness of God demands a reparation; that only after the accomplishment of this reparation on the Cross could mercy be preached to man. This is not an arbitrary condition; it is claimed by universal conscience, which everywhere has poured torrents of blood upon the altars. That pardon might be preached and received, it was necessary that humanity should offer to God an atoning sacrifice, and thus proclaim the eternal rights of His holiness. Now that is what its Chief, what the new Adam, has voluntarily done for it. That is the only possible explanation of His untold sufferings, of the anguish of Gethsemane and Golgotha. That is the only fact which will enable us to understand why the sight of that troubled death has become here below an ever-flowing source of peace. That is why human conscience feels a thrill of profound assent in presence of the sacrifice of Calvary, and that is why we feel that Jesus upon the Cross suffers in our stead, that His work is our work, that upon the accursed tree our salvation has truly been accomplished. Destroy this belief, and what becomes of the faith of St. Paul, of St. Peter, of St. John?

Who does not see that if the Cross is not the central point of divine revelation—if it tells not of Redemption—it may well be overthrown, and we may well dispense with it?

I have told you what constitutes the power of the Cross; I have told you that it answers to the deepest wants of our souls, and that it alone manifests the love



and holiness of God in their fulness. How, then, account for the fact that, satisfying as it does the human soul, it raises an eternal opposition on the part of the world? how account for the fact that, though it is the power of God, it is at the same time foolishness?

It is because the world takes a serious view neither of the holiness nor of the love of God. I do not hesitate to say that the human soul, when it is stirred in its depths, when it understands all that the law of God requires and all that His love has inspired, declares itself in favour of the Cross, and finds in it the fullest answer to its inmost needs; that is why the Cross is eternal. But where are those who reflect seriously upon these things? Where are those who, in the present day, resolutely affirm the holiness of God? Is it falling into the current of empty declamations to affirm, to repeat incessantly, that the sense of holiness is dying away in modern society? Do you find it strange that men should admit a divine law which nothing enforces, a mercy without reparation, a Gospel without redemption? Do you find it strange that men should mistake indulgence for love? that they should cast away the holy and jealous love of a God who gives Himself that He may obtain the affection of man in return; and finally, that they should accept the Gospel—all the Gospel save its foolishness, which is also its power?

Consequently, for the greater number, the Cross will remain what it was in the days of St. Paul, foolishness. We must be made aware of this fact, that it may neither surprise us nor shake our faith. The world will endeavour to take from us this foolishness; it will bring all its powers into play against it, seductions, threats, mockery; it will try to make of the Gospel a reasonable doctrine, an edgeless sword, a savourless salt, a religion which will never wound, but which will never convert. Let not

enthusiasm lead us astray on this point. It is a fearful thing to be in contradiction with the rest of men, to clash against the favourite ideas of the generation to which one belongs. Ah! doubtless this part is easy for those troubling and morose spirits to which any eccentricity is welcome, and who would willingly add the foolishness of the Gospel to the scandal of their own narrow-mindedness. But he who aims at being the humble witness of a despised truth, he who, loving much, must consent by his fidelity to estrange the hearts whose affection was most precious to him, he will understand me and tell me if such a part is indeed easy. This opposition to the world, this firm and patient testimony is what men most dislike; therefore to clash with public opinion, to preach foolishness, all this implies suffering, and is not that what the Cross tells of? Well, let us suffer if it must be so, happy at being thus made partakers of Christ's sufferings, happy at being able to know the fellowship of His sorrows.

But if we are to be the witnesses of a thing which is foolishness, let us at least show that this foolishness is the power of God. Now, how shall we show this, I ask, if not by the influence it will exert upon our lives? You wish to defend the Cross; prove to us, first of all, that it has converted you, prove to us that it sanctifies you, prove to us that it inspires you with the spirit of devotion and sacrifice. Do you know what does most harm to the Gospel? Not the attacks of its enemies, but the apathy and timidity of believers.

Alas! how can men believe that the Gospel is a power when those who have heard it for ten, twenty, thirty years are the same to-day as they were of yore; when in many cases they retrograde instead of advancing; when their life in nowise differs from that of the rest of men; when the world diverts, absorbs, engrosses them more and more.

How can men believe that the Gospel is a power when they see it vainly demand of those who accept it the sacrifices of time, money, ardour, life, which to-morrow, perhaps, vanity, glory, the world in all its forms will obtain without so much as asking for them?

How can men believe that the Gospel is a power when the hearts of those who hear it remain cold and dry? There is a heresy which no watchful zeal can reach, which no profession of faith can remove,—a subtle and dangerous heresy which insinuates itself in the very bosom of the best organised churches, of the most enlightened societies,—a heresy which everywhere spreads a deadly poison, and instils death under the appearances of life,—a heresy which refutes all the apologies of truth, which paralyses every effort, and which well-nigh renders the Cross itself useless—it is coldness of heart. To be a Christian and not love! To speak of the power of the Gospel and not feel it in one's heart, not prove it by one's life! Is not that denying it? Lord, at the foot of that Cross where Thou hast revealed to us Thy love, teach us to love more, and to prove by the change in our lives the power of that Divine foolishness of which Thou wouldst have us be the witnesses!

## XV.

*THE SINS OF OTHERS.*

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”—GAL. vi. 1.

In the judgments which he bears upon sin, man always oscillates between two extremes, excess of rigour, and excess of indulgence. In the fourth century, in the days of persecution, the Church was on the point of condemning without mercy those who, in an hour of weakness, had denied Jesus Christ; later came plenary indulgences and the unprecedented disorders which, at the close of the Middle Ages, dishonoured Christendom. In the sixteenth century Calvinism applied to the most trifling faults the severe penalties of a Draconian legislation; two hundred years later an insipid morality became the general substance of Protestant preaching. The same contrast strikes me in modern society. In certain countries I see austerity easily degenerating into a pharisaical despotism; in others, on the contrary, the mass of the people are indulgent towards moral levity, and even towards corruption, when it knows how to veil itself under graceful appearances. This is natural to an age in which men look upon crime as a disease, and seem to have lost the sense of holiness. We find these two extremes in our own method of judging of things. To-

day, severe and pitiless judgments fall from our lips in presence of a passion or a vice from which we instinctively recoil; to-morrow, when brought face to face with a fault or a disorder towards which our own heart inclines, we can only protest with hesitancy and effort.

Well, it is impossible to study the attitude of Christ with regard to sin without being struck with astonishment, and without acknowledging that with Him we enter a sphere which is superior to that in which humanity moves.

Jesus is holy; His life is a light which sets forth the thickness of the gloom which surrounds Him; it is the realisation of the prophetic words of Simeon, who said that the thoughts of many hearts would be revealed by Him. In His presence the Samaritan woman, frivolous and debauched as she was, understands all the impurity of her life and is alarmed; the young ruler, this type of the self-righteous man fully satisfied with himself, is troubled in his conscience and goes away sorrowful; the wretched demoniacs exclaim: "What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God?" Peter himself, on one of the first occasions of his meeting with Christ, utters these words: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." That was the impression produced by an unparalleled holiness, beside which sin appears in all its hideous deformity and all human virtues pale, just as the lustre of glass trinkets grows dim beside the brightness of the pure diamond. None can say that Jesus was indulgent towards evil; on the contrary, to use the words of Pascal, He was "Holy, holy, holy to God, terrible to devils, wholly without sin." None can say that He lowered the moral ideal, for He set down as His only rule perfection itself: "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

And yet, to whom have sinners ever obtained easier

access than to Jesus Christ? with whom have they ever found a safer refuge than with Him? See how the most contemptible, the most vicious, the most degraded beings, see how all men, save hypocrites, come to Him attracted by an irresistible charm. In general, a sullied life dreads the sight of a holy; it shrinks from it just as the diseased eye shrinks from the light which hurts and annoys it. Speak of the moral ideal to the fallen being. Even supposing he will listen to you, what effect will you produce? Nothing but a dull and profound discouragement such as that which a man feels when, in his nightmare, he sees standing out before him a straight wall of a prodigious height over which he must climb if he would save his life. And this effect will be produced only upon the natures in which all moral nobility is not completely extinct; thoroughly debased sinners will, on the contrary, be annoyed; they will reject your words which condemn them; they will exclaim against your pharisaism; they will stifle your voice with the loud bursts of a cynical mirth, and will leave you without hope. . . . Oh! you who have made these sorrowful experiences, is not that incomparable attraction which Jesus exercised upon the vilest beings a thing most strange to you? Whilst everywhere else we meet either with a repulsive severity or with a complaisant indulgence, whence comes it that in Christ we find that other marvellous contrast of perfect holiness joined to the most powerful art of drawing to Himself all the most guilty and most vicious souls? Fathom this mystery, and you will see that its secret is love. Yes, if they come to Him, those publicans, those sinners, those gluttonous men and those wine-bibbers, it is because they have never before felt a love like His; it is because there is something in His accent, in His eye, that does not deceive them; it is because in Jesus Christ as in God Himself love and holiness blend in an

admirable harmony, whilst in us, alas! they are almost always separate.

I have thought it right to bring before you the example of the Master before studying the exhortation of the apostle who bids us raise those who may have fallen. "If a man be overtaken in a fault," says St. Paul, "restore him in the spirit of meekness." Let us, first of all, consider the effect produced upon us by the falls of our brethren, then we shall see what we are to do in order to raise them.

Here before us is a worldly company. Those who compose it are not coarse, untaught beings who from their childhood have been deprived of all moral influence; they are men formed by a brilliant education, capable of understanding, of admiring the beautiful, susceptible even at times of the most generous emotions. In this choice circle suddenly something new is heard. . . . It is a secret which every one must keep for himself. . . . What is it then? A failing, a fall, a scandal which has just come to light. . . . Do you see the effect immediately produced? . . . Do you see those eyes shine with a malignant joy? Do you hear conversation, hitherto languid, flow on anew, free and sparkling as a flame which a breath of wind fans and stirs into a blaze? Do you hear those multiplied questions? Do you note that ardent curiosity which is eager to feed upon the slightest details of the sin in question? Do you see those expressions of the countenance which betray that one knows a great deal more than one wishes to say? Do you hear those perfidious insinuations which veil themselves under a false show of commiseration? . . . Is all this true? Do I exaggerate when I affirm that the follies and the misconduct of others are the choice subjects of conversation in every stage of society (but more particularly, perhaps, in what we call the upper classes), and that if

we should take slander out of these conversations, we would rob them of their keenest fascination? And people tell us that man is good! . . . Oh! I know that they are clever at saving appearances. They will not awkwardly exhibit a gross calumny, this they leave to ill-bred folk; but who does not know that the tongue may learn the art of fencing, and soon acquire in it an astonishing skill? Who does not know that there is a delicate art of gracefully shooting a poisoned arrow, of mortally wounding with a smile, of insinuating all manner of evil without affirming aught? . . .

But, some will doubtless say, you speak to us of a worldly company, and you forget that you are preaching to a Christian congregation. True, I was on the point of forgetting it; true, I had wellnigh forgotten that amongst us nothing of the sort ever happens, that the faults of others never cause us any joy, that when we hear of them our sorrowful hearts are filled with profound compassion, that we never comment upon them, that we never magnify them, that we never exaggerate them, and that this hateful pleasure of slander is as foreign to us as the joy of demons is unknown to the angels. . . . Ah! let us set aside that cruel irony. Those worldlings of whom I speak are often those who call themselves the disciples of Christ; those men who rejoice at the evil they hear are often believers who profess that the whole of religion is summed up in charity. . . . Those worldlings, they are perhaps ourselves. Let others excuse themselves if they will; as for me, I have felt it, that fearful joy which the discovery of others' faults produces; and then I found nothing at all extravagant in the strongest expressions by which the Scriptures depict the depth of our fall and the depravity of our heart.

And what shall we say when we find that detestable joy lurking under a false appearance of charity and dis-



guising itself under sanctimonious phrases? Ah! I prefer a thousand times the light, scornful, and biting slander of the unbeliever and of the avowed worldling. . . . As he cares not for holiness himself, nor pretends ever to attain it, he is at least consistent with himself when he refuses to admit it in others. . . . I understand that each of the faults which he discovers in his fellow-men causes him to rejoice, and that the falls of austere people are for him as so many subjects of personal triumph. . . . I understand that he takes a singular delight in pointing out the errors of those lives whose holiness annoys him. That is the sentiment of fallen beings who, when they see others lapse, parody the words of Scripture, and say, "Lo, he hath become as one of us."

But how shall I express what a Christian feels when in a religious circle he hears the faults of others eagerly criticised, exaggerated, magnified; when he sees pious slander dealing its deadly blows in the shade under cover of the glory of God and of a brother's interest, and men who call themselves Christians hasten to set up a tribunal and to pronounce with cruel rashness sentences which in many cases will be irrevocable? . . . Now, such things have occurred. . . . There are churches which have perished in this way. . . . There are men who, having seen all this, have taken a dislike to religion and have become the most determined infidels.

If you should ask me why, in the circles where religious life is most intense, this pitiless severity often attains its most fearful proportions, I would answer that religion itself has its perils, and that when holiness is separated from love, it is altered and perverted, just as, when we eliminate from the air we breathe one of the elements of which it is composed, nothing is left us but poison.

The Christian, for example, by the very fact that his conscience, rendered clear-sighted by the Gospel, easily

detects evil under the most delusive appearances—the Christian, I say, may, if he does not take care, find in this very search a secret pleasure of which he does not suspect the danger; he may, in support of his belief, delight in pointing out everywhere the cankerworm of selfishness which destroys all the human virtues; and if he does not keep a careful watch over himself, he may rejoice at finding it; it may appear to him as a justification of his faith and as an argument in favour of the remedy of which he is the bearer. This is a first motive which will develop in him the spirit of judgment.

To this motive is added another. The Christian struggles for what he rightly calls the truth; he is surrounded by adversaries of his faith. . . . How great is the temptation to find them in fault, and to point out their inconsistencies, and, if possible, their falls. I appeal to your experience on this matter. In this age of ardent conflict and controversy, where are our scruples? where is our charity when we hear reports of the lapses of our foes? Where is that respect that St. Paul recommends us to bear even to our enemies? Is it not most sure, that if we should hear that one of them has erred, and that a scandal has been the result of his misconduct, this news would be relished and repeated everywhere with an overflowing joy? Verily we know not what spirit we are of. Where, then, is that charity which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth?

But we must go further in this sorrowful research. . . . It is not only the faults of our foes which make us glad, but often—and this we say with amazement—often it is those of our brethren themselves. What, then, dwells in our heart? and what gloomy passions ferment in its depths? What! the fall of one of our brethren may become for us a cause of secret joy! . . . Are we then so anxious to believe in anything but good? . . . Do we

think to exalt ourselves by lowering others? . . . Do we believe that their errors will set forth our own excellence? . . . Do we pretend to purify ourselves by the sins of our fellows, as a man who would wash himself with mud? Oh, inconceivable misery! to rejoice because a soul has erred! because the Holy Spirit has been grieved! because the sanctuary of a heart in which God was worshipped is threatened with ruin! because the Church has been weakened and scandalised! To rejoice at all this, and call oneself a Christian! . . . To rejoice at all this, and follow Jesus Christ! When we have discovered in ourselves or in others a spark of that sinister joy, we are appalled at all that a human heart shelters, and we understand those terrible words which St. Paul uttered when speaking of human nature: "Hateful, and hating one another!"

One of our brethren has lapsed! Well, if you are truly animated by the Spirit of Christ, let me tell you what impression this fall will produce upon your soul.

He has lapsed; but you who condemn him, have you never erred? Would it give you pleasure if some importunate voice should here retrace all your past life? Are you not happy, on the contrary, at the thought that oblivion may have swallowed it up for ever?

You say that your life has been free from all crying sins. Granted; but is this due to yourselves alone? If the occasions for sin have failed you, has not your heart a thousand times provoked them? has it not called for and solicited them? Trace out, if you dare, the history of your inner life. Relate to us all those secret thoughts which no one has ever suspected; those idolatrous affections so fondly cherished and deeply enjoyed; those shameful lusts, those latent passions, those mean feelings of envy; those successes of self-love dreamed of at the expense of the humiliation and sorrow of others. . . .

All this, no human eye has seen it. And whilst this world of iniquity was fermenting in your soul, your outward life was orderly, honoured, admired. But suppose that in one of those hours when passion inflamed your heart and fascinated your conscience, temptation had come to you, real, living, with all its seductions and enchantments, what would have become of you? Where would now be that pride of a spotless life and of an honourable past? Suppose this first fault had drawn upon you the malignant eye of a man who would have judged you as you now judge your brother, once again I ask, where would you be? God in His mercy has spared you. A thousand circumstances have prevented your fall. But be sincere: abandoned to your desires, you had been lost, and to yourselves, least of all, can you ascribe your salvation.

Your brother has lapsed! But do you know his history? Do you know the illusions which surrounded him, the seductions which assailed him, the temptations which the world scattered on his path? Do you know if, in the fatal hour, he did not look for a brother's hand to seize and save him, and can you tell if that hand which he sought in vain was not your own?

Your brother has lapsed! But did he know what you know yourself? Had he, like you, a preserving past of blessings and pure influences? Had he, like you, from his very cradle known the prayers, the tears, the warnings of a Christian mother? Had the Gospel been laid before him from his youth? Had he seen the Cross standing out before him as a faithful guide? Had he heard those multiplied warnings which have not failed you? Ah! which is the most guilty before the God who weighs all things in His just balance—which is the most guilty, he or you? To whom has most been given? Of whom shall most be required?

Such is the first impression which the fall of one of our brethren should produce upon us. It should call forth a painful self-examination, and a sincere humiliation before God.

This first feeling produces another; real and profound compassion for the brother whom sin has overtaken.

When you read the beautiful chapters in which the Gospels recount the birth of the Saviour, and in particular the sublime hymn which the angels sang in the plains of Bethlehem, are you never struck by the touching fact that it is angels, that is, beings that have remained pure, who rejoice and bless God the first on account of the salvation of fallen humanity? From this we infer that the nearer a being lives to God, the holier is the love it bears Him, the more deeply also it feels compassion and mercy. And why speak of angels when He whom angels worship, He whom Scripture calls the Holy One and the Just, is everywhere represented to us as moved with infinite tenderness towards all His fallen creatures? . . .

Well, if those who have remained pure, if He who is holiness itself, feels compassion for our guilty brethren, what should we not feel for them, we who, more or less guilty also, are therefore to a certain extent responsible for their wanderings? They have fallen! This simple word recalls their present misery and the more terrible wretchedness which they are preparing for themselves in the future. Nevertheless, if, in this very hour, it were possible for them to return to God, our anger would certainly not help to make this return easy, it would simply harden them. And what! can we tell if, in the anguish by which they are tortured, their heart does not seek another heart that will understand them and gladly receive their first avowals of repentance? What will they do if they find it nowhere, and if they see, rising

all around them, the icy walls of our inflexible severity?

We reject the institution of the confessional such as it exists in Roman Catholicism. But it is not enough to reject it, we must meet whatever may be true and legitimate in the instincts which have created and maintained it.

Man must needs unburden his heart to man. "Confess your faults one to another," says St. James. How do we obey this commandment? Men tell us that it is enough to confess our sins to God. That we may be pardoned, yes, doubtless, and yet this confession would not suffice if our silence were likely to be hurtful to any one. But go to the depths of the human heart; you will find that in it there is a secret but imperious desire to be true towards the world. Men see but the outward and superficial side of our life, and this side is its bright side. Well! there are times when reality must come to light, when the truth must appear, when one of our fellow-men at least must be told of all the misery and temptation which dwells in our soul. It is not only the desire to be true that leads us thus to unburden our hearts to another, it is also the profound yearning to be understood, aided, counselled; ah! do we not all know how comforting and salutary are such avowals? Do we not know that certain temptations which mercilessly assail us so long as they are permitted to float vaguely and dimly before our eyes, lose their power and attraction as soon as they are expressed in words? Do we not know how precious is the strength and consolation which a sympathetic heart may impart to us? This is, therefore, a blessing; but it does not follow that the confessional is necessary. "Bear ye one another's burdens," says St. Paul, addressing, as St. James had done, all the members of the Church. Now, if any one has need of

this sympathy, it is evidently the man who has erred ; shall he obtain it from us, brethren ? Shall he find in us a charity that will condescend to hear him and to respect him sufficiently to keep his confession a secret ? Shall he find in us that serious interest which can never deceive and which alone inspires confidence ? Let us beware. A first fall often has the most decisive consequences. The humiliation which follows it may be turned into benediction, or it may degenerate into bitterness and soon into rebellion, and upon us, perhaps, often depends this momentous choice.

Thus to receive the erring soul with sympathy is, doubtless, much ; but that is not enough. Our mission lays upon us the duty of its full restoration.

Sympathy alone will not suffice. There is even a sympathy which is mere weakness. There is a soft and effeminate manner of pitying the sinner which is but an unworthy counterfeit of the charity of the Gospel. Now, if we cannot accept holiness without love, by the same reason we cannot accept love without holiness. There are men to-day who affect to consider criminals as the wretched victims of an unfortunate nature, of some hereditary fatality, or of circumstances which have all conspired against them. Guilty and cowardly complaisance, well worthy of an epoch which delights in giving to the prostitute the place of honour in the play or in the novel, and which pretends to explain the triumphs of the Gospel, at its birth, by its indulgence towards all human failings ! Lying sentimentality which is a mere parody of true love ! Men exclaim against our pharisaism, they shatter the pedestal on which the Christian virtues were enthroned, and then hasten to erect on its ruins an altar to rehabilitated vice. Ah ! let us never cease to protest with all our might against this blasphemous corruption of the holiest doctrine which

ever was preached; let us remember that, if Jesus pardons, He says also: "Sin no more." Let us remember that He transforms and restores all those whom He pardons, and that the charity which leads not to complete restoration is unworthy of Him.

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore him," says the apostle. The soul which sin has overtaken is like the bruised reed of which Scripture tells. It must be raised up gently that it may once more aspire heavenward.

This is a delicate and sublime work, for it is the work of God; yes, but the work of God destined to be accomplished by men, for it has pleased Him to use our instrumentality. Will you ask me to trace out a plan for you? How could I do so? Everything must depend upon character, and each individual requires to be studied and understood. This only will I say: "Do the work of Jesus Christ, in the spirit of Jesus Christ." You must have for your fallen brethren a love without weakness and a holiness without pride. Do not flatter; Jesus Christ never did so; point out to those who have erred the straight and narrow way; tell them, if needs be, of the cross to be borne, of the sacrifices which God demands of them. An easy religion will never take full possession of the heart; a low-toned morality will never save the soul; only those who ask much can expect to obtain much.

But, at the same time, never grow weary of placing before them that Divine mercy which always anticipates the sinner's return, that ever-faithful kindness, that profound love which meets their every want, and which, having once begun a work of salvation, pursues and achieves it. Be yourselves, not only its preachers, but its living examples . . . , and, whilst loving the soul which is entrusted to you, labour to make yourselves use-



ful, substitute the intervention of Jesus for your own, and take as your motto the grand saying of the Forerunner: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Here a thought strikes me. We speak of raising the fallen. Well! in our epoch, men seem to have set their hearts upon an analogous and admirable work which has but too long been forgotten, namely, the material and moral restoration of those lower classes among which Jesus lived, and which have been so cruelly neglected in the past ages. Alas! why must we have learned to fear ere we learned to love them? At length, however, the day of reparation seems to have dawned for them. Many of those whom fortune and instruction have raised to an elevated rank, are beginning to understand that their position lays them under the most imperious and sacred obligations towards their humble brethren. I do not here refer to those cowardly adulators who court and flatter the masses by stirring their passions and in the mere hope of self-advancement. No, in spite of such men who are capable of injuring and destroying the grandest causes, the elevation of the working population is everywhere advocated in the present day. Everywhere it is acknowledged that their mind needs food, light, and health as well as their body. Noble preoccupation this, which cannot but call forth our deepest sympathy! Well! when I read the writings of the generous men who have devoted themselves most ardently to this task, I am surprised to hear them, mere philosophers as they are, come to the conclusion that, all things considered, the sovereign remedy is in the hands of the workman himself, and that every progress, every amelioration, every alteration, will be of no avail whatever without the moral will of the individual.

Grand conclusion! Truly Christian thought! for it proves that in reality the soul governs the body, and that

the masses are not mere flocks whose condition may be ameliorated by changing their pasture-land. You aim at raising the working classes. Well, make their conditions of life easier, open healthy workshops and lodging-houses for them, assure them a legitimate time for rest, build schools for their children; . . . all this is doing much, but listen, you will have done nothing if the moral will of individuals, that is, if the soul has not taken a higher direction. It is upon the soul, therefore, that we must act in the first place. From this I, in my turn, infer that the Church has greater reason than ever to pursue her sublime mission, that is, spiritual restoration, and the salvation of souls. Let the positivists of our times sneer at what they call our useless dogmas and our fruitless faith, . . . let discouraged believers repeat that, in order to be accepted by and to exert any influence upon modern society, the Church must become utilitarian and servilely follow in the train of philanthropy. No, no; now, as eighteen centuries ago, in the life of the soul will be the salvation of nations; it was by acting upon the soul that Jesus changed the world and transformed societies and empires; only by raising souls as He did shall we obtain similar results. The hour of Christianity always strikes sooner or later, and the Cross, which so many affect to disdain as useless, at length saves even those who have despised it. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all things shall be added unto you."

Our duty, therefore, is to raise fallen souls, but let us not forget this, however; we cannot raise them *en masse*, if I may so speak, and by I know not what a collective action which would exempt us from individual love and sacrifice. Vainly would you form for yourselves the ideal of a Church system, of a special organisation which would save the whole of humanity at one stroke. Vainly would you cast heaps of gold into what we

call Christian works. All this will be of no avail unless each of us, in the post where God has placed him, acts upon those who surround him, and brings them all individually under that influence of love which nothing can either equal or replace. Labour then in the humble sphere in which God has placed you, work upon the souls with which He entrusts you, and if, your faith growing feeble, you should feel crushed by the thought of the insignificance of your efforts in that enormous mass of humanity, behold Jesus saving first John, then Simon, then Mary Magdalene, then Zacchaeus, or, in other words, unknown beings, beings for whom none before Him had ever felt the least concern, but loving them, bearing with them, raising them, and, through them, raising the human conscience and saving the world.

To raise a fallen soul! . . . Do you know what this signifies? Ask it not of the world, which would pay no heed to you; but hear the angels of heaven rejoicing over a sinner saved. Ah! in all the actions of His life and ministry Christ attracts and ravishes me. Yet, shall I say, . . . Never does He stir me more deeply than when He presents Himself under the image of the Good Shepherd bringing back His wandering sheep, and though weary and foot-sore, yet never resting until He has deposited it safely in the fold. Ah! were I a painter, thus would I represent His adorable figure; but—like that monk and painter of the Middle Ages who prayed and painted in turns in his cell—only on my knees would I picture Him thus.

Discuss His life if you will. . . . Tell us, if you can, that He was not sent of God. As far as I am concerned, I believe what my heart tells me, and in that love which bends towards fallen humanity, I recognise the presence and intervention of God. Where, I pray you, would He be, if He be not there?

Well, He calls you to accomplish this sublime work in your turn. Oh! brethren, those fallen souls are there, close by your side. They suffer, they weep, they groan, or, sadder still to say, they have become hardened and blasphemous. Will you remain inactive when, by your love, you might save some and bring them back with you to the Father's house; when already, here below, you might participate in the joy of the angels, until the day when, surrounded by those whom you would have saved, you would enter the everlasting habitations?

One word more. Have you never asked yourselves with terror if you have not lost some soul? Do you know what may have been the eternal consequences of your former levity; do you know whether, through you, many a sinner may not have been precipitated into the broad way? What have you done for those whom God had confided to your care? What have you done for them in the days of your unbelief, of your scepticism, of your sins? Alas! what have you done for them since you have called yourselves Christians? Do you know what may have been the result of a harsh and scornful word uttered on some fatal day, of a judgment lightly pronounced, of a lustful glance, of an example of worldliness? Do you know where the wind may have borne those seeds of death, and by what mysterious influence some soul may have been the victim of your own errors? Do you know if, among all those unfortunate beings whom God will cast from His presence at the last day, more than one will not sorrowfully turn towards you, and say: "It is thou, it is thou that hast lost me!" I cannot tell, neither can you, perhaps, God only knows.

But if your conscience reproves you, if these words sound in your ears as the reproachful cry of an inexorable past, listen to them, for still it is time. Still it is time to act and to save some soul, the Divine Word still

says to you to-day: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."

## XVI.

*THE PROMISED LAND.*

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord shewed him all the land of Gilead, unto Dan,” &c.—DEUT. xxxiv. 1-5.

THERE are in history few figures equal in grandeur to that of Moses, and I know not if within the whole range of the Old Testament there is one narrative more sublime, more pathetic, than that of his death. Nearly a century had elapsed since, in the palace of Pharaoh where he had been reared amidst the pleasures of Egypt and the splendours of royalty, the thought of his people's degradation had laid hold of his heart for ever? From that time he had wandered about as an exile, taking refuge in the wilderness where God had called him to fulfil the most formidable of missions. He, the meek and timid man, who shrank from notoriety, had been forced to resist a cruel and crafty king until the day when Israel, delivered by his hand, was able to cross the Red Sea and direct its steps towards the land of Canaan; but then had begun for him an unceasing struggle with that ignorant, ungrateful, and rebellious nation, unfit to bear the noble burden of its religious destinies and of its liberty. He had witnessed all the people's revolts, all their sins; at the foot of Sinai where God had proclaimed the sublime law which will endure to the end

of time, he had seen them worshipping the golden calf. Misunderstood by them, alone in the midst of Israel, he had taught, led, sustained them during forty years, ever ready, watchful, and indefatigable, now pleading with God for His people, now pleading with his people for God. At length he is drawing near to the long-desired end of all his thoughts. The promised land stretches out before him, and the waters of Jordan alone separate him from it. The promised land! . . . Oh, how often had he longed for it and beheld it afar off in his solitary dreams during the long nights passed in the wilderness when, beneath the starry sky, he had conversed with Jehovah! . . . There Abraham and Jacob had fixed their tents, and their tombs awaited the return of Israel; there the reign of God upon earth was to be established; there, for Moses, was rest, the realisation of all his hopes, the reward of all his toils. . . . Then it was he heard the voice of the Lord saying unto him: "Get thee up into the mountain; thou shalt see the land before thee, but thou shalt not go thither."

From the solitary summit of Nebo, the worn and aged man casts a wistful glance before and around him; he sees all the land from Dan to Gilead: there Jericho, the city of palm-trees; there the fertile plains of Naphtali, Ephraim, and Manasseh; then Judah, and beyond, in the far distance, the western sea. . . . Yes, this is indeed the promised land, but he is forbidden to set his foot upon it. . . . For one moment his heart sinks beneath its weight of anguish, but soon, forgetting himself, he thinks of Israel's future, he beholds with deep emotion the spots where God will establish His sanctuary, the valleys out of which will one day come the salvation of the world. Northward, the far-distant hills of Galilee; southward, Bethlehem, Moriah, and the mount upon which was to be raised the Cross we now adore. . . . Then, having

embraced that long-desired land in one last lingering look, Moses bows his head and dies.

A grand lesson is taught by this sublime scene. Have we not all dreamed of a promised land upon earth? Have we not yearned for it? Have we not been on the point of reaching it when suddenly we have heard a voice saying: "Thou shalt not go thither." I would inquire to-day why God refuses to give us what we ask of earth; I would plead His cause and justify His ways. I shall be happy if I attain this end, if, instead of leaving you to the bitterness which fills your irritated and disappointed hearts, I may lead you to submission and gratitude.

Yes, we all dream of a promised land upon earth. Is there a man who has not expected much of life, or one whom life has fully satisfied? . . . Do not believe in appearances, trust not to the outward joy, to the unconcern depicted on so many faces. All these are but the mask. Underneath lies the true being which, if sincere, will tell you that it seeks and suffers. But for Moses the promised land was the country where the Lord should reign; the glory of God alone inflamed his soul; it was after righteousness and holiness that he thirsted. Where are those now whom the same ambition fires?

The promised land—is it for you that renewed earth in which justice shall dwell? Is it the reign of God realised among men? Is it God loved, adored, occupying the first place in the hearts and minds of all? Is it the Gospel accepted, the Church restored, souls converted, the Cross triumphant? Is it, in the beautiful words of Isaiah, the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, as the waters covers the sea? Are you so completely inspired by this lofty ambition, by this ardent desire that, though otherwise happy and enjoying all possible earthly blessings, this one thing failing, you feel that all else fails to



satisfy? Need I say that this promised land will never be yours here below? In the fervour of your faith you may have hoped to reach it. By certain signs you thought you had perceived the approach of new and better times: you had seen the tottering nations shake off their deadly sleep; the Church rise at the voice of God and awaken to the sense of her sublime destinies; you had seen the Holy Spirit descending as in the day of Pentecost and kindling the sacred flame in every heart. . . . Thus in the primitive Church did the believers await on the ruins of the pagan world the triumphant return of Christ. Yes, that was the promised land. Alas! the world has continued its march, the reign of God cometh not with observation, the work of the Spirit is pursued silently and mysteriously, and whilst this brilliant vision of a renewed earth still flits before your troubled sight, a voice whispers mournfully in your ear! "Thou shalt not go thither."

Let us not delude ourselves, however. They are few in the present day, those who, consumed by the thirst for righteousness and truth, ardently long for the establishment of God's reign. We are not to be compared with those believers of whom the world was not worthy, with those humble yet grand witnesses of the truth who, having all the earthly blessings their hearts could desire, counted all these as nothing because the God they loved was denied by the world. Alas! when we lack nothing, when we have health, strength, fortune, hope, and earthly affections, do we feel that we are strangers here below? Do we think of the reign of God, or pray that it may come? Let us confess it, even our griefs have a different character. Some selfish thought ever mingles with our sorrow. The promised land for you was your personal happiness,—the happiness you sought after with unswerving perseverance, and which you afterwards

so bitterly regretted. In His Divine mercy the Lord does not despise these sorrows, these regrets, however mingled with selfishness they may be. The God who raises the bruised reed without questioning whence came the wind that crushed it to the earth, often makes use of our earthly troubles to bring us back to the right path, and to awaken in our hearts a secret desire for true peace, for pardon, for eternal consolation. . . . Look into the history of your own lives and see if this be not true.

You had dreamed of a grand and noble existence upon earth, for your nature shrank from sordid pleasures. God had given you talents, brilliant faculties, a keen sense of the beautiful and the sublime. How joyfully you rushed towards the new sphere of life that opened before you! How every noble cause claimed your sympathy! Each day was to find you stronger and wiser. To know, to love, to do,—such was your aim. All these enchanted paths stretched out before you wrapped in the dewy haze of morn, which, in the spring time, betokens the brightness and warmth of a fine day. That was your promised land; your eager eyes rested upon it, you were on the point of entering it. . . . Suddenly misfortune has come upon you; disease has shattered your frame, your fortune has escaped you, you have been forced to earn your daily bread in the sweat of your brow, crushing cares have weighed down your heart and withered your hopes, the selfishness and hardness of men has caused you many a bitter and cruel deception, and whilst others outstripped you in the race and hastened to reach those prospects of felicity which henceforth were closed to you, the stern voice of affliction murmured in your ear: “Thou shalt not go thither.”

You, my sister, had dreamed of the happiness of reciprocated love; the way of life appeared smooth to you

whilst leaning upon a loyal arm and heart. What joy to pour all your thoughts and affections into a congenial soul! What joy to have ever present at your fireside a living sympathy for which nought that would affect you would be indifferent! What joy to be able to share in labours, preoccupations, works which would become yours! That was your promised land. . . . And now you are a widow; you are treading alone that solitary path whose asperities none can smooth for you. Or, what is harder still, you have seen infidelity, falsehood, cold indifference, perhaps, opening between you and the heart of the man whose name you bear, a gulf which nothing can fill up; you have buried your hopes in a grave before which you dare not ask for sympathy, for neither respect nor love can soften the bitter anguish of this heart-sorrow which you must endeavour to conceal from the world.

To others God has spared this trial. You have seen a joyous family-circle gathering round you; you have prepared for life the children God had given you. How gladly you have observed the first awakenings of their intelligence, how anxiously you have watched their temptations and troubles, how thankfully you have witnessed their victories and their progress! They have never known all the prayers and tears and sacrifices they have cost you. Your end was well-nigh attained. They were ready for the struggles of life; all that a watchful love could sow in their hearts had been sown. Their soul understood yours, and with a confident eye you glanced upon their future career, their success, their noble activity. That was your promised land. . . . Alas! but yesterday yet all this was real. But a day has come—a day of fearful anxiety, of terrible presentiments, followed by a reality more terrible still. . . . From your desolate home a funeral procession has passed, and to-day your wavering faith must seek in heaven the

image which continually floats before your weeping eyes.

Shall I tell of all our other deceptions? Shall I speak of those works so long pursued with abnegation and love, but which have ended in failure and ingratitude, if even our best intentions have not been misjudged and calumniated? I will not attempt it. Let those answer who in all ages have looked for happiness, rest, and gratitude upon earth as the reward of their efforts. Let them tell us what the world has given them, and how many of those fruits of which the spring gave fair promise have lasted until the autumn, Ah, the promised land!—it is not here below. We see it, we hail it from afar, we hope to cross its threshold, but sooner or later a voice is heard which says, “Thou shalt not go thither!”

“Vain desires! fruitless illusions!” exclaims the world, and in the name of its selfish philosophy it recommends forgetfulness and dissipation. But of this forgetfulness we will not hear. No; better far to have suffered, to have known those desires, those affections, those hopes; better far to bear with us those holy images and sacred memories; better far to endure the torment of a soul that believes, and of a heart that loves, than to enjoy the senseless and contemptible frivolity of the world; better far, O Moses, after forty years’ fatigue and suffering, to die within sight of the shores of Canaan, than to drag the heavy and shameless fetters of pleasure and sin in the palaces of Egypt!

And yet in presence of the stern law which forbids our entering into possession of the promised land here below, our troubled heart turns questioningly towards the God of love, and we ask Him to disclose the secret of His ways which astonish and sometimes confound us. “Wherefore,” we ask, “wherefore!” Never on earth shall we fully know the true cause of the ways of God. There are, particularly in suffering, mysteries which are beyond all

human explanation. Nevertheless, it is written that the secret of the Lord is for them that fear Him. Let us therefore endeavour to explain it in part. Let us endeavour to understand that we may the better learn to praise and to be content to remain in ignorance.

If Moses does not enter the promised land, it is, in the first place, because he has sinned. On a solemn occasion, in presence of the unbelieving and rebellious nation, he transgressed the command of the Lord, and then for the first time he was told, "Thou shalt not enter the land of Canaan." What! some will say, could not God forget the faults of His servant? Had not Moses been His prophet, His witness? Had he not glorified His name, defended His cause, ardently desired His reign? Had not his whole life been one long-continued sacrifice to truth? And would not the God he had served so long now remember to be merciful? Yes; He has remembered mercy. Moses has received His pardon—he is not cast away, and God, who has chosen, who has kept him, will take him to His bosom; but pardon and mercy do not annul Divine holiness, and so long as Moses will remain upon earth he will endure the visible consequences of his former transgression. As he sinned in presence of the people, so in presence of the people he will be smitten.

Now, this is what we find it difficult to understand. The sense of Divine holiness is daily becoming more feeble. Alas! our unnerved conscience is afraid to hear anything that is likely to produce disquietude or alarm. With the Gospel we say God is love, and we forget that the Gospel never separated His love from His holiness. We forget this, even in presence of Gethsemane, of Calvary, of those unutterable sorrows which remind us that pardon does not annul justice, and that Divine holiness demands an expiation.

Yes, God is love; but have you thought of this, that

what God loves above all things is the right. Can God love His creatures more than He loves the right? That is the question. Men at the present time solve it as best suits their weakness. God, they say, loves His creatures above all else, and when they speak thus they overthrow the entire Gospel; for it is obvious that, if God loves His creatures better than He loves the right, He will certainly save them, whatever be their corruption or their unbelief. Thus heaven is open to all—to the impenitent, to the proud, to the rebellious, as well as to the penitent and broken-hearted. Thus sanctification becomes nothing more than a simple accessory to be possessed only by a chosen few, and pardon a mere declaration of universal indulgence. What, after all, are pardon, change of life, the painful struggle against sin? God loves us, He saves us all, and whatever we may do, we are sure of heaven.

That is not all. If God can thus give to the right a secondary importance, can He not do so in every case? What henceforth becomes of His holiness? Why speak to us of His law, if that law may be altered at His will? I go further. Why speak to us of redemption, and of the Cross of Calvary, if you divest them of the idea of a sacrifice claimed by Divine justice—of that idea which the apostles have ever attached to them, and which alone gives to the Cross its incomparable power?

That is what many make of the Gospel; that is the convenient doctrine which, too often proclaimed from our Christian pulpits, lulls consciences to the sleep of death, lowers the Church, and then boasts of its popularity in the midst of a generation whose every instinct it flatters. Not only is the notion of God darkened and obliterated, but I defy you, with such a system as this, to explain suffering. What! God loves His creatures better than He loves the right, and He leaves them to suffer; and suffering, with its poignant reality, is the perpetual law

of history; and, without necessity, millions of beings whom God with a word might save, must know of life nothing but its bitterest griefs! . . . And often the noblest and best are those whom He calls to the most fearful trials!

On the contrary, admit with Scripture that God loves the right above all things, that holiness is His very essence, and you will very easily conceive that, if for the sinner His name is Love, for sin His name is Justice; that suffering, ordained by Him, is inseparably joined to evil; that sinners, persevering in impenitence, are for ever excluded from His communion, and that even to pardoned sinners suffering is imposed that they may remember His holiness.

That is the Gospel, the true Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the only one a Christian minister should be allowed to preach from a Christian pulpit, the only one that affirms God such as He is, with all His rights, the only one that troubles, but also the only one that converts and saves, and notwithstanding its many severities, the only one that explains our sorrows and comforts our hearts. You wish to know why life does not keep its promises, why your day-dreams, your prospects of felicity are mercilessly destroyed; why, within sight of the promised land, an inexorable voice exclaims, "Thou shalt not go thither?" The Gospel answers, Because you are sinners; because this earth which sin has sullied cannot be the land of rest and happiness for you; because God's purpose is to warn you and prepare you to meet Him. You wish to know—you, the redeemed of the Gospel—why, though you have believed in the pardon of God, in His love, in His promises, you are treated by Him with a severity which bewilders you. Ah! it is because God, who has made you His children, would also make you partakers of His holiness; it is because He would have

you constantly remember what you formerly were, and what, without Him, you still would be. Thus in all ages God has dealt with those who most loved Him. Ask Moses why he does not enter Canaan. Does he murmur? does he complain? does he accuse Divine justice? No; he bows his head and adores. Ask Jacob why his grey hairs will go down in sorrow to the grave. Does he accuse God? No; he remembers the artifices of his youth—his conduct towards Isaac, his perfidy towards Esau. Ask David why he wanders as a fugitive among the mountains of Israel, pursued—oh, sorrow!—by his son, by his own son. Alas! he remembers his shameful sin, his murder, his adultery. Ask St. Paul why his apostleship is such a long martyrdom. He remembers that he has kicked against the pricks of his conscience and persecuted the Church of God. Thus it is God acts towards His worthiest servants. Thus is the declaration fulfilled that judgment must begin at His house. Thus God reminds those He has pardoned, and whom He saves, that if they are the children of a God of love, they are to become the children of a God of holiness.

Oh, stern but paternal discipline, against which our hearts have so often murmured; we bow beneath thy rod, for, by our very afflictions, thou remindest us that God, yea, God Himself, is labouring for our salvation!

But when, as for Moses, God forbids our entering the promised land here below, He has another purpose still—He aims at strengthening our faith. Let us for one moment suppose we were permitted to realise our desires upon earth, to see our designs accomplished, our sacrifices rewarded—in one word, to reap all we have sown—what would happen then? We would walk by sight, and no longer by faith; gentle and easy would be our progress through a life in which every one of our efforts would be



followed with success, and every one of our sacrifices with its reward. Who would refuse to be a Christian on such conditions as these? Who would not seek this immediate and visible blessing? Do you not see that an interested and mercenary spirit would mingle with your obedience like a deadly poison? Do you not see that your hearts, attracted earthwards by the whole weight of their happiness, would soon forget the invisible world, and their true, their eternal destiny? What henceforth would become of the life of faith, of that heroic struggle of the soul which endeavours to break off the chains which bind it to the world of sight, that it may unite itself to God? What would become of that noble heritage which has been transmitted to us by the believers of the past? Now, God expects better things of us; and according to the beautiful image of Scripture, as the eagle, bearing its eaglets on its wings, teaches them to take their flight, so God tears us away from the world we see that we may learn to soar towards our true country. That is why He refuses you present rest and peace, the sweet security of heart, and the delights which you would have lingered to taste. That is why, when the world has spread out before your gaze the promised land of felicity which enchants and attracts you, you have heard this inexorable voice saying, "Thou shalt not go thither." But be sure of this,—He does not deceive you; for true rest, true happiness will still be yours. O Moses! thou hadst dreamed of a holy and blessed land beyond Jordan; beforehand thou hadst beheld its smiling valleys, its shady and peaceful groves where rest awaited thee; thou hadst contemplated the sanctuary in which the Ark of the Covenant would have its dwelling-place; and thou hadst already heard the songs of the faithful worshippers resounding on the hills of Canaan, beside the graves of thy fathers! Alas! this vision was but a dream. Pe-

yond Jordan, as in the wilderness, thou wouldst have found an ungrateful, idolatrous, and rebellious people; thou wouldst have seen the name of God dishonoured, His glory despised, and each step of the conqueror marked by crime and turpitude. Ah! better far is it for thee to die on Mount Nebo, for God has reserved a goodlier inheritance for thee—a promised land which thou shalt enter in peace. There sin is no more; there pure voices proclaim the glory of the Lord; there His sanctuary is raised in ineffable radiance and ideal beauty; there rest, in the bosom of infinite Love, all those who, like thee, have fought for justice; there God reigns, surrounded by the countless multitudes of His worshippers. Close thine eyes, weary pilgrim; thou wilt open them again in light, in the heavenly Canaan, in the holy Zion, in the courts of Jerusalem.

Finally, if God refuses to give us what we would have desired to possess here below, it is that our hearts may be His unreservedly and for ever. Some will doubtless object; yes; holiness and faith may be learned at this school, but love, is it indeed thus that God thinks to obtain it? Would we have loved Him less had He left us those treasures His jealous hand has so soon ravished from us? Would we have loved Him less had we been able daily to render Him thanks for the continuance of the joys and affections He has so cruelly wrenched from us? Would we have loved Him less had our heart, instead of retiring sorrowfully within itself, been permitted to open to felicity, and to beat freely in the full confidence of bliss? Less? Ah! we affirm it indeed. If what we have lost could be restored to us to-day, if our loved ones who have died could come out of their graves and appear to us, if our youth, our life, our hopes could revive, no human words could tell our gratitude and our love. I hear; but beware, you have said, *To-day*, and

you are right, for yesterday, alas ! when you were in full possession of these treasures, when your life was happy, where was that gratitude, that zeal, that love which should have overflowed ? Answer ! Where was that life, consecrated to the God from whom you had received so many blessings ? where those prayers, that courageous profession of your faith and hopes, those sacrifices ? What place did God hold in your thoughts, in your dreams of the future ? Did you reflect that God Himself was scorned and treated as a stranger on that happy earth, decked with all your joys ? Did you think of His cause forgotten, of His Gospel attacked, of His Church enfeebled and divided ? Did you care for those thousands of souls groaning beneath their weight of ignorance, misery, and sin ? Did you hear their never-ceasing cries of anguish ? Did you seek the land where righteousness dwells ? . . . No ; that all these might be revealed to you it was necessary you should suffer. When injustice has touched you and pierced you with its keen darts, you have understood what the oppressed feel here below ; your bereavements have inspired you with a new and profound sympathy for those whose hearths death has made desolate ; sickness has revealed to you some of the trials and temptations which are unknown in the strength of life ; your humiliation, your secret dishonour have made you sensible of the hidden sorrows which are afraid of the light of day ; and the more vividly evil, sin, and suffering have appeared to you in their terrible reality, the more you have understood that refuge, consolation, salvation are to be found in God alone, the more your heart has yearned for Him, the more you have loved Him, the more you have felt the truth of the Apostle's words—" Lord, to whom shall we go but unto Thee ? "

We have seen how God rears us and prepares us for the promised land which is not on earth, but in heaven.

Happy are those who wait not till they feel the rod of trial to bend their steps thither, but happy also are those whose chains trial has broken, and who are now walking towards the true fatherland. Companions in sorrow and fatigue, let us march on together, some with a firm and joyful step, others more feebly and falteringly. The Lord leads us on ; and if He gives courage to the strong, infinite tenderness and inexhaustible patience are for the weak and trembling. Let us march on ! The promised land is open to us. Jesus has conquered it by His sufferings and death. He calls us all. Come, you whom earth has deceived, come to the God who never lies ; come, and may we all one day, gathered in our true home, be for ever united with the redeemed of all ages in the communion of the thrice-holy God.

## XVII.

*ELIJAH'S VISION.*

“And the Lord said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.”—1 KINGS xix. 11-13.

ONE of the most striking proofs of the deplorable ignorance in which our age live concerning the Holy Scriptures is the lightness with which it judges the God of the Old Testament. I do not speak only of the disparaging criticism which, since the last century, has attacked the sublimest scenes of the Bible, and without so much as seeking to understand their hidden meaning, has found in them matter for the meanest raillery; I speak also of another science which aims at being more real, more serious, and I am struck with the prejudices to which it yields. For instance, because the Scriptures, with inflexible truth, with holy candour, retrace the many failings, artifices, and falls of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, of all the Jewish heroes whom national pride, had it dictated this book, would certainly not have portrayed in such dark colours, it does not hesitate

to charge with their faults and crimes the God they adore, without inquiring if He sanctions them, without considering that He condemns them, and that their authors, without one exception, are brought under the painful and severe discipline of trial and repentance. Again, because Jehovah, in His providential plans towards humanity, makes of Israel His instrument for a time, because He places His chosen people under the yoke of a theocracy, and consequently of a code of laws which, like all other civil and political laws, are to be sanctioned by force, it sees in Jehovah the God of vengeance, it ascribes to Him the same intolerance, the same hatred, the same evil passions which mingled in Israel's accomplishment of its Divine mission; and it forgets that, even then, beneath the veil of theocracy, His true nature, that is, His universal justice, His love, and His mercy, shines forth in a thousand passages of the Old Testament, that many parts breathe a truly evangelical tenderness and mansuetude, and that while listening to some fragments of the prophetic writings, we might believe ourselves already sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ. What! because this God of Israel, revealing Himself in His Son, has shed over us the fulness of His light, shall we despise the Divine rays which illumined the old dispensation? Shall the brightness of the noonday sun make us forget the splendours of the dawn? No; under the shadows with which He still surrounds Himself, we worship the God of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, who, for us, is and ever will be the God of Jesus Christ.

This thought has been suggested to me by the narrative from which my text is taken, and I am not afraid to affirm that, as we meditate upon it and apprehend its true signification, we shall see in it a sublime presentiment of that supreme revelation of the Gospel by which God manifests Himself to us in His true character.

This narrative is drawn from the history of Elijah. Elijah is the true type of the heroes of theocracy. At a period of degradation, abjection, and universal idolatry, he is beset by the thought of God's glory; this passion consumes him, he knows no other. He longs to re-establish the reign of Jehovah, and in this mission nothing will stop him, no ties of flesh and blood. Like John the Baptist, who, nine centuries later, will inherit his name and office, he dwells in the desert. Thence he comes forth to appear in the palace of Ahab, the bearer of the Divine warnings, and his voice is startling like the noise of thunder. The judgments of God accompany his words, and so great is his power that the whole nation hangs upon his lips; he defies the priests of Baal, unmasks their deceit, and causes them to be put to death without mercy. Then might he indeed believe that the reign of the Lord is come, for the people sound His praise, and during a whole day the hills of Carmel re-echo with the cry of the multitude: "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God!"

But, oh, sorrow! after the enthusiasm of a day things take their usual course; Ahab is still Ahab, Jezebel is still Jezebel, and the crowd, exalted for a moment by the fervour of the prophets, falls back with insatiable ardour into the turpitudes of a bloody and voluptuous worship. Then Elijah, like all other enthusiastic souls, passes from one extreme to the other; discouragement seizes upon him; his faith falters; God escapes him; he finds the ways of the Lord incomprehensible; he is angry because God forgets His cause. How easy it would be for Him to interfere, to smite those who despise Him, and thus complete the work of destruction begun on Mount Carmel! But no: heaven is deaf, God is silent, Jezebel is as powerful as ever, and the prophet's life is threatened. In despair Elijah flies; his soul is weary of life; he will go and bury

himself in the wilderness. He directs his steps southward, far, very far, from that land of Judah where he has struggled in vain; far, very far, from that ungrateful and frivolous nation; he reaches Horeb; he wants that boundless waste, those rugged and lonely heights, that wild and dreary prospect which agrees with the state of his soul. There he will die, and when the voice of God, who follows him even in his retreat, is heard, saying, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" he replies by a bitter complaint, he reproaches the Almighty with having forsaken His cause and left His servant alone in this terrible conflict to which He Himself had called him.

Let us not judge the prophet rashly; even in his despair I recognise the zeal which consumes him; his temptation is that of all noble souls, of souls that thirst for righteousness and holiness. Would to God there were many believers like him, notwithstanding his momentary deviation from the path of duty!

The indifferent will be at a loss to understand this revolt of Elijah; as they have no elevated ideal, as the coming of the kingdom of God finds them wholly unconcerned, as the cause of justice and truth has never inflamed their hearts, they easily fall in with the habits of the world, and persuade themselves that it cannot be changed; for them, wisdom consists in taking men as they are, and moderation is, in their opinion, the wisest and safest philosophy. Why aim at reforming the world, why raise against oneself a storm of prejudice and passion when one might live in unbroken peace and quiet? All they cannot comprehend is styled by them fanaticism, and such men as Elijah, at whatever period they appear, are fools in their sight. But the man who ardently desires the triumph of truth, who suffers to see the name of God despised, His glory brought low, and justice trodden under foot, will recognise his own



history in this narrative, and the expression of his own sorrows in the lamentations of the prophet. Thus, methinks, must the Christians of the first ages have been tempted when, after having, with the whole of the primitive Church, awaited the immediate return of Christ and His glorious appearing, they saw truth persecuted and rejected, reduced to win souls laboriously one by one, to plead its cause before kings and emperors, when they saw the Church growing with difficulty, and forced to submit to the conditions of all human institutions, having, like them, its imperfections, its infirmities, its failings, and counting, in times of persecution, its apostates by thousands. Thus also must our fathers have been tempted in the days that followed the Reformation, when after their dreams of the free and serious religion, of conscience freed from the human yoke, and of the grand future which the Gospel alone could have given their country, they saw their churches levelled to the ground, their homes destroyed, their Bibles torn, and themselves, like malefactors, driven forth as exiles. Who can tell how many were the anxious hearts which these noble martyrs turned towards the God who seemed to have deserted His cause? Who will tell their agonising prayers, their murmurs, their bitter lamentings? Thus, too, are still tempted those who, having looked for the triumph of the Gospel, for the extension of the Church, for Christian unity around the Master's Cross, for one of those grand religious revivals which save souls and redeem the world, are forced to see what we see: in presence of an indifferent and scoffing society, the Church divided and weakened, insensible and passionless, and the progress of God's kingdom dependent, apparently at least, upon wholly outward chances, upon wholly human causes. In presence of such a spectacle their faith is shaken, their hearts are troubled, and, like Elijah, they

doubt God's power to act and interfere ; like Elijah, they overlook the sublime traces of His intervention in the past, and if to these general causes of disquiet be added some special trial, some lasting injustice of which they are the victims, some cruel and inexplicable blow, it is enough to wring from the firmest a cry of anguish or murmur, or, it may even be, to drive them to despair.

Christians who have known these temptations, let me tell you that, terrible though they be, the sorrows they bring are noble sorrows ! Ah ! it were far worse indeed to become indifferent to what is going on around you, to feel at ease in a world where God is treated as a stranger, to look with a cold heart upon all the injustice, suffering, turpitude that meet you at every step, to accept this life and this world such as sin has made them. Happy those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, says the Gospel. Yes, to suffer like Elijah, like John the Baptist, like Paul, is after all the best and noblest lot upon earth, for only on this condition may we hope to be comforted of God.

And God spake to Elijah, saying, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." The prophet obeys. Standing on the summit of Horeb, whence his eye embraces the whole expanse of earth and sky, he waits, for the Lord has promised to appear to him and commune with him.

He looks, and behold on the horizon clouds of dust appear ; it is the desert wind rising swift, impetuous as in the East, and soon the sky is covered by a dark and livid veil. The long and dismal blasts of the tempest are followed by terrific peals of thunder ; the trees writhe in agony and are torn from the ground ; even the rocks tremble, the sands of the desert, gathered into moving hills, roll like the waves of an angry sea. The storm passes . . . but the Lord was not in the wind.

He looks again, and before his troubled gaze the horizon seems to move; the rocks totter, the earth is rent, the mountain staggers as if seized with sudden giddiness. It is an earthquake which opens yawning chasms waiting to swallow up their prey; for a few moments nature is abandoned to this fearful convulsion . . . but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

Elijah looks once more, and behold a strange light illumines earth and sky; fire from heaven has set the desert in a blaze. The reddish flame of the conflagration, shining amidst the darkness of the storm, spreads swift as lightning; it runs, it winds around the mountain-sides, it kindles the dried grass and the uprooted trees. It is an all-invading flood of fire, whose burning waves whirling rise towards the gloomy vault of heaven. Terrified, Elijah starts back . . . but the Lord was not in the fire.

The tempest, the earthquake, the fire, were not these what Elijah had asked when, weary and discouraged, he had upbraided God for His inaction and His incomprehensible silence? Had he not said to the Almighty, as it were: "Awake! take Thy cause in hand, scatter Thine enemies like the sands of the desert, crush them in Thy fury, consume them like chaff?" And now he has witnessed that irresistible and formidable power, alike in the storm that swept everything away with its blasting breath, in the earth shaken to its foundations, and in the fire consuming what the hurricane had left standing. He has seen it, he has trembled, and yet the Lord was not there. Where then is He, and by what sign will Elijah be able to discern His presence? The prophet will soon know.

The terrible vision of the hurricane has passed. . . . The storm has ceased. After the convulsions of nature there is a profound calm; the fearful glare of the lightning is followed by the pure and fresh light of day. The

sky has become visible once more, the Eastern sky, with its clear and deep azure; nature seems to revive more beautiful, more serene than before, and from the depths of the valleys rises a soft and gentle murmur, the harmonious sound of nature awaking to new life under the influence of the Divine breath. It reaches the summit of Horeb, the cave in which Elijah has taken refuge; the prophet comes forth from his retreat. An inexpressible emotion, an ineffable sense of peace, freshness, and joy seizes his terror-stricken soul. Neither the roar of the tempest nor the convulsions of nature had impressed him to such a degree. In this still small voice he recognises the presence of God, and covering his face with his mantle, he bows down and adores.

Was I mistaken when I said that in this Old Testament scene there is a sublime presentiment of the supreme revelation which God, through the Gospel, was to give humanity? This God, whose presence Elijah was unable to discern save in the manifestations of His justice and wrath, this God of vengeance, so long as He smites and chastens, has not spoken His last word. "He maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire," but nevertheless He is not in the tempest that overthrows nor in the fire that consumes, and if the law of Sinai, if the theocracy of Israel have revealed His holiness and justice, the day will come when He will reveal to the world that His name is Love.

Elijah does not yet understand the true and profound significance of this vision, and in what follows God explains it only in part. He tells him to resume his journey and seek out Hazeal, Jehu, and Elisha, who are all three to be the instruments of His vengeance in chastising Ahab, Jezebel, and the idolatrous nation. Hazeal, Jehu, and Elisha, these are the storm, the earthquake, and the fire which the Lord will send when He

will think it fit. Thus God will interfere, the day of His anger will certainly dawn; but Elijah must know that vengeance will not be His last word. In these terrible interventions God will manifest only one side of His nature, and His true revelation of Himself is still to come.

This revelation, we have seen it. . . . What are those glad tidings symbolised by the still small voice the prophet heard? Harken, and through the stillness of the first Christmas night you will hear the angels' song descending from heaven upon the plains of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men." Draw near to the cradle in which the majesty of God is disarmed, behold this little child, born amongst the poorest of the poor; no splendour surrounds Him; there is nought in Him to repel or terrify; everything is simple and unpretending, and yet in Him is the true revelation of the God of heaven and earth; from this lowly manger will come forth the salvation of the world. He whose birth caused so little stir will grow as a tender plant, to use the words of the prophet; no outward pomp will He display, nothing that might recall the fearful majesty of the God of vengeance whom Elijah invoked. Instead of the iron sceptre of which Israel dreamed, He will bear a reed; instead of the conqueror's diadem He will wear a crown of thorns; His voice will not be menacing like that of the storm and thunder, it will tell of pardon, peace, salvation. To all the sorrows of earth He will say: "Come unto Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart." Nought but prayers will He have for His foes, nought but blessings for His murderers. He will be reviled, loaded with insults and ignominy, nailed upon a cursed tree; but in this excess of humiliation He will reveal to the world an unknown greatness, that of triumphant love, of a charity that

shrinks not from sacrifice. A majesty beyond compare will surround His bleeding brow, and in this disarmed victim mankind will acknowledge its King. What neither force, nor terror, nor violence could have done, His cross will accomplish . . . consciences will be troubled, hearts will be stirred, the Church will be established, a new humanity will rise to begin the reign of God upon earth; it will march on with faith, love, and hope for its motto, it will subdue the nations; after eighteen centuries it will preach the glad tidings of salvation on all points of the globe, until the glad day dawns, when, in the pacified world, there will be but one flock and one Shepherd. In presence of this wondrous triumph of redeeming love, oh! let us bow our heads, and, like Elijah, adore, for truly the Lord is here.

We see, therefore, what is the true signification of this sublime vision, we know what means the "still small voice" which fills the soul of Elijah with a thrill of holy joy, we know that God is love. And now let us endeavour to draw from this scene some of the lessons it is destined to teach us.

In the first place, let us learn not to judge the Lord. As we have already said, the delays of God surprise us, and we often find His silence inexplicable. Why does He not interfere? we ask. Why does He allow His cause to be opposed, attacked, and apparently defeated? Why does He allow evil to prosper and triumph? And though our lips avow it not, our irritated and impatient heart calls for His intervention, His judgment, and perhaps His wrath! His wrath! . . . ah! when Elijah called it down upon the rebellious nation, he knew not what *we* now know; he had not seen the Holy One and the Just expiring upon the Cross; he had not seen the love which is mightier than hate conquering hearts and establishing the reign of God on the earth. His wrath!

. . . ah! what could we answer should it reach us first? Do we deserve it less than those who provoke our displeasure? When we take into account all the mercies we have received, the light which has illumined our life, the patience which has borne with us so long, the deliverances which have been wrought on our behalf; when in opposition to the wondrous story of the Divine mercies we place that of our rebellions, of our ingratitude, of our baseness, of our secret faults, or, it may be, of our crimes, can we, nay, dare we still invoke the God of vengeance? Let us rather rejoice that the hour of judgment has not yet come; let us rejoice that a time is still left us for repentance and salvation. Let us remember that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, and that we may triumph over evil, let us imitate Divine Providence, which, though able to subdue all things by force, chooses rather to conquer by love.

I next find in my text a deeply-comforting thought. Is there a man who, having vainly looked for Divine intervention in the history of humanity at large and in his own personal history, has not sometimes felt the shudder of doubt pass over his soul? Who, in times like those, has not longed to ask God His secret, the secret of those strange and mysterious ways which bewildered him? Well; this secret is revealed in the vision of Elijah—this secret is love. Love is the final and supreme explanation of all God's dealings with humanity; love, not wrath; love, not vengeance, whatever our hearts may sometimes think to the contrary. Nevertheless, it must be rightly understood that, if in love alone God gives mankind a full revelation of Himself, it is He also who sends the wind, the earthquake, and the all-consuming fire. Let us beware lest, because we believe in the Gospel, we render the arm of the Lord powerless, and make of our God a soft and effeminate

being, suited to the spirit of the present generation. No, for us also the Lord reigneth; for us He will ever be the centre of history, the Ruler of all the convulsions that shake the world. And are there not certain pages of the world's history in which His intervention becomes visible, so to speak, and in which, like Belshazzar during his feast at Babylon, we discern a mysterious hand tracing the death-warrant of the powers of evil? When Nineveh and Babylon fall, when those gigantic empires crumble, do we not see the intervention of God there? When murderous Jerusalem is trodden under foot by the Gentiles, when the plough tears the ground on which stood its magnificent Temple, when exiled Israel is dispersed throughout the world to be the constant wonder of history by its unique and extraordinary destiny, do we not see in this the fulfilment of the awful words: "His blood be on us and on our children?" When Rome itself, whose fall had been foretold four centuries beforehand by St. John, the Seer of the Apocalypse, is invaded by the barbarians; when its conquerors, Attila and Genseric, obedient to their mysterious destiny, call themselves the scourge of God; when, on leaving their native shores, they give the pilot this order: "Direct thy sail whither blows the wind of Divine vengeance," can we refuse to acknowledge the action of an avenging Providence? and should we forget to recognise it, would not the smoking ruins which marked their passage everywhere proclaim it loudly in our stead? Finally, when in modern history we see all the powers which have opposed and rejected Christianity becoming the prey of ruin and death, whilst civilisation, progress, respect for conscience, true liberty exist only beneath the shadow of the Cross and in the nations whose life the Gospel has pervaded, when everything shows us, as the President of a noble republic whose sons are not ashamed to invoke



the name of the living God once nobly confessed, when everything shows us that justice exalts a people whilst sin is the ruin of nations, we were blind indeed if we denied the reality of God's action even in the darkest days of history, if we refused to acknowledge that, as in Elijah's vision, it is He who lets loose the tempest and the all-destroying fire. Yes, God reigneth, we must affirm it, we must proclaim it boldly, in presence of a civilisation that prides itself on its material progress and professes a scornful indifference, an insulting disdain for the realities of the invisible world; we must remind society that it cannot with impunity banish God from its midst, and that if the place He should occupy remains vacant, it will be filled by the powers of darkness. We must remind it that His justice slumbereth not, and that, to chastise the nations that forget Him, He has only to give them up for a day to the evil passions which ferment in their depths, to the rising tide of materialism to which He alone can say, "Thou shalt go no further." We must remind it that the moral corruption openly displayed by the higher classes is stirring up in the lower regions a blaze of hatred and savage passions whose explosion would produce a moral tempest compared with which the storm witnessed by Elijah in Horeb were a mere child's play. We must remind it that God is holy, that He will not be mocked, and that, for individuals as well as for nations, His judgment is the surest of realities.

Yes, God reigns in history; but if we believe in His sovereign action, how often also do we fail to discover the traces of His steps? How often does the spectacle of the world appear to us as a labyrinth in which we wander hopelessly? And in His very judgments, how much there is that we cannot understand. Alas! in the storm which the breath of His justice raises I see the

innocent smitten with the guilty, I see the child atoning for the sins of the father, I see the consequences of an iniquitous action falling upon several generations; I see a mysterious fatality crushing individuals and nations, I see success attending certain clever strokes of policy whilst good causes are left to perish, so that, although I know that these various events, even those which confound me, are directed by God, yet I feel with as much certainty that God does not reveal Himself fully in them. Ah! then it is that the vision Elijah beheld brings a truly Divine and cheering light to my soul, for if it shows me that God sends the evils which are destined to chastise the world, it teaches me at the same time that His chastisements do not reveal His true nature; it teaches me that the secret of His ways is to be sought elsewhere, that it lies wholly in that love which history teaches not, but which God reveals in silence to the pardoned soul that believes in His word, that hearkens to His voice, and consents to be taught of Him.

Accept these consolations, ye afflicted souls. You are perhaps groaning to-day beneath the weight of trial; it seems to you as though God had directed all His power against you, and you have realised in your lives all the awful sides of the prophet's vision. The blast of affliction has swept all your hopes away, your happiness has fled in an hour of anguish, and your heart is passing through what Scripture calls the furnace of sorrow. You have been told to seek God in these trials, but your heart has shuddered, and, like Elijah, you are waiting still. . . . Ah! you are right, for if these afflictions have been permitted of God, they will not fully reveal His will and His true purpose. Have faith! The day is approaching when you will hear the still small voice which struck the prophet's ear, that secret voice of the Lord which

alone can appease the rebellious soul and fill it with unutterable consolation. You will hear it, and then you will know that love was at the root of all these dispensations, that love alone can explain your sufferings; you will know this, and bowing your head and veiling your face, with Elijah you will say, "Truly the Lord is here."

When Elijah had beheld this vision on Mount Horeb, he heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus." Return; a fitting word for him who in the hour of danger had deserted his post and his mission. Return on thy way to the wilderness. On that way which he ought never to have taken, for God had not called him there. Return to those before whom thou art to be My witness. Return where hate, scorn, persecution await thee. Return, for if I have strengthened thy faith and raised thy drooping heart by the revelation of Myself on the holy mountain, it is not that thy spirit may dwell there in endless ecstacy, but that thou mayest go back into the world stronger and more faithful than before, to serve Me amongst those who forget their God and are hastening on to perdition.

Let us listen to this command of the Lord, and let it be our strength. We have come here, it may be, discouraged and sorrowful like Elijah; like him we have learned once again the secret of the Divine ways; but more favoured than the prophet, we have beheld the love which Jesus has revealed to the world, and which is for us the supreme explanation of all the dispensations of Providence towards us. Let us therefore, like the Lord's servant, return to the post of duty; let us return to those wandering souls, to that frivolous and unbelieving world before which God wills that we should be His witnesses; let us return with humility, courage, and fidelity; let us

return with a renewed faith, a brighter hope, a stronger and more persevering love ; let us return, and let the world understand when it hears our words, when it sees our works, that we too have ascended the holy hill and heard the voice of the Lord.

## XVIII.

*REPENTANCE.*

“Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight ; that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest.”—Ps. li. 6.

HAD I no other reason to believe in the divinity of the Bible than the manner in which the heart of man is depicted there, this would be enough for me. Here, for instance, is the Book of Psalms, written three thousand years ago. Do you know of any other which expresses more faithfully the noblest aspirations of your soul, your struggles, your doubts, your sorrows ? Where is the man who does not find in it his own history ? You have perhaps perused the religious books of the nations to which Christianity was unknown—those poems in which the Grecian race expressed with so much grace and genius the bewitching influence of a worshipped nature ; those lofty hymns in which the northern tribes extolled the vengeance of their deities, or those monotonous and despairing songs, by which the Hindoo stirred himself to commit the suicide which would enable him to enter into the rest of Nirvana. In order to understand them, you travel in spirit to those countries which have produced them. You seek, by dint of attention and study, to picture to yourselves the feelings of a Hindoo, of a Greek,

of a barbarian. . . . But when you read the Psalms, it is your own heart you find there. True, the words are Jewish ; true, Israel and Jerusalem are the themes of the inspired bard ; but beneath the surface you see man himself appearing with the truest and most characteristic features of his nature. . . . That is why this book awakens the same emotions among all races of men. The miserable negro is comforted by it just as well as the most highly cultured mind in our civilised countries. I love thus to find the human soul in its simple and true expression, such as it was thirty centuries ago, such as it is still to-day, with its eternal yearnings for holiness, pardon, love which the sages of the day may misunderstand or despise, but which reappear with indomitable obstinacy. It is good thus to rise above one's epoch. In fact, each epoch presents to us an incomplete idea of man. One day he is deified, on the morrow he is lowered and degraded ; one day the intellect is exalted at the expense of the heart, on the morrow a sickly sentimentality seems to be the true expression of the human soul. Education creates in us artificial needs ; the fashion of the day alters or falsifies our nature. For each century is prejudiced and sectarian, and sees but one side of human nature. . . . The Bible alone is the book of humanity—it alone pictures man such as he has always been, with all his greatness, but also with all his wretchedness ; it neither flatters nor debases him, but it judges him from a point of view which overlooks time and space—such, in a word, as he must appear in the eyes of Him who embraces all things. Let a man perverted by the spirit of system open those Psalms, he will not recognise himself in them, but will perhaps cast an unintelligent and disdainful glance upon their sacred pages which so many tears have watered. . . . But stay ! Here is trial approaching. Here is a great sorrow which causes the most deeply

hidden chords that still exist in the depths of his soul to vibrate. . . . Hark! they will produce exactly the same sounds which strike us in those inspired lines. So true it is that the heart of man is always the same, and that, when stirred in its depths, it responds by a sublime instinct to the voice of the God who made it, and who alone can understand and comfort it.

I have chosen as the subject of our meditations to-day one of the most touching of these Psalms: it is the cry of a guilty soul; it is the bitter confession which escapes David when his conscience is roused by the voice of Nathan. I would show you by this example what is true repentance. We have arrived at the period of the year<sup>1</sup> at which men most willingly admit that a little time must be retrenched from the affairs of the world and devoted to meditation and serious thought. That is what, in the religion of the majority, is called the time for penitence. It is understood that Christians must prepare themselves in this way to celebrate the memory of the work of redemption and of the sufferings of the Lord. A touching custom would this be if formalism had not perverted it! But what is it in reality? The soul presents itself before God as a debtor before his creditor. It seems to say to Him, "I have robbed Thee of so many days, of so much affection, of so many thoughts, which I have given to the world and to sin, and which I mean to give them still. But here, in exchange, are so many days of contrition, so many good works, and so many penances." . . . What a miserable calculation! That is what people call performing one's religious duties. . . . One's religious duties indeed! Is this the reasoning of true love? Can it be satisfied with such a mercenary combination? Can it pretend to pay off its debt towards God by prayers or tears? This, however, is the most uni-

<sup>1</sup> Passion-Week.

versal idea of repentance. . . . That is what men make of the most touching drama which can ever stir the human heart. That is how they pretend to conciliate the most complete worldliness with the most enthusiastic effusions of piety. That is also why I must remind you once more of what true repentance is, by studying with you this example through which it has pleased God to instruct His Church unto the end of time.

I need not here retrace all the details of David's fall. Everything, in his twofold crime, is calculated to amaze and appal us. To have been the object of so many mercies, and then so openly to violate the Divine law; to have known the most celestial joys, and then to have so deeply sullied his soul; to have sung in presence of the assembled multitudes the praises of the Lord, and then to give to the entire nation the shameful spectacle of so crying a scandal—everything here combines to make of David a unique example of an unparalleled fall; and willingly would many a one in this assembly, comparing himself with the guilty king, exclaim, in the words of the Pharisee in the parable, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as this man."

But the Christian who knows himself, the Christian who knows the history of his own life and of his secret temptations, pauses and reflects. He thinks of the position of David, of that sudden prosperity to which the youthful shepherd of Bethlehem had been raised, of the examples by which he was surrounded, of the manners and customs of the East, of the seductions of an unlimited power, and then he has only to humble himself, and to ask himself with terror what would have become of him in such a situation and under the attraction of similar temptations.

Do you know what strikes me most in this narrative? It is not the greatness of David's fall. Yet it is odious,



and no expression is too strong in which to picture it. No; it is the sincerity, the intensity of his repentance. Thus to fall, alas! is the common lot of man; but thus to rise again is the miracle of God.

There is in all deep falls I know not what fatal power which enslaves the soul and renders it well-nigh incapable of restoration. David innocent would surely have shuddered like you, like me, had this story been related to him. What, then, has lost him? A look. A look, and from that moment see how guilt follows guilt, how link after link is added to his chain of sin. An unlawful desire first of all, then the sin, then the lie, then the perfidy, then the murder, then the hardening. . . . Ah! if ever repentance seemed an impossibility, it surely was then . . . ; and yet, at the first words of Nathan, behold a soul so completely changed that we may take it as our model, behold a criminal who teaches us how we are to return to God!

The *sincerity* of David's confession is the first lesson to be learned from our text. Do you know what it costs the human heart to speak these words: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, that Thou mightest be clear when Thou judgest?" Do you know how difficult is an avowal such as this, especially when a man occupies an exalted position, when he is surrounded with flattery, when everything conspires to lessen, in his eyes, the gravity of his faults? Do you know how hard, how humiliating, how bitter is such an attitude? That is the first aspect of David's confession. It is himself he condemns, it is upon himself he casts the entire weight of his guilt, and yet, excuses would certainly not have failed him. Might he not have alleged, as we have already said, the perils of his position, his exceptional temptations, the intoxication of prosperity, the silence of his friends, the encouragements of his flatterers? All these arguments

probably presented themselves to his mind, but he did not entertain them, and laden with the entire burden of his crime, he falls at the feet of God.

Is our repentance marked by the same sincerity, brethren? Scripture tells us of the incurable wickedness of our heart, but never does this heart appear to me more deceitful than when, being discovered in sin, we essay to shift the responsibility of our faults upon others and to excuse ourselves in our own eyes. All manner of sophisms, however wretched, serve our purpose then: excuses which we would never accept on the part of others reassure ourselves. Excuses! Man will sooner grow weary of sin than of seeking excuses for his faults. From the first of sinners, who lays the blame of his guilt on his companion and on God Himself, down to Pilate who casts the blame of his upon the Jews; from Pilate down to us never will you find a man who will not discover a way of dispensing with repentance by self-exculpation. One will plead his youth and the temptations of his age in excuse of his dissipation. Another, on the contrary, will plead the power of inveterate habits, and the fatal influence of a long life in which God had no part. One will comfort himself with the thought of the religious indifference in the midst of which he had been brought up, and will not fail to remark that none ever spoke to him of his soul. Another, on the contrary, will pretend that he has been saturated with religion and has grown disgusted with it. Here is one who will quote the examples of dissolute life which met him in his own family. How could his conscience live, says he, under such fatal influences? Here is another who will accuse the severity of those with whom he lived, their narrow-mindedness, and their inflexible rigour. The ignorant will say that his ignorance shields him from responsibility, and the learned critic will believe himself exempt from the necessity of

repentance and conversion, because his studies will have shaken his faith. The poor will allege their condition of dependence and the oppression of material life which leaves them no time to think of their soul; the rich, the temptations of worldliness, and the concessions forced upon them by the rank which they must keep up. The man of cold and calm temperament will say that his honesty stands him in the stead of conversion; the man of ardent passions will plead his impetuous nature. Will excuses ever fail those who seek them? Rather than accuse ourselves we accuse others . . . ; we would be Christians to-day, if Christians were not so narrow-minded, so uncharitable, so intolerant . . . , as if we were to be converted to Christians and not to God. More, we shall accuse God Himself, for is it not accusing Him to allege, in self-justification, the position in which He has placed us, the character He has given us, the temptations by which He permits that we should be beset, our unanswered prayers, and our fruitless struggles? Deplorable resources of a deceitful heart, worthless excuses which all come to, casting at God these words of the unprofitable servant in the parable: "Thou hard and cruel Master, Thou reapest where Thou hast not sown, and gatherest where Thou hast not strawed."

What will become of us when, to this natural disposition of our hearts, will be added the influence of a fatalistic philosophy which excuses everything in the history and life of each individual as the effect of temperament, of inherent character, of circumstances, so that at most criminals will be diseased but never guilty beings!

But behold those sophists who thus rob man of his moral liberty; see them when they themselves are the victims of some injustice, of some perfidy, of some oppression. Do they accept all this with cool placidity? do they declare that those who thus trample under foot their

rights, their honour, their liberty, are to be pitied rather than blamed, and simply yield to the force of circumstances, and to the fatal effect of their temperament? No! they grow irate, indignant; they thunder against oppression and iniquity, or, in other words, they belie their own theories. After having denied human accountability, they now recognise it; and by accusing others they lose for ever the right of excusing themselves. Thus conscience, stronger than all sophisms, overthrows those theories which, should they be permitted to triumph for a day, would eventually become all-justifying.

But of what avail would it be to acknowledge that man is accountable if we ourselves seek to cast off our own responsibility? Let us set aside all useless excuses. Let us recognise that, however great may have been the share of circumstances or the action of others in our falls, it is we who, all things considered, have caused the balance to incline on the side of evil, either by a decided act of the will or by a cowardly weakness. Let us not, therefore, seek to delude ourselves, for in the last day we shall not deceive Him who searcheth the heart, and before whom every mouth shall be stopped, but rather may we utter this confession—"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

Against Thee! This is the second feature which strikes me in David's confession. The source of his bitterest sorrow is the thought that he has offended God. Not that he forgets those who, upon earth, have been the victims of his guilty conduct,—and the remainder of the psalm is sufficient proof of this,—but he goes further and reaches higher; he thinks of the God whose holy law he has violated, of the Father whom he has grieved.

Here let us examine ourselves. When we sin, is it the feeling that we have offended God which causes our deepest sorrow? I appeal on this point to the testimony

of your conscience. You have erred, my brother. In an hour of temptation you have committed a shameful and guilty deed, and your conscience, wilfully blinded, has scarce uttered a reproachful word. But suddenly you learn that this action, which you had thought buried in oblivion, has had a witness, and that soon, perhaps, disclosed and commented upon everywhere, it will draw upon you the judgments of the world and of your brethren. What anxiety then seizes upon you! What unbearable uneasiness! Ah! how you do curse your weakness! How anxiously you watch the looks of your fellows in order to discover in them what is their opinion of you! How you tremble at the prospect of the dishonour suspended above your head! For you there can be no more rest, no more security. You seem to hear an accusing voice following you everywhere. . . . At length, however, you learn that you have been mistaken, that your reputation is safe, that no voice will denounce you. How freely you now breathe, and how bright life once more appears to you! Truly, you are a new creature, and, nevertheless, God has seen all, God has known all, and God has not yet pardoned you! . . .

Now what is this but sheer pharisaism? Yes, this is the odious pharisaism which, in theory, you condemn as well as I, and which consists in cleansing the outside of the cup whilst the inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. In this lies the morality of the world. We sometimes hear of men who have committed suicide that they might not survive the dishonour which a sudden discovery would cast upon their name. So long as they have been permitted to practise evil with impunity, in secret, in silence, the thought of suicide never entered their minds. If success had crowned their actions, they would have walked the earth with lofty brow; it is the mere idea that their crimes are known which overpowers

them and renders them desperate, and to escape the judgment of men: fools that they are! they rush headlong to meet the judgment of God. That is what becomes of conscience at the school of the world. The essential point is to save appearances, to keep one's honour untarnished. This is easy to conceive on the part of worldlings for whom God is an empty name, but what are we to think when we see Christians tranquil and undisturbed so long as God alone knows of their guilt? Ah! they must allow me to tell them that they have never known repentance. Repentance is not the humiliation which is produced in us by the thought of being judged by our fellow-men, and of seeing the entire edifice of our reputation crumble in the twinkling of an eye. No, no, all this is the world's method of reasoning; true repentance dwells only in the heart which, without any thought of men, but looking only to God and feeling that only against Him it has sinned, exclaims with David: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

Again, men call repentance what, in many cases, is a mere mortification of their pride. Two very different motives may lead us to accomplish the Divine law: the love of God—this is the Christian principle; the respect of our moral dignity—this is the selfish principle, elevated selfishness if you will, but selfishness, notwithstanding.

You have endeavoured, for instance, to obey the moral law; you have applied all your powers and your honour to practise it scrupulously; your progress and the approbation of your conscience are a cause of joy for you, and you do not perceive that you are worshipping self; that what preoccupies you is less the glory of God than your personal esteem, and that in the innermost recesses of your heart there is an idol which you call virtue, but which is not God.

Well! it pleases God, O virtuous sinner, suddenly to overthrow that idol by an unexpected temptation which reveals to you your desperate weakness and your profound corruption. Where now are the lofty serenity, the proud satisfaction of an untainted conscience? All this has crumbled in an instant.

Then you grieve; but beware, this sorrow is not repentance yet . . . it is less to God than to yourselves that you are anxious to make amends; it is your pride that suffers, rather than your love; it is mortification far more than penitence which causes your tears to flow.

Happy are you at least, if, willing to learn the lessons which your very transgressions are destined to teach you, you give up the delusions of your pride, and if, shattering at the feet of God that idol which you had set up in His place, you tell Him with David: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned."

Therefore, true repentance lies neither in the shame which is the result of our guilt, nor in the mortification of our mistaken pride. Nor does it consist in the sorrows which our sins involve, but in which the thought of the offended God does not enter.

It has pleased God that suffering should be annexed to sin. We shall see this one day; we sometimes see it already here below. We read this terrible law in the history of nations from which it detaches itself with supreme evidence; we read it often in the history of individuals. We read it, for example, in the pale brow and dimmed eye of the profligate. And had we the discerning eye of God, we would detect it in many of those lives to which iniquity, artfully pursued, has given a false show of happiness. We cannot tell all that passes in the heart of those whom we call the elect of fortune; we ignore all that is felt by so many cadaverous souls which no longer believe or love, and which, having

no hope for heaven, have seen all the illusions of earth wither away and vanish for ever.

Whoever has sinned must suffer. . . . But to suffer thus is not true repentance yet. Does he repent (this is an extreme example), the wretch who is about to suffer death for his crimes, and who, trembling, kisses the crucifix as he marches to the scaffold? Does he repent, the miserable man who, blinded by the fever of wealth, has lost everything, even his future, even his children's honour, and now casts a dull and heavy eye around his empty and desolate hearth? Does she repent, that prostitute whom a guilty passion has degraded, and who feels that the celestial joys of pure love are for ever denied her? Do you repent, alas! when, keenly feeling how factitious, empty, and derisive is the world, you come hither to mourn over its vanity? No, let us dare to say it, all this may still be useless suffering. Sorrow alone has never saved a soul, and none can tell how many hearts it has hardened. . . . No; those disenchantments, that bitterness, that gloomy melancholy, those very tears are not repentance. . . . When you weep, you are perhaps only thinking of yourselves, and your sorrow is merely refined selfishness. . . . No; so long as your conscience will not have spoken, so long as your tears will not have flowed at the feet of God, so long as you will be unmindful of His despised holiness, of His slighted love, speak not of repentance, for you know not what it is.

Let us beware lest on this point we go further than Scripture and flatter man while humbling him. Does it not seem that true repentance should be absolutely disinterested, and that the sinner returning to God should forget himself and think only of his offended God? Yes, that is the ideal; but that is not what most generally takes place. . . . Alas! it must be acknow-



ledged, it is often by wholly personal suffering that man is led to consider his ways and that his conscience is roused. . . . It was when the prodigal son felt the pangs of hunger that he remembered his father's house. . . . Ah! if we had written his history, we would doubtless have portrayed him in the midst of the luxury and enjoyments of life suddenly seized with a mysterious sorrow and yearning after the true happiness which he had lost. Jesus, who knows human nature better than we do, tells us simply that he grew hungry; his thoughts went back to the mercenaries who, in his father's house, had bread in abundance . . . then came the repentance which penetrated his soul. Let us accept this humiliating truth. Let us accept it, lest we look upon repentance as the privilege of noble souls, lest, decking ourselves out in our griefs, ay, even in our misery, we pretend thus to enter the kingdom in which mercy reigns and in which repentance itself is a Divine gift.

We have seen how the guilty king pours out his soul before the Lord. But it is not enough for him to mourn; what he desires, what he asks with importunity, is pardon, and a pardon full and free; it is salvation, and the joy of salvation. Hear the words he utters: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity;—cleanse me, and I shall be clean;—wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow;—make me to hear joy and gladness;—create in me a clean heart, O God;—restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation;—and uphold me with Thy free Spirit." What! some will perhaps say, it is David guilty—David still covered with his pollution—David scarce restored, who dares to claim such mercies as these! Would you then have him remain afar off, miserable, mourning, atoning with his tears for all his past iniquity?

Afar off! and why? and how long? Ah! I understand; you would have David appease the wrath of God by his

sufferings. You would have a salvation merited by the sinner's expiations; or, in other words, under pretence of humility, you overthrow the Gospel and annihilate mercy; for if it is man who atones for his sins, there is no more need of redemption, and the Cross is a vain symbol. Nothing henceforth for the sinner but the prospect of an endless expiation; for when will he dare believe that he has suffered enough? Ah, not thus did David understand the love of God. He, born under the old dispensation, under the covenant of works, here rises to salvation by grace so fully that we might suppose this psalm written by St. Paul. He the sinner, he the criminal, dares to ask the love of God anew, thus realising beforehand the admirable words of St. Augustine: "If thou wouldst flee the wrath of God, run and cast thyself into His arms!"

But here a serious voice anxiously asks if this view of salvation is not in contradiction with the moral order. How will David, thus pardoned, be capable of understanding Divine holiness and the greatness of his fall? What! absolution once pronounced, the sorrow for sin will disappear, and his soul will, undisturbed, enjoy the delights of communion with God! How far will not such a doctrine lead, and who does not see that the moral levity so universal in the present day finds in it its support and its excuse?

I understand the objection, for more than once it has presented itself to my mind. And how could we avoid being struck with it when we see moral unconcern, frivolity, and worldliness growing so rapidly under shelter of the doctrine of pardon, when we see the most deplorable falls so easily forgotten, when we vainly seek in souls the profound traces which true repentance should leave behind it?

Here is my answer: If the doctrine of pardon favours moral unconcern, the fault lies with us who disfigure it,

and not with God who gave it. The God of Scripture is a holy God. You fear lest, by pardoning David when he claims His mercy, He will allow the sinner to forget his crime. That is because you yourselves forget the path through which God is about to lead him. Wait a little ere you judge. You will soon understand how God sanctifies those He truly forgives. Behold, in that desolated palace, a father weeping beside the corpse of a little child; hear him repeating those words which so many broken hearts will re-echo throughout all ages: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." That man is David, David pardoned, David saved, but David suffering, not in expiation of his sins, but that he may learn to hate them. Behold, later, on the hills of Judea, that aged and white-haired man, that wandering fugitive, forsaken by his family, betrayed by his friends, and fleeing, oh, sorrow! before his own son. Hear his bitter complaints. Alas! hear him, more sorrowful still, when, having conquered his foes, he must exclaim, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" It is David! Ah! you thought forgiveness meant unconcern. Come and learn how God works out the education of the hearts which He would make partakers of his holiness. No; God forgets no one. Peter pardoned will bear with him everywhere the memory of his threefold denial; Paul pardoned will ever remember that he has persecuted the Church. God leaves to each of them a thorn, a painful thorn in the flesh, as if to remind them of what they were when it pleased Him to save them.

You seemed to look with mistrust upon a salvation without pain. Be comforted. The Lord has provided. Ask of those who surround you. Only the point in question is to know whether we are to suffer far from God in order to deserve forgiveness, or in His bosom because we have been forgiven. On this hangs everything.

If it is to deserve pardon, then, as we have already said, there is no need of mercy; then the Cross of Calvary is overthrown; and it is your own, brethren—beware!—your own, that you are raising in its stead. But if it is with God, if salvation is a free grace, if even David in the day when he exclaims, “I have sinned,” may be purified and rendered white as snow, ah! let him believe in that fountain of mercy, let him plunge in it, and fear not for his soul. Never will this holy love lead him astray. Those who make of it a plea in favour of their sins calumniate it and lose themselves; for if there is anything calculated to sanctify a soul, it surely is pardon. Pardon is heaven. Dare to say that it is dangerous for the soul to breathe the air of heaven. Pardon is God found anew. How could God not transform the heart which finds him thus? Leave God to save the sinner. He will not be at a loss how to achieve His work.

Such was the repentance of David, such also must be ours. But how could I conclude without pointing out the feature which sums up everything in this psalm, and which alone suffices to prove the sincerity of the guilty king’s repentance. David wishes to be forgiven, and why? That he may walk with God, that he may be His witness upon earth: “I will teach transgressors Thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto Thee.” Repentance, therefore, is, in reality, a change of life; anything short of this would fail to prove your sincerity. Is this your resolution? I expect to find you at work to-morrow, nay, to-day, walking with your Saviour, going only whither He can go with you, loving what He loves, fleeing what He condemns.

But if you are not sincere, if you do not wish to mend your life, I know what you will do. As your conscience speaks, as you cannot stifle its voice, you will endeavour to satisfy it by a show of penitence. You will urge your

soul to sorrow, you will seek religious emotions which will bewilder you, you will shed bitter tears. You will comfort yourselves by these very emotions, and, without having made one step towards true conversion, you will return to the world to-morrow more frivolous, more unconcerned, more dissolute than ever.

Know, however, that the holiest thing in the world—the forgiveness of God—is not to be trifled with. Know that fruitless penitence at length wears out the soul, that each of those factitious emotions deprives it of a portion of its frankness and of its energy. Know that the voice of conscience, if too often silenced, loses its power and becomes an insipid formula. Know that there are souls which nought can move, neither promises nor threats, neither the love of God nor His anger. Know, finally, that many a dying sinner has wished to repent, but for him repentance has been an impossibility, and ask yourselves if it is thus you wish to die.

O God, grant us a repentance which will transform us, and give us grace to walk in Thy presence henceforth, with the freedom of a son before his Father and the holy fear of a sinner before God!

## XIX.

*LITTLE THINGS.*

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much.”  
—LUKE xvi. 10.

WHEN we study the work of God in creation, it presents itself to us under two equally admirable aspects: the infinitely great and the infinitely small. On the one hand, we have those immeasurable distances of the universe which no figures can express, and in presence of which our imagination stands still in awe; those endless ages unfolding one after the other throughout all eternity. On the other hand, we have that not less marvellous spectacle of life with all its wonders displaying itself in a space which is imperceptible to the human eye, those masterpieces of organisation, of mechanism, of structure, concentrated in beings of which a single drop of water can contain thousands. . . . Two infinites which alike fill us with amazement!

And if we cast our eyes upon humanity alone, we Christians who believe in the intervention of God in its history, a similar spectacle strikes us. On the one hand, we see the sublime and oft terrible action by which God leads the nations at His will, making of certain tribes the instruments of His wrath, moving down thousands of lives by war, by storms, by epidemics, effacing, as has been the case in America, a national iniquity in torrents

of blood. On the other hand, we adore that paternal Providence which forgets not one of its creatures, which counts our sorrows and tears, and for which no being is too small or too insignificant. Accordingly, in little things as well as in great, we adore Divine wisdom and bow before its purposes.

Let us descend from these heights. From the works of God, let us pass on to the works of man. We may do so without pride, since man was created in the image of God. We also, in our lowly existence, have a twofold activity; before us are placed duties great and small. Great duties impose themselves upon us with strong evidence; we are constantly reminded of them, and we cannot neglect them without, at once, hearing the exhortations and warnings of our conscience. Therefore I will not refer to them to-day; I shall draw your attention to the faithfulness we are called to bring to the accomplishment of the little duties of life.

But at the very outset, I meet with several dangers which I must, first of all, point out.

In the first place, if, with Scripture, I lay before you the importance of small duties, I do not mean to say that you are to become fully absorbed by them. That is the danger of shallow minds. From the way in which they set to work, it would seem that little things alone are of importance; they continually hold them out to us, they weary others and confuse themselves with them. Every detail is for them an event, every obstacle a mountain, every anxiety a crushing burden. Accordingly their life is a busy, bustling, restless thing which leaves their soul neither peace nor serenity. Such must be incessantly reminded that small duties are to be performed in a great spirit, that they must be referred to the noble sentiments which are the springs of action of the Christian life, and that the soul, even in the midst

of the most agitated life, must tend towards a higher aim, just as the skiff on the dancing waves makes for the port under the firm hand of the pilot who guides it. Let us take another illustration: the trees must not prevent us from seeing the forest, or, in other words, the duties of each successive hour must not prevent us from taking in the whole of life. Martha, absorbed by her household cares, must not prevent Mary from coming, peacefully and contemplatively, to sit at the feet of her Lord.

Secondly, observe that, if I recommend small duties, I do not mean to say that they are to be preferred to greater. This is the danger of pharisaism. When the soul forgets its true destination, which is the service of God in love, it transfers upon unimportant objects the need of holiness by which it is tormented; and the more insignificant these objects, the more ardently and fanatically does it pursue them. Remember the Scribes of the Gospel straining a gnat, paying the tithes of the meane-t herbs, counting the number of steps which might be taken on the Sabbath day. To-day habits and customs are changed, but the same spirit manifests itself. Thus, the superstitious Roman Catholic will plunge into the most minute observances, and the stranger these will be, the more valuable also will they become in his sight. Thus, the sectarian Protestant, losing sight of the grand instructions of the Gospel, will easily imagine that little things possess I know not what particular holiness: a small Church, a little flock, ordinary remarks of edification upon a subject of detail reserved for the most advanced Christians, all these will be his objects of predilection, and, far from wishing to enlarge the circle of the Divine mercies, he will prefer restraining it to the measure of his own narrowed heart. Alas! and he will peradventure forget justice, love, and holiness!



Deplorable error which has often served to justify the preventions of unbelief! Those who fall into it must be energetically reminded that we are not permitted to reverse the Divine order of things; that there are in life duties which are clearly indicated; pressing, imperious duties to which God wishes all others to be subordinate; that these duties are the grand moral lines to which all commandments of detail must be referred, just as the rivulets which traverse the valleys must, that they may not become transformed into marshes, flow towards the river in whose region they have taken their source;—that, if this be not considered, piety goes astray, and that, by separating itself from moral life, it falls into ridiculous and often odious extremes.

But it is not only the narrow-minded who are in danger of becoming fully engrossed in little things; it is often, on the contrary, in the noblest and most sincere natures that conscience reaches the highest degree of sensibility. Here we are in presence of one of the most real and most painful religious phenomena I know of, namely, the disease of over-scrupulousness. Have you never met with any of those souls preoccupied to the highest degree with finding out what is the Divine will and living in constant dread lest they should fail to acquire an adequate knowledge of it? Troubled, anxious, trembling, they dare not take a decision, make one step, utter one word without a scrupulous pre-examination, and, ever absorbed, on the one hand, by their painful recollections of a past whose errors they deplore and on the other by apprehensions as regards a future whose snares they dread, they lose all confidence, joy, and peace. This is a touching error, which commands our respect, for these very scruples betoken a serious search after holiness; nevertheless, it is also a perfidious error, for it robs the soul of all its vigour and energy; it

destroys in it the inspiration of love by bringing it back to the servile fear of the slave, and, sinking it into hopeless sorrow, it gives piety a morbid and repulsive character.

Those who have fallen into its toils must be reminded that salvation is a mercy, and that, by continually bringing into question its efficacy, by making it wholly dependent upon the incessant fluctuations of their troubled conscience, they constantly give the lie to the Divine promises, they forget that God is an all-pardoning God, they set at nought the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. They must be reminded that the God of the Gospel will not be served by slaves, but by children, and that He expects of them a filial confidence and a joyful trust. They must, finally, be told that the Gospel bids them rejoice because joy is a power, because alone it enlightens and warms the soul; to their downcast eyes the love of God must be presented such as it was revealed in His Son until they learn to read upon the Cross of Calvary the joyous assurance of Christian liberty which alone enfranchises the soul and restores it to life.

I have pointed out the dangers presented by the subject before us; I have removed the obstacles which might have impeded our march. I now go straight to my text, and the first thing which strikes me is the vast importance of those small duties which Jesus Christ recommends in it.

Look closer and you will see that little things, small virtues, small sacrifices, small duties, in a word, form the whole texture of the moral life of individuals as well as of societies. Have you ever taken into consideration the vast number of obscure sacrifices and forgotten actions which are daily required in order that a grand result may be obtained, nay, in order that good be not overborne by evil in that struggle which they have waged with one

another from the beginning of the world? When we read the account of a battle, we generally see nothing beyond the skilful tactics and the heroic charge which, in the decisive hour, produced victory; but we must not forget the clever calculations, the slow and complicated works, the multiplied precautions, the unknown labour which, at the given moment, rendered the final manoeuvre possible, and placed at the general's disposal well-disciplined, well-fed, well-rested soldiers, well armed for the battle, and provided with all that was necessary. Suppose one of those insignificant details had been omitted, suppose one of the general's orders had been neglected, suppose one of the advanced vedettes had feared to peril his life by uttering the cry of alarm, and who can tell if victory would not have been changed into defeat?

This is a striking image of Christian life. When we cast a superficial glance upon the reign of God here below, we see only the grand struggles and the grand triumphs, only the glorious results which are connected with the names of great men; but we forget all the perseverance and abnegation, all the hidden prayers and tears, all the privations and sacrifices that have been required ere a moral triumph could be won. Obscure actions, sacrifices buried in oblivion, prayers apparently lost! All these were nothing, you would perhaps have said. True, all these were nothing. They are nothing also, those imperceptible grains of sand which cover the shores of the sea; taken separately, they scarcely would cause the balance to oscillate; nevertheless, when clustered together, they stay the rush of the waves, and say to the raging ocean, "Thou shalt go no farther."

Accordingly, I feel no surprise when, in history, I see that the greatest men have precisely been those who have paid most attention to little things. In the political

or military order, as well as in the domain of art or poetry, all true geniuses have been men of detail; never have they judged of little things as being below their notice. True, they have never allowed themselves to be fully absorbed by them, but never have they thought it possible to dispense with them. On the contrary, it is by making themselves familiar with all the little drudgeries of their art or science that they have learned to master it at will. Examples of this abound. Here is Cæsar minutely recounting in his Commentaries the exact measures of the intrenchments of his soldiers or of the bridges which they have built at his command. Here is Michael Angelo curbing the ardour of his genius to study with a scholar's patience the play of the muscles and the laws of anatomy. Here is Rembrandt unwilling to trust any but himself with the grinding and mixing of the colours which give their magical tint to his immortal paintings. Here is Racine seeking with indefatigable perseverance the correct expression, the fitting word which alone can exactly render his thought. Here is Napoleon governing empires, but growing angry in presence of the slightest error which his eagle-eye detected in the calculations that were referred to him. But let us set aside these examples, and return to the Gospel. Who can deny that Jesus Christ has accomplished the most extraordinary and the most mighty revolution which the world has ever seen? Well, it is Jesus Christ who has taught us what, in the moral order, is the value of the sinner's tears, of the widow's mite, of the publican's humble sigh, of those little things for which none had cared before Him. Jesus Christ! How can we pronounce His name without being reminded that His life is the most admirable commentary of the words we are now meditating, "Faithful in that which is least?" Would you know the secret, if this word I

may use, of the prodigious work by which He has conquered the world? See him in Galilee, beside those humble and lowly ones whom God gave Him as His first disciples. Does He look upon them as unworthy of His attention? Is He preoccupied with seeking a wider scene for His activity? Does He think that the soul of a Samaritan woman is incapable of comprehending His instructions, or that He is labouring in vain when He teaches sinners and publicans? No, Jesus is faithful in the accomplishment of the humblest duties, faithful towards each of His disciples, even towards the most unintelligent and tardy to believe, faithful towards each soul He meets, towards each sorrow which God calls Him to comfort. No work of restoration and salvation is beneath His notice, and it is often in the lowliest sphere that His Divine wisdom and His mercy shed forth their most dazzling lustre.

Therefore, everything in the world and in the Gospel tells of fidelity in matters of detail.

Now, how do we accomplish this duty which is laid before us in a manner so clear, so evident, so imperious? On this point I will appeal to your own testimony and to your own conscience.

You, my brother, for instance, you have a grand ideal of holiness. The moral beauties of the Gospel attract and subdue you; and when we tell you of a life consecrated to God, of a joyless and, if need be, crucified life, we are sure to awaken a noble ambition, an enthusiastic admiration in your soul. When you compare modern society or even the Church of the present day with this ideal, then bitter and sorrowful words escape your lips. You condemn your epoch, you point out all its pollution, all its meanness, all its turpitudes, and you say, "Who will restore mortal rectitude, obedience to principle, the authority of conscience to the world"? I understand

and admire that holy ambition. Would to God it were more universally spread and fired all our souls!

Here is an immediate occasion for realizing in detail that holiness which you so much admire in the gross. Here is a luxurious and sensual habit to be retrenched from your daily enjoyments. You loathe the corruption of your epoch, you deplore the laxity of its morals. Well, here, in your own life, are lusts to be quenched, unwholesome reading to be given up, a frivolous society with whom all intercourse should be interrupted, a connection which disquiets your heart, and which should be broken off. But what! You draw back! Where is the generous ardour which but a moment ago expressed itself in burning words, where is that moral firmness of which you were so proud, where is that noble disinterestedness? Vainly do I seek them now that the hour for action has come. That is because in reality those acts of devotion and self-denial of which I speak are too insignificant for you. Were you called to great sacrifices, to striking actions, you would be found ready, but in the unpretending duties of life where is your fidelity?

You, my brother, have a grand ideal of charity. That is the feature which strikes you most in the Gospel; it is this aspect of the Cross which most powerfully attracts and subdues you. You feel a thrill of emotion in presence of the work of restoration and love which the Lord expects of you, you embrace the whole of humanity in your sympathy, and in particular, its poor and destitute members. You long most ardently for the advent of the reign of righteousness, and gladly hail its approach. Noble desire! holy ambition! Would to God all our hearts were filled with it!

Here is an opportunity for exercising that charity by which you are thus animated. Here, at your door, is a

beggar, a wretch in rags; here is a misery, surely not ideal or poetical, but low, vulgar, defiled perhaps; or here is a Christian work which needs your aid. What is required of you? A trifling sacrifice, one pleasure less, a little less of luxury in your dwelling, a little more of simplicity in your life. Or here, beside you, are soured hearts, whose sufferings a word of sympathy might alleviate; here is a rancour to be effaced, an offended brother to be brought back to your affection, or a wandering soul to be brought back to God. Nay, it is even less than this. The question is simply to show in your daily life a little condescension and meekness, a little of that humility which thinks not of self: . . . the question is merely to repress a bitter spirit of judgment, a hateful predilection for biting words, which leave behind so many poisoned wounds. . . . But what! you remain inactive! Where is that ardent sympathy, that profound love of humanity, which caused your heart to throb? I understand such duties are too unpretending for you. They weary and annoy you, they are all alike. It is continually the same appeals, the same complaints, the same lamentations. Ah! you are willing to love humanity at large, and for it you would perhaps die a martyr's death; but in little things where is your charity?

You, my brother, have a grand ideal of the Church and of its destinies. You delight in reverting in imagination to its heroic age, when, in the amphitheatre or on the burning pile, it triumphed over the world while succumbing beneath its blows. As you think of the divisions by which it is now rent, and of its sufferings, you sorrowfully exclaim, Who will restore us the Church of olden time? Noble ambition! would to God it seized upon us all, and that the zeal of God's house fired each of our hearts! Now here is an immediate opportunity of raising the Church or extending its limits. The Gospel is

to be spread in an obscure locality, schools are to be established, a missionary is to be sent to some foreign land . . . Nay, it is less than this even. The question is simply for you to defend, in a conversation, some attacked truth, or to confess the despised name of Jesus Christ. . . . It is less than this still. . . . You are required to fill some humble office in the Church ; to show by the very assiduity with which you will accomplish its meanest duties, what is your faith, your principles, the general direction of your life. All these duties are very small, alas ! too small, perhaps, for you to feel their importance ; and trampling them under foot, or, to say the least, setting them continually aside, you wait for the advent of the great day of the Lord ; you look forward to the grand future of the Church, and you forget that the Church to-day is suffering and pining away through the unconcern and apathy of men who think as you think and do as you do.

You have, doubtless, observed that all these examples bear the same character. In all of them imagination takes the place of conscience, and admiration that of will. Let us beware ! All Christian virtues, holiness, faith, love, devotion, have their grand and luminous side, which strikes and touches even the most insensible souls. Nothing is easier than to give way to these emotions ; but when all these grand things are to be realised in detail, then we perceive that they involve innumerable sacrifices, sacrifices which, for the most part, are obscure and unpretending ; then we perceive that we must come in collision with many a repulsive duty ; that we must submit to bow beneath the yoke of obedience ; that we must renounce human glory, and bear what Scripture rightly calls the reproach of Jesus Christ. Now, that is precisely what we are anxious to avoid. Thus overlooking small duties, we comfort and reassure ourselves



with the thought that what has most deeply affected and penetrated us in the Gospel has been its grandest and most sublime points; and we do not reflect that this very emotion, this very admiration, render our responsibility still more terrible, and that, in the last day, God will not ask us if we have admired His Gospel, but if we have believed in Him, if we have confessed Him, if we have lived for His glory.

We have still to show what are the logical and inevitable consequences to which the neglect of small duties fatally leads.

The first result of this neglect is the gradual weakening and decline of religious life in the soul. And why? Because, as we have already said, life is commonly made up of small duties, and because, by daily overlooking them, we finally die to true life. Very small is the number of those who are called to striking actions or heroic deeds, and even for such, these actions and sacrifices are required of them only once or twice during their whole life-course. Our common destiny will probably be modest, unnoticed . . . ; it is to little duties that God will doubtless call us. What will become of us if we neglect them? Nothing strengthens faith and moral energy as much as unbroken fidelity; a multitude of unknown actions, of trifling sacrifices, eventually form a compact and indissoluble mass resembling those Roman walls which have remained standing amongst the heaped-up ruins of centuries, because they are composed of tiny stones joined together by an indestructible cement. On the contrary, nothing weakens the soul as much as petty but multiplied infidelities. Each of them separately is as nothing, yet each of them shakes the moral life and loosens some of its parts till the day when, under the stroke of some sudden temptation, the entire edifice crumbles into dust in one moment.

To this first result is added another more terrible still. Reflect seriously upon this : by neglecting small duties, conscience becomes obliterated, it insensibly loses its uprightness and sensibility, and this all the more rapidly that it is warned or alarmed by no crying scandal. Not that it becomes utterly silent; on the contrary, it protests; at each of our faults it utters a deep groan; but who is not aware of the fact that its voice may be stifled even by sanctimonious words and by the sounds of an apparently fervent and piously employed life? Thus man goes on deceiving himself more and more.

But he does not deceive others, brethren. The world has a penetrating eye, and soon detects the secret laxities and the inconsistencies of a religious life. The world which often disdains the Gospel, nevertheless expects much of the Gospel; I appeal, in support of my affirmation, to the extreme severity with which it judges Christians. The world, and this must not surprise you, is not easily taken in by pious discourses or fair appearances; it will resolutely require of you fidelity in small duties, and if its expectations be not realised, your piety will be, in its opinion, as the empty sound of a clashing cymbal. If it finds you consistent with your principles, scrupulous in the observance of insignificant duties, I do not say that it will love you more (for how could it love you when it hated Jesus Christ?), but in reality and in spite of itself it will do you justice, or if its lips condemn, its conscience will approve, and though it may curse you, yet will it feel your power and come inevitably under your influence. That is the most powerful and the only true apology for Christianity, compared with which all our affirmations are as nothing.

We must conclude, and my first conclusion will be a warning. Be faithful in that which is least, and, in the first place, be faithful in small temptations.

It was a lustful glance that lost David, it was the simple question of a servant-girl that lost Peter, it was an avaricious thought that lost Judas. Great temptations are less to be feared; they warn and alarm us by their very greatness; they call forth all our moral vigour, all our powers of resistance, and often save us by the dread which they inspire. If, for instance, the world should tell you to deny Jesus Christ, and to desert His cause, you would shrink back in terror. But it will surround you with its blandishments, it will lavish its praises upon your talents and virtues, it will tell you that you are losing your strength and your influence in too gloomy a piety; and if you yield to its seductions, it will govern you so completely, that one day you will be ashamed of that Cross beneath whose shadow it is now your hope to die. Again, if the world should tell you to hate one of your brethren, all your generous instincts would rise against this thought; but it will awaken in you a slight feeling of jealousy which will not alarm you in the least, and, if you entertain it secretly, that heart which now is so loving, so sympathetic, will soon fall a prey to bitter sentiments, to a hellish blending of envy and detestable passions. If the world should tell you to yield to the flesh, and to bring your soul under its shameful bondage, all your instinctive nobility of sentiment would loudly protest; but by one unchaste look it will cast a secret disquiet in your breast, and if you yield to it, all the powers of an unbridled passion will bear you away as they will, until the day when you will awake to find yourself wallowing in the mire of vice. Ask those fallen beings whose very sight is loathsome to you, and whom the world crushes with its scorn, ask them the secret of their history. How many of them commenced their downward course by a great fall? Very few. An apparently innocent habit, a small temp-

tation gave the first impulse towards the abyss of perdition. It was a mere nothing, they said, but that mere nothing lost them.

Here is a ship setting sail at dawn; the breeze fills her sails; majestically she advances towards the open sea, all eyes follow her, and joyful cries hail her passage out of port. But with what sorrowful looks would you look after her if you knew that, in the depth of her hold, by an imperceptible fissure, the water is entering drop by drop without one moment's interruption; if you knew that while the sun shines and all is joy and gladness upon her deck, death is stealthily invading her, and will soon swallow up its prey; if you knew that far out on the fathomless ocean, in the silence of the approaching night, she will suddenly go down!

Alas! how many have we seen of those Christian lives advancing, they also joyfully and trustingly, on the ocean of life. The Church followed them lovingly, and already hailed their brilliant destiny; but in their hidden depths some new-born passion was noiselessly giving entrance to the seductions of the world, to its pleasures and lusts. Everything has sunk, . . . and now all that is left us is the sad and heart-rending memory of those souls whom the world has entrapped in its snares, and over whom the angels of God with us mourn. Brethren, beware of small temptations.

Again, be faithful in the least opportunities you have of serving God. Be faithful, for, as we have already said, nothing strengthens us more than unbroken fidelity. Be faithful, that you may attain a stronger faith, a deeper sanctification. Be faithful, and after each sacrifice which you will have made for truth, holiness, justice, you will feel that these are not mere abstractions but the most real things in the world. And, in fact, who does not see that in the service of God each faculty which He has given

us is developed by exercise and weakened by inaction? Here is a conscience, careless at first, which having obeyed the voice of duty in a first trial, becomes more delicate, more keenly sensitive. Here is a heart, hitherto happy in its selfishness, which having answered the first call of God, has opened to the true life of devotion and love. Here is a soul, long wavering and undecided, which having, in spite of all sophisms, on one occasion followed the truth, feels its faith growing stronger and stronger until it reaches to the possession of the eternal realities. Thus in every domain is accomplished this strange saying of the Gospel: "Unto every one that hath shall be given;" thus, under the blessing of a faithful God, the fidelity of the Christian bears its fruits and brings with it its own reward.

Again I say, be faithful in the little which God has given you. It is on this point that fidelity is often the most difficult, and Jesus acknowledges this sufficiently when, in a striking parable, He shows us the servant who had received but one talent despising that which he has received, and giving himself up to envy, to anger, and to cowardly discouragement. Striking image of the temptations of poverty which the Gospel has never flattered, and of which it points out at the same time the blessings and the perils. Oh, you to whom God has denied the blessings of earth, and who have often said with bitterness that if you possessed them you would be faithful in their use, more faithful than those whom you envy, beware lest in casting upon your brethren a look of anger, you forget what is still left you; beware lest you become so completely blinded by ingratitude as to scorn that which God has left you. Ah! how can you consider yourselves destitute and incapable of action when you are in the service of a Master who has said that a glass of cold water given in His name will not

lose its reward? Up to this time, sadly looking to yourselves alone, and mourning over your miserable lot, you have ignored all the good you may do, you have despised the sublime mission to which God has called you. It is time to learn it. Heirs of eternity, servants of God, awake, and in the humble position where God has placed you, show us what a loving heart can do to prove its love to Him. Show us all the resources it can call forth, all the work it can accomplish. Prove by your example that the last often may become the first, and that the feeble are called to confound the strong. Courage! the reign of justice is approaching. It comes, the day when all the seeming grandeurs of selfishness and pride will appear in their hideous nakedness, but when the humblest and most obscure life which will have glorified God here below will shine with eternal glory. Happy those who in that day will hear the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Grant, O God, that we may be among those who will hear them, among those who, from this day forth, will seek their encouragement in Thy approbation and their reward in Thy love!

## XX.

## SIMEON.

“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law, then took he Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said: Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.”—LUKE ii. 25-32.

EVERYTHING is simple in the narrative we have just read. Nothing there to recall the ostentatious grandeur, the puerile succession of prodigies with which religious systems generally surround the infancy of their prophets and of their gods. See Mary and Joseph entering the Temple of Jerusalem. Who would have imagined that so grand a destiny hung over the child whom they had come to present to the Lord? No retinue attends them, no striking miracle marks the ceremony which they now accomplish, and St. Luke merely tells us, in passing, that they offered to God two turtle-doves, that is, the sacrifice of the poorest. Then appears Simeon, that Simeon of whom the legends of the Church have made now a priest, now a Pharisee, now a glorious personage, as if the Gospel had

need of our worldly distinctions, and as if it had not conferred upon him a nobility sufficiently high when it had summed up his character in these simple words: "He was a just man, and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." Yes, everything is perfectly simple in this scene, and yet who of us can read it without emotion? How beautiful is that figure of the aged Simeon, of that man whose whole life has been but one long expectation, and who now sees the realisation of all the desires of his heart! How touching are the words which escape his lips: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace!" How lively is the faith by which he hails, in a little child, the Saviour of men, and proclaims His destinies, the full accomplishment of which is daily approaching. Does it not seem to you that Simeon is the representative of all the believers of the ancient covenant, of all those who, during long ages, have sighed for deliverance, of all those who have foretold and expected it? Does it not seem to you as if you saw in him the Church of the patriarchs and prophets taking the new-born Christ in its feeble arms and presenting Him to the Church of the future with the words: "As for me, my task is finished; behold Him whom I have so ardently desired; behold thy Saviour and thy King!"

Let us meditate upon this narrative, and may it become for each of us a reality. Why should we not all find here what Simeon found in the Temple, namely, a Saviour? But if he found the Saviour there, let us remember that it was because he went thither moved "by the Holy Spirit." Is it the Spirit of God that has led us to this sanctuary? Oh, sorrowful thought! when on this Christmas Day we see our churches filled, how can we avoid thinking of all those whom formalism alone has brought there? How can we avoid thinking that, strangers to God all the rest of the year, they are satisfied, and be-



lieve they have done their duty when, on similar occasions, they grant Him a few moments' divided attention? In times of holy festival they flock to the house of God, there to behold once again the most touching mementoes of the God of the Gospel; they come and sit in turn before the cradle, the cross, or the open sepulchre of Jesus, and when they have learned once more how much God has loved them, and of how vast a mercy they have been the objects, they conclude therefrom that they may plunge anew, body and soul, in the vortex of business, of the world, and of sin. They reassure themselves by thinking of the religious emotions which they have experienced, as if those very emotions themselves did not render their habitual indifference more guilty, and their levity more inexcusable. . . . O Holy Spirit, if there be any amongst us who have come hither without having felt Thy Divine attraction, without having heard Thy voice, speak to their hearts, as well as to our own, that they and we, attracted by Thee like Simeon, may like him also be led to contemplate and to bless Him whose humiliation and mercy this day recalls!

Simeon, we are told, waited for the consolation of Israel. In these short but striking words we discover a thought unknown to the ancient world, and which gave to the Jewish nation an incomparable grandeur. Israel is a *waiting* people. Whilst other nations grow, conquer, and extend their limits, whilst their only thoughts are of power and external prosperity, Israel waits. Even in the most glorious days of its history, it turns its eyes towards the future. This little nation has a vast, a strange ambition: it expects the reign of God upon earth. . . . Ah! I know full well all the carnal and interested motives that mingled with this ambition; I know that, for the great majority of the people, the reign of God was the reign of Israel, a brilliant Jeru-

salem, an enlarged territory, enemies trampled under foot, a lofty dominion over all the nations of the world; but all truly pious and holy souls took another view of "the consolation of Israel." For them it signified, above all, deliverance, pardon, salvation. It was for the glory of God that they thirsted, it was truly His reign that they expected upon earth.

Yet how few they were, the souls that grew not weary in their expectations! For more than four hundred years no prophet had appeared to revive their hope. The stranger ruled in Jerusalem; every day Roman centurions trod the holy ground where rested the bones of the fathers; in Moses' seat, proud and hypocritical priests read over, without understanding them, the promises of Scripture; religious formalism wrapped the entire nation as in a leaden shroud; instead of the sublime effusions of the piety of bygone days, nought was heard but the monotonous prayers of the Pharisees, sounding like a funeral knell. At rare intervals, some high-souled believers rekindled for a moment the faith of Israel, but these passing gleams, soon extinguished, left the night darker still than before. The Sadducees, the scoffers, the reasoners of that time doubtless asked, mockingly, where was the promise of the Messiah. Nevertheless, in the midst of that icy indifference, Simeon still waits. Neither the flow of time, nor the wretched condition into which Israel has fallen, nor the sneers of the unbelievers, nor the indifference of the priests, nor the strange silence of God, who seems to have deserted His cause, nor his advancing age, nor his white hairs which tell him that the time of illusions is past, can shake his indomitable hope. Resting upon the Divine promise which he sets against all he sees, against all he hears, against all the doubts of his intellect, against all the discouragements of his heart, Simeon believes, he waits,

he hopes until the day when he can exclaim: "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." What an example is such a life as this, and for us believers of this age, what a striking lesson!

Do not be mistaken on this point; a Christian is indeed a man who waits. Oh! I know that the Christ is come. He is come, He who hath the words of eternal life, and to whom should we go but unto Him? He is come, He who alone can quench our thirst after righteousness, pardon, holiness, love; He is come, and we have known Him, and we would have Him hold in our hearts the most sacred place. No, we do not expect another, for we believe that neither earth nor heaven could produce a holiness superior to His, or a more sublime charity than that which He has so magnificently revealed upon the Cross. But if Christ is come, His kingdom is yet to come, and it is this kingdom that we are waiting for. Are you of those who expect it, of those who turn an anxious eye towards the future, because the present fails to satisfy them? Yes, you will doubtless answer; for where is the man who would declare himself fully satisfied? All who suffer grow weary of the present; they wait, they hope. But I do not here refer to the suffering of the egotist who hopes to find to-morrow what is denied him to-day. Every suffering which bears upon self alone is selfish in its principle. No, tell me not of those restless aspirations, of that melancholy which is caused by discouragement, by wounded pride, by envy, by discontent at an inferior position, by secret anger at not occupying the first rank. In all this there is nothing grand; and however poetic your grief may appear to you, it is none the less a mean, petty and fruitless sorrow.

Here I address those who seek and suffer, because they hunger and thirst after truth and righteousness, and

because they see around them error, selfishness, and corruption. Those are the waiting souls. They wait all the more ardently that they love Jesus Christ. And, in fact, how, after having beheld in Him purity, moral harmony, and in particular, love in all its fulness, could they give up the hope of seeing these virtues elsewhere, and be content to take mankind and the world such as they are, such as sin has made them? Consequently, I will show you men whom the world might have rendered perfectly happy, men who had talent, power, wealth, affection, all that can make life beautiful, but who, having once contemplated Jesus Christ, have felt that henceforth all this would fail to satisfy them. A burning thirst after holiness has taken possession of their soul, and so long as they have to struggle with the sin that besets them, with the lusts that degrade them, they are not satisfied—they wait. They have beheld Jesus Christ, they have seen His love, their heart has opened to all the unredressed wrongs, to all the unalleviated sorrows of humanity; the more penetrating becomes the eye of their charity, the more does this spectacle overpower them. At sight of so much real and bitter misery, of so many bleeding wounds around them, they feel oppressed, they ask God that His kingdom may come, they wait. . . .

Ah! if our heart could love with a love more vast, more generous, more unselfish, if all sufferings and acts of injustice awakened a bitter sorrow in our conscience, would we not all, like Simeon, wait for the consolation of Israel?

But, in order to be sincere, we must confess that the number is very small of those who suffer thus and who feel the ardent need of taking refuge in the expectation of God's kingdom. Let us not flatter mankind, let us not assign too generous causes to our griefs, and to our

distaste for the world. Let us humbly acknowledge that when a man possesses health, strength, talent, and fortune, when he succeeds in the world, his soul must indeed be strongly inflamed with love to God to long passionately for His kingdom. Let us acknowledge that between our words and our true dispositions there is, in this respect, a contrast which is often derisive, and that if the Christianity of our period has struck the melancholy chords of the soul, if it has spoken of great sorrows, of ideal aspirations, this language appears very declamatory and very vague to the man who sees how easily satisfied, how busily engaged in present interests, how deeply sunk in ease and worldliness are our lives.

Well! what is required in order that this language may become sincere? Affliction. Affliction, not only with its heavy blows, but with the hard and repulsive trial of patience. Then it is that our heart understands for the first time what, so far, it has only caught a glimpse of. Admit it, ye Christians who think you love God, you must suffer here below that you may understand how God is contemned by the world; you must exhaust all the deceptions of earth that you may learn to long after the land where righteousness dwells. Is not that our common experience?

You delighted, for instance, in speaking of the reign of truth, of the triumph of justice. Thinking upon all the iniquities which oppress humanity, oft had your imagination taken its flight towards the time when the cause of God will finally triumph. You had perhaps thought that to indulge in such dreams was to expect the reign of God. Suddenly injustice sweeps down upon you, it enters your heart like a sharp and poisoned arrow; you feel a treacherous hand thrusting the dart deeper into the bleeding wound. Ah! how ardently and sincerely you now invoke the just Judge! The prayer which now

escapes your lips is no longer a burst of your imagination, but a cry of your heart! All the oppressions of earth reveal themselves to you in their appalling reality, and with tears and groans you call for the day of supreme reparation.

You spoke with emotion of the sufferings of mankind; this sympathy, I willingly believe, was natural to you. Moreover, it is the great current of modern piety; the sufferings of the poor, of the ignorant, hitherto too much neglected, now impose themselves upon the Church. Your thoughts were turned in that direction: the poetic, the grand idea of Christ as the Comforter was, of all others, dearest to you. But when you were called to descend from those hazy regions of sympathy to meet with real sorrow under its vulgar and oft repulsive features, what then became of your charity? Suddenly here is sorrow reaching you personally; here you are groaning under the pangs of a cruel disease, suspended between life and death, or struck with sudden distress and with a terrible affliction. Is it not true that at such times the veil which had hidden the world of the suffering from your sight is rent, and that now before you appear all who suffer, alas! without sympathy, all who have neither your consolations nor your resources? Your own grief lends a more heart-rending accent to all those forgotten sorrows, and with renewed ardour you call for the reign of the Comforter.

Thus, under the blows of trial, our soul learns to desire the eternal realities. Thus, after having begun to mourn over ourselves, we embrace at one glance the world which knows not God, and unite our prayers with that deep longing of the whole creation which St. Paul tells of. To wait! that is our common calling. We are servants whose Master is in exile and who await His return. Ah! guard that grand hope in the depths of your hearts, let

not that Divine flame be extinguished by the breath of indifference or unbelief. Like Simeon, you will have to struggle against all the temptations of doubt, against all the sneers of scoffers. Men will tell you: "Where is the promise of His coming?" They will tell you of the Gospel gradually losing its power; they will affirm that God no longer interposes to defend His cause; they will set before you the feebleness and the divisions of the Church, the defections of those who desert the standard of Christ, the scepticism of scholars, the hostility of the multitudes. Well, like Simeon, hope against hope, fly for refuge to the Word of the faithful God, and, safe upon that rock, wait, wait still. The day of the Lord will come. Happy those who will see its advent; but happier still, in the great day of final retribution, those who, without having seen its dawn, have died fixing their eyes upon the east and firmly trusting in the fidelity of God!

The second feature which strikes me in Simeon is the greatness of his faith. To appreciate it aright, let us cast off our own notions, let us set aside that deceitful prism through which infant Christianity appears to us enveloped in the most magnificent tints of grandeur and poetry. What does Simeon see in the Temple of Jerusalem? A poor child brought thither by poor parents. What more frail, what more uncertain than His future? A child without glory, without appearance! Yet in this child he discovers Him who is to be the glory of Israel, and what is more marvellous still and utterly foreign to a Jewish mind, Him who is to enlighten and raise the Gentiles. What a sublime destiny! Accordingly it is the whole of mankind that Simeon gives as His retinue to the little child whom he bears in his arms. Never were loftier hopes attached to so frail a basis! Never did a bolder faith launch out into the infinite, relying

upon the word of God! Well, was Simeon mistaken? I appeal to unbelief itself. Let it tell us whether all the facts announced by him have not been realised; whether the name of that child has not become, I do not merely say the glory of Israel, but the highest glory of all humanity; whether the Gentiles whose restoration Simeon thus predicted, raised indeed by Jesus Christ, have not formed, under His adorable name, a spiritual family which continually increases and pretends to absorb in its bosom the whole of mankind; or rather, let it hear the song of Simeon himself repeated every Christmas Day in all parts of the earth by the increasing choir of the Church of the redeemed!

Brethren, have you the faith of Simeon? But what do I say? Do we need to make so sublime an effort as he? Compare for a moment, I pray you, our situation with his. Simeon believed when Jesus was a little child only a few days old. For eighteen centuries now Jesus has lived and has given life to the world. Simeon believed when Jesus had no other train than Joseph and Mary. You see Him surrounded by the prophets who announced Him, by the apostles who preached Him, by the redeemed of all ages who all proclaim that in Him alone they have found pardon, light, and peace. Simeon believed when Jesus had yet performed no mighty deed. You have seen, I do not say simply His three years' ministry, His incomparable life, His stupendous miracles, but you have seen His work uninterruptedly pursued and gradually extending; you have seen His Gospel, everywhere victorious, waging against iniquity, error, and corruption, an implacable war; you have seen His Church, a thousand times ready to perish, ever rising again and growing in spite of threats, persecution, and scorn; you have seen Christ accomplishing around you, in the very depths of souls, the most as-



tonishing and the most undeniable of works, the conversion of the will, the renewal of affections,—a change, in a word, which none but Himself could have effected; you have seen Him taking possession of souls to-day just as well as when His eye rested with its wondrous power of attraction upon Levi or Zacchæus; you have seen what His name can do in the bitter temptation of suffering, or at the solemn hour of death when illusion is impossible, when man is on the point of appearing before the supreme Judge, and must obtain pardon, at any cost; you have, it may be, heard dying lips utter, with a last benediction, that adorable name which summed up a whole life of faith, love, and long expectation. All this, if others have ignored it, you have seen, you have been its witnesses, and yet, you do not believe. That is not all, Simeon believed when Jesus had done nothing for him. But you have seen His love in all its magnificence; you have been led to the foot of the Cross; you have been told of His mercy and of His abasement; you have seen the body which Simeon held in his arms pierced with nails, struck with rods and streaming with blood; you have seen those eyes vainly seeking a Father's face; you have heard those lips uttering the most sublime words amidst the most fearful anguish; you have been told that you were the objects of that unspeakable love; alas! you have doubtless known this long; this thought has touched you sometimes. But when you should have believed, you have drawn back: before the prospect of a Christian life and of the sacrifices it involves, before the judgments of men, you have fled, refusing even that effort of attention and goodwill without which serious faith is impossible; before so many witnesses who call you, before that Cross where so many sinners like yourselves have found their only refuge, before that love which confounds even angels, you remain undecided, keeping back the heart which God claims of you,

or determining, by an odious calculation, to give it to Him only when the world will have had enough!

I hear your excuse: "Faith," you say, "does not come at our bidding," and you add, perhaps, that it was easy for Simeon to believe since he had been warned by the Holy Ghost.

Oh yes, well do I know that faith comes not at any one's bidding! God forces nobody. It was not to be served by slaves that He sent His Son here below; to win us over to Himself, He draws us, He calls us gently, and that is what Scripture calls the attraction of the Holy Ghost. But who will tell me that you have never felt this attraction, and that you have the right to say that God has not warned you?

I do not know your inward life, but I know my own, and the heart of man, says Scripture, answers to the heart of man. Now, I beg each of you individually to examine himself before God, and to consider whether he has never felt in his heart a secret voice drawing him towards Jesus Christ. Most varied is this mysterious voice, its accents are not the same for all: it often strikes the hardened sinner's ears like a terrific peal of thunder; but for the little child who reads the Gospel at its mother's feet, it is the kind and gentle voice of the Good Shepherd. Have you never heard it? It has often recalled to your memory your past sins and your secret faults; in silence, far from the din of the world, it tells you of a holy God, of a judgment which it will be impossible for you to avoid, of an eternity which awaits you. It disturbs your guilty pleasures, and pours into them the poison of remorse. When you seek to shake off your thoughts in dissipation, it writes upon your conscience those words which a mysterious hand traced upon the palace wall during Belshazzar's revel, "Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." It has sometimes led you to understand fully

and well how low, how cold, how empty and derisive is the life of the world. It causes you to yearn after a pure love, after a holy life, after inward peace; it calls you to the infinite joys of heaven, to communion with God, to all that is grand, heavenly, and good; it now touches your heart by the memories connected with this day, and in this very hour it persuades you that I speak the truth, and that I have simply narrated your own history. Well! that voice which disquiets, alarms, or attracts you, is the voice of the Holy Spirit. Say not, therefore, that God has not warned you, or that He has left you uncalled and without witness! Do not, by such sophisms as these, belie the most evident proofs of His mercy; do not cast upon God a fault for which you alone are responsible. To unbelief add not ingratitude, and to-day, if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts!

I have shown how Simeon waited for his Saviour, and how he believed in Him on the very day when Jesus was presented to him. We have still to consider the feelings which were awakened in his soul by the certainty of his faith—all these sentiments may be summed up into one: joy, the joy of a soul which is well-nigh overpowered by the goodness of God, the joy which finds expression in a truly sublime song: “Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.”

Joy! Is not that the feature which characterises this Christian festival above all others? Alas! why should a painful thought here come across our heart? This Christmas night, during which we celebrate the purest and most touching of memories, is, of all nights in the year, that which the world most particularly devotes to the extremes of dissipation and to the grossest pleasures, that in which vice and pollution fill our streets, till morning, with the sounds of their cynical mirth and impious revels. Ah! may at least the voice of prayer, rising towards God from

the hearts that love Him, cover all these blasphemies, and fall back in blessings upon those who thus delight in profaning that which we consider as most adorable and most sacred!

Be joyful, but let your joy be like that of Simeon. Now, what is the principle of his joy? It is Divine peace: "Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace." And this peace, upon what does it rest? Upon the assurance of salvation. "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Had Simeon been told by some special revelation at what price this salvation would be accomplished? I cannot tell, but what I gather from his words is that he knew that this salvation would be accomplished by suffering, for he clearly announces to Mary that a sword should pierce through her soul. He knows that salvation is brought to the earth, and that is what gives him peace. That is also what should be to-day the best foundation of your joy. If for you this question still remains unsettled, if for you God still remains a stranger, if eternity is for you a troublesome thought, if the sight of the Divine Tribunal brings you only terror and affright, if the promises of the Gospel, if its pardon resound in your ears like a mystic language to which your heart is closed, how can I tell you of peace and joy? There can be no peace but in truth, and for us guilty sinners there is no truth save in pardon. To your knees, then, my brother, my sister, to your knees at your Saviour's feet! To your knees, if need be, in tears, to your knees with a broken heart! And tell me not that I bring you a sorrowful message, for, with the whole Church, I can assure you that if there be upon earth a vast, unspeakable joy, a joy beside which all the delights of the world grow dim, a joy which makes us even happier than the angels, it is the joy of a penitent and pardoned sinner.

And you who know this joy, keep it not all for your-

selves. Let it irradiate your entire existence, and by the joyous light which will ray out from your soul, men will see that the peace of heaven has descended there. Too much preoccupied with defending our faith by arguments and painful discussions, we have not reflected sufficiently upon all there is of power and persuasiveness in the pure and peaceful joy of a heart that believes in God. Nevertheless, Scripture calls our attention to it, for if it nowhere enjoins upon us to discuss and argue, it often bids us be joyful. The Gospel makes of joy a command. Who can measure its mild but irresistible influence, who will tell us how often unbelief has melted in its contact, just as the soil, hardened by a cold winter's night, is softened by the rays of the sun?

Be joyful. Let not your doubts and your melancholy place themselves to-day between your souls and the opening heavens. To-day is the anniversary of the child Jesus. Beside His cradle have the hearts of children. Have their simple and joyous confidence, have their innocent and uncalculating faith, have their unreserved happiness, whose power is such that it unruffles the most anxious brows and softens the most stony hearts. Redeemed of Christ, shake off the weight of life, let not your thoughts and hearts turn towards the earth when God would draw them heavenward. Join in the angels' song, and if you vainly seek beside you those whose voices would to-day have mingled with yours, think that in heaven they repeat the same glad anthem, and that the heavenly strains answer to the melodies sung by the faithful here below.

Be joyful, but not with that evil joy which carefully avoids the sight of suffering because it is afraid of being troubled in its selfish security. Christian joy opens the heart and unceasingly expands it, for it is inseparable from love. That which saddens it, on the contrary, that

which causes this life-giving stream to dry up, is the bitter regret of having loved too little.

Go, then, brother ; go if need be to those who have offended you, to those from whom you are separated by a cruel resentment which casts a gloomy shadow over this day's festival. Go tell them that to-day you have seen your Saviour abased and humbled, and that in presence of such a spectacle your pride has been broken down. Go tell those who suffer that to-day you have seen your Saviour taking upon Himself poverty, and that your heart has been stirred ; go tell the afflicted that to-day the glad tidings which alone can raise and comfort have descended from heaven.

If there be in this assembly an unbelieving heart, a heart closed to the faith that makes our joy, to such an one would I say ere I close : You do not, brother, share in all the sentiments of love, confidence, and profound gratitude which this Christmas Day awakens in us. For you this festival is a touching legend and nothing more, and your reason, you say, is too much enlightened to allow of your believing that the heavens really opened, and that the song of the angels was ever heard on the earth.

Now, let me ask this question : Are you anxious to gain us all over to your opinion, and, in a word, would you rejoice to see the time when Christmas would no longer be celebrated ? If you are firm and consistent with your principles, this must be your wish. Well, let the memory of this holy night be blotted out, let the angels' song die away, let the name of Bethlehem be added to so many others buried in ancient mythology, your desire will be satisfied. But know this, at least, from the day when faith in the Incarnate Son of God will have disappeared, faith in God Himself, that is, in the living God, will vanish from the earth, for if God

has not manifested Himself in Jesus Christ, where is He, and where shall we hear His voice? You will not hear of an opening heaven; your reason cannot conceive of a God who saves His creatures by an act of His love. Well! let heaven be closed, and let your God remain there in inactivity, bound by the most immutable laws. Like ancient paganism, you have placed Fatality at the top of the scale of beings; for the God of Love you have substituted the God of Destiny; but ancient paganism had the Gospel for its heir, while yours will lead you simply to nothingness!

But no; you will not deprive us of our Christmas. Discuss, if you will, in your schools. Dream of a more perfect, of a more reasonable religion, if you can. With the mystery of the Incarnate God suppress the mystery of the personal and living God, I am tranquil. Whilst you will agitate those unsolved problems, the sinful and guilty man, the man who hears the voice of his conscience, the man who suffers and seeks a God who loves Him, the man who feels his need of a Saviour, will, with the Christian Church, go and worship at Bethlehem. Each year he will direct his steps thither; each year more numerous worshippers will surround the cradle of Him whom we call the Son of the living God, till the day when, over the whole of the human family kneeling together at the Saviour's feet, will resound the angels' song, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth, good-will to men!"

## XXI.

*THE UNGRATEFUL.*

“ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

—Ps. ciii. 2.

ONE day ten lepers, meeting Jesus in Galilee, exclaimed in their anguish, “ Jesus, Master, have mercy on us ! ” The Saviour sends them away cured, purified. One only returns to give Him thanks, and then these sorrowful words escape His lips : “ Were there not ten cleansed ? and where are the nine ? ” This is a distressing but faithful picture of our conduct towards God. If I required a decisive proof of the depth of our misery, I would find it in our inconceivable ingratitude towards Him who hath given us all things. Where are they, in the world, those who think of blessing God and of counting all His benefits ? There are, whatever men may say to the contrary, very few atheists, very few who dare openly to deny the existence of God ; but do I exaggerate when I affirm that the great majority of our fellow-men live as if God existed not ?

I mistake. This God whom they ordinarily contemn, they are careful not to forget Him when fear or interest seizes their soul, and that is what gives to their habitual ingratitude a still more odious character. It has been a thousand times observed that these two sentiments which I have mentioned—interest and fear—are the dominant



features in all heathen religions, those which are expressed in almost all the acts of their worship. Alas! in this respect the human heart is ever the same; and if you should divest the religion of the greater number of all that is inspired by these sentiments, what would remain for God? Here, for instance, is a man who to-day is stirred and fearful because he is threatened by some great misfortune, because death seems to hold one of his children in its grasp; he prays and weeps, but to-morrow where will be his fervour, his repentance, his short-lived piety?

To bless God, to feel one's absolute dependence upon Him,—who thinks of this? Suppose our felicity were never disturbed, is it not almost certain that our ingratitude would last for ever? It is not necessary, in order to develop this brutal unconcern in our souls, that we should occupy an intoxicating position, or possess a prodigious fortune, or enjoy one of those unutterable prosperities which bewilder and confuse; no, alas! an unalloyed happiness, an undisturbed security, the assurance of finding the daily bread upon our table, is enough to make us forget that all we have is lent us. It would seem, from our conduct, that God owes us all that He is pleased to give. The very regularity of His benefits deprives them of all savour in our eyes; they must be withdrawn from us that we may understand that they were His gift.

Behold the spectacle which the world presents in this respect. In every sphere, you will find men who despise that which God gives them, who look beyond and above themselves, and who continually ask that which is denied them. See, for instance, this workman, to whom God, with his daily bread, gives health, strength, and affection which would suffice to make him joyful. Do you think he appreciates his happiness? No; his eyes are turned higher. He envies those to whom God has given a more elevated position, and the only blessings to be desired are,

in his eyes, those which he cannot attain. Now the man who is the object of his envy—that more fortunate individual—do you think he esteems himself happy and satisfied? Do you think he feels his heart overflow with gratitude at the thought of all he possesses? No; in his turn he looks up higher. Higher! that is towards the region of abundance and luxury; there only is happiness, and for him the only happy people in the world are those who occupy a position superior to his. Well, question these happy beings in their turn. They have all that can be desired—independence, wealth, and all possible means of gratifying the least of their fancies. You think they are happy. Alas! it is amongst such that we most often meet the contempt of happiness; it is amongst such that heart and mind are most easily sated. You would see them in their turn forming new and extravagant plans, and seeking happiness everywhere save where God has placed it. You would see this worldly woman, to whom God has hitherto spared all veritable trials, forgetting that amongst thousands of beings she has an exceptional position, that she possesses that which is denied to the great majority of women. You would see her calling forth imaginary woes, absorbing her thoughts in them, conversing about them, complaining continually in presence of a world where real and heart-rending sorrows, which her selfishness veils from her sight, cross her path at every moment. You would see them—those elect of fortune—despising the thousand joys which God has scattered on their way, rushing with an insatiable ardour towards an ever-receding end; seeking, always seeking, that happiness which they will never attain.

At this view we are tempted to sneer at human nature. Let us rather pity it. In this latent discontent which everywhere pursues man, which corrodes his joys and withers his happiness, I see in reality a striking proof of

the greatness of his destiny. Ah! you thought that man could be happy here below, you thought that happiness dwelt in all those envied joys. No, answers the experience of ages as well as our own; no, happiness is not there. And why? Because our soul is made for God, and the infinite alone can satisfy it. "O God," exclaims St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself; therefore, our heart is restless so long as it has not found repose in Thee." You call him foolish, that happy worldling who tramples under foot all his joys and seeks new and impossible pleasures; you accuse him, the man who might enjoy everything, but who gives up his soul to the excitement of passions the very ardour of which consumes all delight, just as fire burns up dry leaves. Ah! recognise, nevertheless, in all these excesses the secret thirst which tortures the human soul, and by the immensity of his desires measure the greatness of the object which alone can satisfy it for evermore. As for me, I confess that I prefer this eternal research, however senseless it may appear, to the moderate and selfish wisdom of those who are satisfied; between the superficial optimism which the philosophy of the world preaches and the incurable sorrow which lies in the depths of the human soul, I would choose the latter. Yes, it was to be so. In this deep abyss of the heart from which God is absent, vainly have you cast blessings of earth, success, glory, affection, all that man sees, all that he loves, all that he envies . . . the gulf is yawning still, and all you have cast into it has only enlarged it more and more. What it wants, this unsatisfied heart, is more than the happiness of the world, more than the world itself,—the love of God alone can fill it.

However this be, ingratitude lies at the foundation of our nature; that is the sentiment of man towards God. But if, for the worldling, it explains itself, as it were by

that bitter disenchantment which is so fatally attached to all his subjects of joy, how can its presence in the Christian's heart be justified ?

You are a Christian, my brother, that is to say, you have learned in the light of the Gospel to know yourself. You know all the misery and lust and sin which your life and heart shelter ; you have fathomed those gloomy depths of your nature which the eye of man does not perceive ; you are aware of all that mingles of pride and self-love with your works, even the best ; you have measured the abyss which separates you from the love of God, and you know full well what would be your fate should He judge you according to His holy law.

You are a Christian, however ; that is to say, you rejoice at having found in God a Father, and in Jesus Christ a Saviour ; you believe that you have been the object of an immense love ; you detect this love alike in the Divine Providence which sought you out in your wanderings ; in those cries of your conscience which drew you towards the Cross of Calvary ; in the heavenly joy which filled your heart at the glad news of pardon ; in those multiplied deliverances of which you have been the object, and in the hope of the sublime felicity which eternity has in reserve for you.

You are a Christian ; that is to say, you subsist before God only by grace ; you have no other refuge than His mercy. Where are your titles, your virtues, your merits ? What would you have become without the love which sought you out ? What would you have become in the day when temptation invaded your soul, if, abandoned to yourself, you had been left alone to struggle ? All that you are you owe it to God. Reduced to your own resources, you had been lost ; to yourselves, least of all, can you ascribe your salvation. Everywhere throughout your past life you see the Divine footprints of the Good Shep-

herd who sought you ; everywhere you find His unwearied love. Well ! if gratitude should dwell anywhere upon earth, should it not be in your heart ; and if you are not the most grateful of men, will you not be the most thankless of beings ?

This consequence is so natural that it seems as though now there were no more to be said, as though the soul, inflamed by the sight of the love of God, had simply to follow its impulse and to give itself to Him completely. But, strange to say, into this pardoned, sanctified soul, into this soul filled as it is with the love of God and the joy of angels, you will perhaps see ingratitude glide like a cold serpent. How, then, has it found entrance there ? Is it only through our natural levity or the fearful facility with which we forget our liveliest and most serious impressions ? No. There is something more than this ; here we must search one of the most sorrowful sides of our heart. This heart is ungrateful because all obligations lie heavily upon it, even that of the love of God. Yes, there still remains in our heart a spark of proud independence which will not accept the yoke of God ; we feel that His benefits bind us, and we will not be fettered ; we feel that if the work of redemption be true, our selfishness is criminal. Let us say it bravely. There are days when the love of God annoys us because it requires of us a reciprocal affection, a boundless gratitude, an unreserved sacrifice. That is why ingratitude reappears even in the soul of the believer ; that is why that poisonous seed germinates and grows with such frightful rapidity in his heart. I find it in that truly brutal unconcern with which the Christian accustoms himself to be the object of the love of God, to consider his situation as most natural ; I find it in the cold-hearted and profane manner in which he speaks of the most touching and sacred features in the work of redemption which has been

accomplished for him; I find it in the murmurs which escape him as soon as the hand of God keeps back one of the blessings with which he had so soon become familiar. Alas! in that sanctified soul I find the old man, the old scorn, the old insensibility. That is also why God afflicts us, why He calls each of us in his turn to pass through the fiery furnace, thus pursuing that Divine education which pardon of itself could not have achieved; that is why God visits us, according to the striking expression which Scripture applies not to the blessings but to the evils which God sends us, doubtless because it is especially in affliction that we learn to discover His presence. Observe, in fact, that it is in the very hour when God strikes us that we reflect upon the truth that till then He had spared us. His wrath sets forth His love; the just God reveals the good God; and it is under the blows of His justice that we first understand the fulness of His mercy.

If we are naturally inclined towards ingratitude, we must infer from this that it is foolish to believe that gratitude will spontaneously gush from our hearts. No; here as elsewhere, as everywhere, discipline and obedience are required, new habits must be set against the old; with David we must *learn*; yes, learn to number the benefits of the Lord and not forget one. That is the thought I would impress to-day upon your hearts.

What! some will say, can one learn to be thankful? Yes, one can do so; everything can be learned at the school of the Gospel; but rather make the experiment for yourselves.

Have you ever tried to gather together, as in a bundle, all the mercies, all the blessings, of which you have been the objects? Recall to mind, for an instant, the first appeals of Divine goodness, those blessings of your childhood, those pure and sweet memories which so many of

your fellows know nothing of. Remember those prayers of home, those warnings, those emotions, those secret desires which came to you from God; then those disenchantments, those sorrows, those bitter griefs which taught you what the world is worth. Remember that path traced out and prepared for you by the hand of Providence, those deliverances, that unwearied patience, those protections; finally, those efforts, those appeals, those triumphs of grace by which your heart has been conquered. Make up that account and you will surely be seized with confusion, you will surely feel overpowered, as it were, by the weight of Divine goodness.

Then, to those past blessings, add your present mercies. Have you reflected upon this? Ah! too often, like those worldlings of whom I spoke just now, we have counted only that which we had not. Clear-sighted in discovering what failed us, we have remained blind to the benefits of God. And yet, why should we not number them? I exhort you to do so, and I dare tell you beforehand that you will be surprised at all you will discover of hidden benefits in your life, were it apparently the most empty and the most joyless. What would be required to make you understand that what I say is true? Some new trial which to-morrow would deprive you of one of your faculties, of one of those affections, of one of those joys which you do not so much as appreciate. In losing it, alas! you would understand its price, and your privations would reveal to you your riches. Have we not often made this sorrowful experience? When sickness has come to you, then you have known the importance of health; when one of your faculties has grown weak, then you have understood that it had been a gift of God; when your home has become desolate, then you have felt the value of those affections which you had too imperfectly sanctified by gratitude

while it was your privilege to enjoy them. You have remembered all there is of strength and encouragement in a sympathetic glance, in a friendly grasp of the hand, and all the infinite joy which the smiles of a little child can produce. Ah! what would you not give to have all these back again? But no, it is too late, and all your regrets cannot restore them to you. But what sorrow, what confusion, at having passed by all these joys without fully appreciating them, at having sought happiness where God had not placed it, and at having scorned the most delicate and touching proofs of His love? Why must such trials be sent to teach us gratitude? Why cannot happiness alone produce it in our hearts? It does so sometimes. I have seen happy beings touched and converted by their very happiness. The portion which God had allotted to them appeared to them so beautiful and undeserved that they have been, so to speak, overwhelmed by it, and His very goodness has called forth in their souls the first awakenings of repentance, and of a renewed life. Oh! you who are still young, you whom God has hitherto spared, why should you not be called, moved, converted by these multiplied evidences of Divine tenderness? Why do you allow it to spread, the fatal and gloomy idea that suffering alone can bring souls to God, and that none come to Him but those whom the world no longer cares for, and who fly to Him as to their only refuge? Why should this good and merciful God have but the refuse of the world, defiled sinners, mourning souls? and why should you give occasion to worldlings to sneer at those tardy conversions, and to say that the love of God has no power save on those for whom the earth has ceased to have any attraction? Prove the contrary, brethren. Show the world that youth, life, hope, happiness, may bloom in all their beauty under the eye of God, that joy may blossom



in the heart and bring forth fruits of devotion, charity, and sacrifice. Prove this to the world that needs to hear it, and to count all the benefits of the Lord, wait not until they are taken from you.

But you who groan beneath the weight of trial, shall I dare apply to you also the words of my text, shall I dare exhort you to say with the prophet: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!"

Ah! God forbid that I should speak lightly of sorrow, or wound a heart under pretence of comforting it! No, let us be true; there are days when blessing seems an impossibility. Will you bid him bless God, this being who is crushed by an unutterable grief, and who needs to summon all the energy of his faith to avoid falling into despair? Will you bid them bless God, this father and mother whose heart God seems to tear from their breast by tearing their child from their arms? Will you dare do so? And in presence of such afflictions, is it not enough, is it not a great deal that no feelings of rebellion arise in the hearts of these afflicted ones? And yet, if God be love, if love be at the root of all His works, shall I have nothing to say to such? Why should I not draw near to those broken hearts, why should I not tell them, in the name of the Gospel, that in their unutterable sorrow there was a blessing? But if I dared not tell them so, it would seem as if I believed that we are in the iron hands of fatality! But no! there is no fatality.

I believe in a God who worketh ever, in trial as well as in benediction; I believe in His love even when He chastens. Ah! beware lest you misconceive His visitation, beware lest you pass blindly beside those stern but real marks of His intervention. I know what you will answer. You will tell me: "Where then is God in my life, where is His action, where is His love in the blows that have fallen upon me?" But unhesitatingly I reply,

“Wait ere you judge.” You recollect that Gospel scene in which the apostles, far out on the sea in the dark hours of night, saw a phantom approaching their bark and uttered cries of terror. But from the midst of that fearful shadow a sweet and gentle voice was heard saying: “It is I, be not afraid;” it was the Master, it was Jesus. Ah! how often also, wandering like the apostles and like them tossed upon the stormy billows, you have seen standing out before you in the dark night of trial a phantom, the terrible phantom of fatality. Wait a while, your eyes will soon be opened, soon you will hear from the depths of the gloom your Saviour’s voice saying, “Weep not, it is I!” Yes, it is He who comes to you in that mysterious affliction, it is He who is approaching, it is He who seeks you, it is He you must bless, but at the same time you must humble yourself at having misjudged Him so long.

That is why I say to you: “Beware lest you misestimate the benefits of God in trial.” Ah! when we do not detect His presence there, we have but to choose between despair and dissipation. Despair is the portion of the noblest souls, of those who would perhaps have sought their refuge in God had they known Him. Dissipation is the consolation of the greater number. Thus they forget what God wished to teach them in the solemn hour of sorrow; and how can we think without a fearful heart-sinking of all those useless afflictions which pass without leaving any fruitful result! What! God has smitten you, and you have not recognised His hand, and it is in vain that He has come to you? What! you whom God has stamped with the mysterious seal of suffering, you have succeeded in effacing that Divine impress, and in getting used to that world which seemed no longer fit for you? Do you not feel that even the worldly are astonished at your conduct, and that they see you with surprise share in their dissipation? No! you

were not made for such a destiny. Everything tells you so, and that secret wound which reopens at my words speaks to your conscience more powerfully still. Ah! if it be not too late, seek the blessings of trial, and accept the instructions it is destined to impart.

For you, brother, the temptation is elsewhere. You surely cannot forget your trial. No, it is there, holy and respected; it is there in all its greatness, so vividly present, it may be, that you see nothing else, and thinking only of what God has taken from you, you forget all He has left you. That is your temptation, and why should I not tell you that it is also a peril and a snare, and that the sorrow which thus degenerates into bitterness or gloomy discouragement renders you unfit for the mission for which God has left you upon earth?

Nevertheless, understand me well. Too often, in the day of trial, the world in its way preaches forgetfulness. It tells us in the name of its philosophy to forget what we have lost, and think only of what is left us. It tells us so, but the heart which is faithful to its affection protests energetically. Yes, you are right. The living should not make us forget the dead. The dead, alas! the world so soon forgets them, their place is so soon filled up by others, the waves of life sweep so rapidly over the spot from which they have disappeared, that we must respect those hearts which guard with jealous care the shrine of memory. Understand me well, therefore; it is not of forgetfulness I would speak. I will tell you, on the contrary: "If you love those whom God has taken from you, would you not be happy to do what they themselves would counsel? Think then of what they would say to you if they could reappear and speak! Ah! from the abode of eternal love where God has gathered them, they would bid you love those who are left you, they would bid you labour for their good, and employ for their

benefit those powers of the soul which you are consuming in bitter regrets. Well! it is in their name, it is for the sake of their memory that I now tell you: "Beware lest you forget what God leaves you, beware lest you despise the task which He gives you to fill."

Shall I give you an example which will show you how, even in the midst of sorrow, man may learn to bless God and carefully number His benefits? This example is that of St. Paul.

Do you know a man who suffered more than St. Paul, a man who, during thirty years, concentrated in his person more suffering of body, heart, and mind, a man whose life was more tormented by struggles and defections, by the hatred and scorn of the world? Well, have you observed how St. Paul begins all his epistles? By words of thanksgiving and praise. Read them all. There is not one of them in which, from the very first lines, you will not hear him bless God. Nevertheless St. Paul was not a man to be easily deceived, to be blinded by his enthusiasm, or to view things through a delusive prism. He saw the miseries and shames which desolated the Church, and yet St. Paul, writing to those persecuted Churches, St. Paul, writing from his prison, St. Paul, on the eve of his execution, St. Paul gives thanks, and why? Because above all these causes of sorrow he sees causes of joy; because above that which is transitory he sees that which passeth not away; because in his eyes present suffering is swallowed up in the victory of love. Learn of him to see the all-surpassing goodness of God above all which saddens you.

Moreover, in recommending gratitude to the afflicted, can I forget that it is they who often give us the most touching examples of this virtue? It has been observed that accents of love oftener rise to the lips of the unfortunate than to those of the happy; that misfortune,

generally speaking, is more grateful than prosperity. From the table of the poor rather than from that of the rich does blessing rise to God for the daily bread. Ah ! how beautiful is this instruction ! How can we see without emotion, in poverty, on a bed of pain, and oft amid the pangs of disease, a believer count up carefully, with scrupulous attention, all the benefits of God without forgetting one ! More than once have I beheld this beautiful spectacle ; in more than one bitter trial in which it seemed that rebellion was the only feeling that might be awakened, I have seen Christian souls accept everything with angelic meekness, delight in pointing out all the tenderness and consolation which God mingled with their sufferings. How can I forget that the prayers in which thanksgiving has burst forth in the most sublime accents, have been uttered by martyrs on the burning pile, in the dungeons, or upon the rack ? Grand spectacle, in presence of which the Church may well exclaim with the Apostle : “ Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ! ”

I have exhorted you to gratitude, I have pointed out to you all the blessings which attend it. But there is one more feature in this subject which I cannot overlook.

We are living in a period of painful agitation, when the strongest convictions are called to pass through the crucible. The Church will come out of it victorious ; the Gospel will come out of it justified. At all times attack has been easy ; it is not difficult to raise multiplied objections against faith, and to triumph because they are not always met by a ready answer. But after this first attack, the wisdom of the age must, in its turn, justify its pretensions ; it must show us how the Gospel came into existence, from what human source it sprang, and it is on this ground that we will meet it.

Nevertheless, the struggle is fierce, more than one soul

is disquieted, more than one soul needs to be strengthened. Well, among all the means which you have at your disposal for stimulating your faith, have you never thought of what gratitude, yes, the mere habit of counting all the Lord's benefits, can do? I do not hesitate to affirm that if in presence of certain specious objections which confuse your intellect, you could remember all you have found in the Gospel of strength, life, and light, you would assuredly feel yourselves strengthened.

Remember, for instance, what you would be without those beliefs of which men try to rob you. What has sustained you in the obscure and decisive struggles of the soul against the flesh and its seductions, but the thought that the eye of a living and holy God was upon you, of a God with whom men say that our reason might dispense to-day? What has given you those firm convictions of conscience which have been your safeguard in the hour of temptation, but the Gospel at whose school your conscience and character have been formed? What, in your hours of anguish, has alone kept you from the dull resignation of the fatalist, or from the despair under which so many succumb, but those inspired and divine words which have brought life and immortality into evidence? Ah! ponder over all that past in which at every step you find the trace of a God of love; think of all those holy emotions which in bygone days have stirred your soul, of those sorrows and joys, of all that inward life which has been your true life. Think of all those regrets, of those many falls and restorations, of those tears poured out at the feet of God, of the heavenly joys of pardon. Were all these mere illusions, or were they not, on the contrary, the most certain of realities? Recall to mind all they have said to you, in the hour when delusions vanish, those deathbeds where you have seen heaven opened, where you have heard the last

words, the last prayer of some cherished being, and where you have felt all the powerful consolations of eternity enter your soul. Those experiences have been yours, and it is all that past, all that wealth of mercies and blessings which the world would have you forget, because, on some particular point, modern criticism has shaken your faith. But no, that is impossible. You cannot forget your history, you cannot tear up the past, you cannot deny the best, the purest, the most sanctifying emotions which have filled your heart. Born blind like the man whom Jesus cured, you cannot be mistaken as regards the Saviour who has opened your eyes and restored true life to you; and when the world will bid you deny Him, you will recall to mind the reply of Polycarp, that grand martyr of the primitive Church. Before the tribunal of the Proconsul, in presence of the instruments of torture, his tormentors said to him, "Deny Jesus Christ!" but he, raising his venerable hand, answered: "Deny Him! but how could I do so, when for eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me nothing but good?"

What I say to each of you individually I say to the Church collectively. Oh! if the Church could but remember! If the experience of the fathers could but be beneficial to the children! If all those dead lying in their graves could but rise again and tell us what for them were those beliefs which we now see vacillate! If in that arena where to-day, in the very bosom of the Church, are being discussed the most precious doctrines of the Gospel, all those grand witnesses of the past could but appear and speak, what strength, what encouragement for us!

Finally, if this world which surrounds us, if this light, frivolous, and indifferent world could but remember, if it could but remember all it owes to the God of the Gospel,

all that it would be without Him! But no, it will not think of this, and ingratitude will seal its eyes. You will see modern society, which owes to Christianity all its best and most precious gifts, progress, liberty, respect for conscience, true equality, immortal hope and charity, which alone can cure all its moral and physical sufferings, you will see it forget all this, forget that in all countries where the Cross has not been preached, those mercies are utterly ignored, and consequently unregretted; you will see it welcome with senseless curiosity all the new-fangled doctrines which pretend to take the place of antiquated Christianity. You will see it, oh, sorrow! take possession of all the progress, light and strength which it owes to the Gospel to turn them against its divinity and bring it down to their own level. Ah! if it could succeed, if for one and but for one day this rampart of Christian faith could be overthrown, if God in His justice left those ungrateful beings to themselves and withdrew His light from them, then they might appreciate the value of those beliefs which we defend with too much languor, and from the fearful obscurity which would invade the world, they would judge of the splendour of the extinguished sun. God will not do so! He who for sixty centuries sends His light and blessings upon this earth which forgets and contemns Him, He who, in the person of His Son, has, on the Cross, saved a world which crucified and cursed Him, He will still bless that ungrateful race, and His love, mightier still than all our rebellion, will shine in all its beauty long after those blaspheming voices will have been hushed in the silence of death.

Oh, power of Divine mercy, if others despise Thee, we bow before Thee, and seized with confusion at sight of our own ingratitude, henceforth we shall repeat with the Psalmist: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits!"



## XXII.

*HIDDEN GUILT.*

“There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel!”—  
 JOSHUA vii. 13.

THE God of the Old Testament is most often surrounded with a terrible glory; He is the mighty God of vengeance, He is a consuming fire. Here and there, however, that majesty is softened; traits of infinite compassion allow us to anticipate the day when He will reveal Himself in the plenitude of His nature. An incomparable tenderness and mercy mingle with the prescriptions of the Mosaic law and permeate the revelations of the prophets and the Psalms; in them we already see the God of the Gospel, Him whom Jesus revealed in all the fulness of His love, and whom Moses had but imperfectly known, for, according to the expression of St. John, if the law was given by Moses, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Jehovah, during the period of the theocracy, reveals Himself especially by His justice and holiness. He is the great justiciary of the nations. Just as He chastises the infamy of Sodom by fire from heaven, so He punishes the abominations of the Canaanites by the sword of Israel. True, Israel often joins to this awful mission its own vindictive passions and national animosities; thence in its history more than one bloody page which troubles our conscience and our heart. But let

us not trace these acts of vengeance back to Jehovah Himself! Jehovah proclaims His holy law, and if Israel violates it, Israel will be chastised as severely as its enemies. That which arms the hand of the theocracy is justice still unmitigated by merey, but for all this justice is the same, and it is often upon Israel that the most terrible blows fall. I find a proof of this in the narrative before us.

The Israelites had just entered the Promised Land. Hitherto victorious in every encounter, they unexpectedly suffer the most shameful defeat before the little city of Ai; Joshua, baffled in his hopes, troubled in his faith, casts himself at the feet of the Lord and pours out his complaints and murmurs with bitterness: "Alas! O Lord God!" said he, "wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! . . . The Canaanites shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth, and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?" But the Lord answered Joshua: "There is an accursed thing among you; up, and sanctify the people." Then Joshua assembled all Israel, the trumpets sounded through the camp and the whole people passed in order before him, and the tribe of Judah was taken, and in this tribe the family of the Zarahites was taken, and in this family the household of Zabdi was taken, and in this household Achan was taken; then Achan, terrified by this awful inquest, confessed all. He had stolen a portion of the booty and hidden it in his tent. In the midst of that holy war, when all manner of rapine was forbidden, he had thought only of self. By his sacrilegious theft he had brought the punishment of God upon all Israel, and therefore he was put to death without merey.

We must here recall to mind the solemn significance which this expression, "the accursed thing," had for the Jews. Israel had been chosen for a grand mission, to preserve the knowledge of the true God, the moral law and the hope of a Redeemer in the midst of the heathen world; it bore in its bosom the destinies of humanity. For such a mission it was necessary that it should keep aloof from the other nations; all the more so that, as we learn from the Old Testament itself, the natural character of the Jews led them, as well as the other inhabitants of the land, to idolatry, to the infamous passions which ancient Asia had enthroned, and, to say the least, to the hope of an enlargement of territory and of a military glory. Accordingly, the Israelites were prohibited from holding any intercourse whatever with the stranger; in war especially, the booty taken by them was to be nobody's property (admirable prescription which was destined to repress the cupidity of this avaricious people, and to remind it that it did not wage all these fearful wars for the mere purpose of enriching itself). All that had been taken from the Canaanites was to be devoted or sacrificed to the Lord. Consequently, Achan, in committing his crime, in burying in his tent the gold, the silver, and the goodly garments which he had stolen from the foe, had added sacrilege to his theft, and that is what explains the severity of his condemnation.

Times are changed, brethren; the people of God is no longer confined within national limits; the judgments of Jehovah are no longer executed in an immediate or visible manner by the hand of man; in a word, the theocracy is no more. But the instruction contained in my text is as true, as necessary amongst us as when, three thousand years ago, Joshua set it forth in the eyes of all Israel, by the punishment of a guilty man.

As Christians we are placed in a world against which we must continually struggle ; like Israel of old, we must be in its midst the witnesses of God by our words as well as by our life ; we must renounce all guilty habits, all criminal attachments ; in a word, every accursed thing. Oh ! I know full well that so long as we walk here below we shall drag after us the remains of a sinful nature, and that we shall often be surprised by the sin which easily besets us ; but these errors, these falls, however sad they may be, are not the accursed thing ; in my opinion, it is simply some evil habit, some guilty affection, some hidden sin which our conscience condemns, but which we are unwilling to give up. That is the danger to which I would draw your attention to-day.

“There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel.” Ezekiel relates a striking vision : In order to reveal to him the true condition of His people, God pierces before his eyes the walls of the houses of Jerusalem. Then the whole nation appears to him with its idolatry, with its odious ceremonies, with its vices and its corruption, which ordinarily were covered with the veil of a hypocritical formalism, and the prophet is seized with horror at the sight. He knew much already, but what he now sees surpasses all his former conceptions. Well, if the walls of our dwellings were transparent, do you think they would not reveal the most sorrowful and heart-rending realities ? if the stones of our houses could speak, would they not have strange things to tell ? What a contrast, it may be, between our attitude here, in public, under the eye of our brethren, and our ordinary life ! What a derisive contradiction between the aspirations, the desires, the hopes expressed in our prayers and in our hymns, and our most habitual conversations ! Some, ruthlessly pulling to pieces the absent, take a detestable pleasure in calumny ; others,

allowing the shameful chains of ease, luxury, and sensuality to surround them, become incapable of responding to the most pressing appeals of misery, that is, to the voice of God Himself, and easily make up their mind to be useless servants. Others, feeding their imagination upon sins which they would not dare to practise openly, wander in the most unwholesome dreams, and sate their curiosity with a literature their acquaintance with which they would be unwilling to avow. Others, again, by their example, their levity, and their worldly language, encourage in those who surround them dispositions which will perhaps lose their souls. Is that all? Are you sure that God detects no other disorders in your lives? Are your actions always utterly unquestionable? Does no unholy connection keep you under its yoke? Can all your business transactions bear the examination of the Divine Scrutator? I cannot tell; but I can hardly believe that such questions are out of place in so numerous an assembly as this. Some years ago a minister was preaching in a large town and before a select audience on the absolute necessity of restoring ill-gotten property. Judging from the cultured and Christian aspect of his congregation, one might have supposed that his sermon was a singular mistake, and that his words would touch none of his hearers; but on the following days many a considerable sum, spontaneously restored to the State or to private individuals, proved that he had hit the mark. Let us, however, admit that our private life harbours no crime, no accursed thing, is it so with our heart too? and if God should pierce its walls, would not men discover in it affections, habits, passions which are in accordance neither with our faith, nor with our name of Christians, nor even with our ordinary language?

Would you dare confess, I do not say the temptations which often cross your heart, for these may be but

sudden seductions which are not the sincere expression of your nature, and which you will soon look upon with disgust—but would you not be ashamed to avow that which lies at the very basis of your life, the affections which most deeply stir your hearts, the thoughts upon which you most ordinarily delight to dwell, the habits which you have not yet renounced? Now, that is what is most to be dreaded; for if evil when it becomes a habit is always awful, what then will be guilt tolerated, accepted, preserved, nay, growing beneath the very shadow of the Cross and under the eye of the holy God?

I hasten to acknowledge that at the outset of a Christian life, in the fervour of first love, such a condition of soul is an impossibility. At such times the temptation is rather to look upon sin with pity and to treat it as a conquered enemy. When the Prince of Life has descended into our heart and transformed it into a sanctuary, when we have heard the Divine harmonies of holiness and mercy there reconciled, when the assurance of pardon has filled our soul with a felicity which even angels know not, when our broken wills and subdued affections have exhaled a sweeter fragrance than the perfume which Mary poured at the feet of the Lord, how then could we believe that the soul honoured with such a love can ever become possessed by frivolous, mean, wicked, or vulgar passions? And yet, what has often happened?

When we offered our soul to God, an accursed thing was preserved there, or perhaps it entered it afterwards; it was an idolatrous attachment, an inveterate habit, which for a moment had seemed dead; placed on the extreme limit of our soul, that enemy appeared quite harmless; and yet, even then, we could not justify ourselves by pleading our ignorance, for the voice of the faithful God warned us of our peril, but we were already seeking excuses and alleging that God could not expect so many

sacrifices at once, and perceiving not that when love begins to calculate it ceases instantly to be true love. Nevertheless, days glided on, and in our soul, now become Christian, the accursed thing still remained; sheltered in its innermost recesses, it occupied a very insignificant place there; but like those weeds which grow rapidly and absorb the vivifying substance of the soil, it spread its roots everywhere, so that they soon mingled with the most tenuous fibres of our heart; the danger increased, and God redoubled His warnings. Sermons which seemed meant only for us, and in which we found the exact representation of our moral state, impressive and unexpected words, passages of Scripture upon which our eyes fell as if by chance, all these shed in the deeps of our heart a terrific light, and revealed to our horrified gaze the enemy seated at the very centre of our life. But who is not aware of the fact that we possess the alarming faculty of closing our eyes to what we do not wish to see? You have doubtless seen some of those invalids who persist in averting their eyes from the danger by which they are threatened; they reject the warnings of sincere friendship, they cling desperately to life, and find marks of health even in the febrile paroxysms of the disease which is consuming them. Alas! so it is likewise in spiritual life; we will not confess that our soul is diseased, we endeavour to deny the secret distemper with which it is affected; and, as if to delude ourselves completely, we carefully note all the signs of life and health which it still manifests. We look to our religious habits, to our good works, to our alms, to our emotions, to the tears we have shed at the foot of the Cross, and we do not reflect that the more real these emotions have been the greater is our responsibility, the more reprehensible is our infidelity; we count all the sacrifices which we have made for God, willingly would we add to them new and extra-

ordinary ones which God does not require of us, and all this simply to obtain the right of refusing Him those He claims, those which we should have offered first of all, those without which all others are vain. We may even seek to shake off our remorse by the effusions of a noisy, active, eager piety. Nay, in the very hour when the guilt is at its height, we may appear doubly zealous in the service of God. Thus, little by little, we take the habit of deceiving others and of deceiving ourselves. Henceforth, there are in us two existences: the outward existence which is apparently moral, religious, and correct, admired of men, it may even be; then, below, our true life where lurks and grows the guilty passion which we have refused to sacrifice! Oh! how rapidly has it developed itself! It seemed to us a mere nothing, and now, behold! it exerts upon us an extraordinary power. And no wonder indeed, for it occupied the most intimate place in our heart; like a fondly cherished idol it had taken its stand in the sanctuary where God alone should have dwelt. To it we referred all our thoughts and affections, in it we concentrated our life. Now, the game is up, it is so firmly settled on its pedestal that it holds us under its bondage, and we have become Pharisees far more guilty than those of the Gospel, for we have known from our childhood that Jesus Christ hates Pharisaism; we have become Christians in appearance and language, living a life whose front is that of a sanctuary, but whose inner parts are full of corruption and uncleanness.

I have endeavoured to tell you how, almost unawares, we may be led to harbour an accursed thing in our heart. I cannot tell if any recognise in this their own history; but if this disease has never attained its last stage in any of your souls, I believe I may affirm that we have all felt its attacks, or if not, that we may feel them to-morrow. Consequently, I have thought it my



duty to point out to you its winding and treacherous course. I have now to indicate the undeniable symptoms by which it betrays its presence. . .

In the first place, when a soul harbours an accursed thing, it is sorrowful, and the peace of God forsakes it; for, in the deplorable state in which it has fallen, it can know and taste neither the heavenly joys of Divine communion, nor the unholy joys of the world. It can no longer know the former, for how can Christian joy be associated with sin? Will you place a song of praise and thanksgiving on the lips of David after his adultery; will you suffer Peter to tell you of the joyful assurance of forgiveness in the very hour when he has denied his Lord? Ah! Divine peace in the midst of a guilty life would be so monstrous an inconsistency that the conscience of the most degraded of beings would shudder with horror at the sight. But if the soul that preserves an accursed thing can no longer taste the Divine joys, it cannot either taste the joys of sin; it had looked for happiness in its guilty passion, but this happiness is envenomed by shame and remorse; so great a bitterness mingles with it that the most severe trial would be more acceptable than such a felicity. Vainly does the Christian endeavour to yield to the seductions of evil. He knows too much to be easily deluded. His eye, enlightened by the radiance of the Gospel, sees through the charms of a guilty passion; he sees all that it conceals of selfishness, shame, and degradation. He once has known the pure joys of holiness, he has walked under a bright and cloudless sky which poured floods of light and peace across his path, and now that shameful life on which he has entered is but a stormy night, illumined at intervals by the dismal flashes of sin. He once has known the delights of Divine love, he has felt his heart burn with its sacred flame; and now, how

could he join in the happiness of worldlings, how could he share in their enjoyments and once more fall a victim to those seductions whose nothingness and vanity he knows so well? He knows too much to participate in those delusions, too much to be worldly without shame or remorse. Henceforth, what will he do? An unutterable sorrow overpowers him. We sometimes see persons who labour under what doctors call marasmus. An inexplicable languor takes possession of their entire being, every effort is painful to them, their face grows pale, their body droops and decays without any apparent cause; but after death it is stated that one of the vital organs was seriously diseased. Well! there is spiritual as well as physical marasmus, and its secret source is always some moral disorder which causes the inner life to die away. Of what avail then are all the blessings from above? When a worm has found its way to the root of a tree, in vain do the cool showers water it, in vain does the sun warm it with its rays; its leaves grow yellow, its branches wither, and in the very season when all is life and beauty, it dies smitten without remedy. Let each of us examine himself, let him seek out the cause of his languor and melancholy, let him ask himself why the Gospel brings him no joy. Happy will he be if he does not discover in the innermost depths of his soul some accursed thing which would suffice to explain all!

Not only does this secret guilt deprive us of all our joy, but it paralyses all our powers. It was on the day when Achan hid the accursed thing in his tent that Israel was beaten by the foe. Up to this time the Lord's people had always been victorious. So it is in the Christian life. There is no real or lasting strength but in sincerity. Ah! I understand that in other domains success does not always depend upon conviction; I

understand that, in politics, men may inflame the multitudes by the charm of their words, and raise the edifice of their popularity on the profession of principles which are not sincere. I understand, likewise, that skilful leaders may inspire crowds with fanaticism; that has been seen at all times. But to the honour of Christianity it must be said that it can never be preached efficaciously by those whose inward life gives the lie to their profession. A church, for instance, in which spiritual life has ceased to flow, may abound in first-rate talents; its activity will nevertheless be without the least influence. Now, what may be rightly said of a church, may with greater reason still be affirmed of individuals. Whoever harbours an accursed thing in his heart and life is, from that very cause, struck with impotence. How, in truth, could he act when he hears within himself an invisible witness reproaching him with assuming an attitude and a language which his life most deplorably belies? His conscience is there before him like a phantom whose piercing eye penetrates to the innermost depths of his life. In mysterious accents, which however he is forced to hear, it tells him that he is acting an unworthy part. If he tries to speak, it shuts his mouth; if he tries to act, it paralyses his arm, so that, weary of resistance, he at length remains silent and inactive, sacrificing to sin the cause of God which he should have served. Oh! who will tell us how many souls have thus been lost—lost to all that is true, holy, eternal; lost by a secret disorder, by a guilty attachment, by an idolatrous craving for human glory. We had seen them set out on the ocean of Christian life like vessels sailing rapidly over the waves; the wind filled their sails, a firm hand was at the helm, a brilliant future awaited them, . . . but in the hold of the ship, by an almost imperceptible opening, the water penetrated, drop by drop, day and night un-

ceasingly. Then the progress of the bark grew slower, and none knew why until the day when it went down, and when nothing was left us but the gloomy recollection of a vanished faith and of an eternal hope which has given place to nothingness!

But of all the consequences of keeping an accursed thing in the heart, there is one which is more fearful still than those I have mentioned: it is the hardening of the heart. Tell us if you know of anything more terrible than this hardening; as for me, I can conceive of nothing which should alarm us more, and what is the most appalling of all is that men often reach it by a gradual and insensible slope. Suppose you have preserved an accursed thing in your heart. At first you are not quiet; on the contrary, there are hours when your heart, attracted on the one hand by God and on the other by the world, seems to be rent; but lust and passion gain the mastery and bring you under their subjection. From that moment there is in your heart a dull irritation against God, against His Word, against all that speaks to you of holiness and salvation; a strange uneasiness takes possession of you when you read the Gospel, you pass with feverish haste over certain passages whose meaning is too plain for you. The faith of others annoys and their holiness condemns you. You feel an exquisite joy when you can detect a flaw in their Christian life; you count up their inconsistencies with secret delight; you find a strange pleasure in the discovery that, after all, everybody resembles you, and that there is no Christian life that can bear a very close examination. Instinctively you seek an easy and accommodating doctrine; you want sermons that will quiet your conscience and lull it into a false security; but you cannot endure those which unveil your secret miseries; you shrink from the contact of the friendly

hand which would lay itself upon your wound to show you that the mischief is there. Thus you judge your brethren with bitterness, and you willingly keep aloof from them. But though they are no longer beside you, your conscience is still there, and how is it to be lulled to sleep, how is it to be bought over? Prisoners have a slang word to denote the conscience; they call it *the mute*. The mute! ah! right glad would they be indeed if it were so. Can it ever become mute? I cannot tell. That is one of the secrets which God alone knows; but I know that if anything could stifle its voice, it would be an accursed thing fondly cherished and unrenounced. When a man perseveres in a criminal life which he hides under appearances of piety, all the springs of his moral existence eventually break; scarce is there room left in his soul for fear and despair. He finds no attraction, no delight whatever in spiritual things; he has lost the sense by which they are to be perceived; "everything," says Vinet, "becomes languid and insipid in his being; he feels this; he understands that it should be for him a cause of sorrow; he foresees his doom, and he has not even the energy to be appalled at it." The most solemn and terrible realities strike upon his heart with a dull sound such as that produced by a hammer upon a leaden bell. Yes, in presence of such a spiritual condition, we may well be alarmed, for final hardening of heart, alas! is perdition begun here below, in anticipation of the eternal judgment.

Do you now understand all that is implied by the words of the text: "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel?" If you have taken in their full import, let each of you examine himself, let each search his dwelling and his heart, let each bring to God the sacrifice which he expects of him. Here, no illusion, no equivocation, let us fully

persuade ourselves that we shall not escape the all-searching eye of God.

Ah! when the trumpets of the Levites summoned all Israel together at the tabernacle of the congregation that all the people might be brought before Joshua, Achan, no doubt, said to himself: "Who will know me in this vast multitude? Who will discover the silver and the gold which I have hid in my tent?" And yet, have you observed how solemnly brief is the manner in which Scripture recounts his judgment: "And Joshua brought Israel by their tribes, and the tribe of Judah was taken; and he brought the tribe of Judah, and the family of the Zarahites was taken; and he brought the family of the Zarahites, and Zabdi was taken; and he brought his household man by man, and Achan was taken." See how surely Divine justice reaches the guilty one, just as the eagle, descending from the heights of heaven, whirls round in ever-narrowing circles until at length it swoops down upon its prey. Think not you will be able to escape God. However secret be your guilt, at whatever depth you may have buried it, the day will come when you will have to give account of it. Alone among the multitude of your fellow-men you will have to appear, and the voice of Him whom none can deceive will force you to confess your crime. Ah! what would you not give then to have renounced that passion, that habit, that ill-gotten gain, that sin, in a word, to which your soul has attached itself, and which has finally lost you!

I conclude this long and painful review. I know that my words will have seemed harsh to many, and I expect to be reproached with having troubled many souls. Troubled souls! Ah! would to God we might trouble them! but what I fear, will you know it? is rather not to have succeeded. Point them out to me those souls

troubled by a holy fear, trembling at the thought of the accursed thing which they still cherish, desirous of glorifying their Saviour by a perfect obedience. With bitter sorrow I affirm that nothing is more uncommon in our ministry than to meet with those who tremble at the thought of the judgment of God. Some come to us for instruction, others for consolation, the greater number for help, but the words which I have most rarely heard are these, "What shall I do to be saved?" Souls easily led astray, souls easily reassured is what we see to-day, but the holy love that trembles at the thought of grieving God, alas! I seek it in vain.

Here also do you know what will take place? The most upright, the most sanctified, the purest souls will precisely be those who will anxiously question whether they are not cherishing some accursed thing in their life, whilst guilty Achan, having made sure that this discourse is not meant for him, has already named in his heart those of his brethren to whom he intends to apply it. Oh, the craftiness, oh, the inconceivable levity of the human heart! Was I not right when I said: "Would to God we might trouble souls!"

But if we would trouble you, it is that you may be saved. And what immense and profound joy would fill your heart if, in this very hour, without further delay, you brought at the feet of the Lord all that which you have so long refused Him! if, like the sinner in the Gospel, you broke at His feet that which is most precious to you! Ah! it were a happiness greater than that of angels, it were indeed the felicity of heaven! So far, you have seen in this sacrifice only what it cost you; see to-day what it will give you; see that conscience calmed, that heart pacified, that inward dignity regained, that life freed from the most shameful bondage and devoted to the noblest of causes; above all, see the delightful assur-

ance of Divine approbation, the possession of that joy which will be your life throughout eternity. That is what God has in reserve for you to-day. Ah! refuse it not; come to Him, and in silence perfect the sacrifice which He expects of you! Amen.



## XXIII.

*THE SALT OF THE EARTH.*

“Ye are the salt of the earth.”—MATT. v. 13.

THE Gospel abounds in extraordinary sayings whose strangeness is modified only by our familiarity with them. Among these are the words of my text. Imagine what a worldly philosopher would have felt if he had seen the disciples to whom they were addressed. The salt of the earth! They! those Galileans whose uncultured mind was incapable of understanding a lofty question, or of discussing it, those publicans, those fishermen, prejudiced and narrow-minded, those poor and ignorant beings who spoke ill an unknown language, those men whose zeal was so often to fail them in presence of the slightest obstacles, and at length to transform itself before their Master's Cross into a most shameful cowardice! They, the salt of the earth!

Nevertheless, these words were true! To-day, whether they will or no, men are forced to admit it. Cast your eyes upon the map of the world. Where is moral life, where is progress, where is civilisation, where is hope, where is liberty, where, in a word, is the future? Where the words of those Galileans have been heard, where they have found their way into the national heart and spirit. Yes, the modern world owes what in it is best to that handful of men; they are our masters, and we are living

upon their heritage. They have imparted to our beliefs and manners a power so great that we all feel its influence. Whilst the ancient world gradually languished and decayed so that, at the very zenith of its civilisation, it had become a mere corpse whose decomposed elements crumbled into dust, in all Christian societies there is a hidden sap which resists everything, and which, after eighteen centuries, spreads its victorious power in all directions. The faith of the Galileans has so completely mingled with our life, that we can no longer eliminate it. It has entered our laws to transform and perfect them; it has entered our manners to save them from the corruption in which modern paganism would plunge them; it has entered our home-life and dwells in the tender and holy respect with which the Christian wife and child are surrounded; it is in the purest of our joys which selfishness does not wither; it is in our ever-awakening and ever-increasing sympathy for the poor and the destitute; it is in the consolations which the Gospel pours upon our sufferings; it is in the words of life and hope immortal that we write upon the graves of our departed friends; it is in our conscience when it revolts against iniquities and crimes which, had it not been for Christianity, would have left us indifferent; it is even in the generous indignation which the inconsistencies and cowardly infidelities which Christians call forth on the part of unbelievers; it is everywhere; and the Master spoke true when, addressing His disciples, He said to them: "Ye are the salt of the earth."

It is this saying of our Lord that I would meditate upon to-day. It contains a simple and striking illustration of the influence which Christians are to exercise upon the world. What is the nature of this influence? How do we exercise it? Those are the two questions which, with God's help, we shall endeavour to solve.

There are two ways of acting upon men : the one outward, by material or moral constraint ; the other inward, by persuasion. Which of these did Christ adopt ? You know it as well as I. He who laid claim to universal dominion, He uttered not one word from which we may infer that He leaned upon the arm of force. With His Divine glance He embraced the future ; He foretold the antipathy, the contempt, the persecution, the hatred which the Gospel would raise ; but at the same time He promised that the truth deposited in the earth like a grain of mustard-seed would become a great tree beneath whose shadow all the nations would one day take refuge. He imparted to a dozen men the truth which He possessed unlimitedly, He inspired them with His spirit, and when He sent them to the conquest of the world, He said to them : “Ye are the salt of the earth.” Thus was the Church established ; thus, after the lapse of three centuries, the Cross was planted on all points of the known world.

But the Church grew weary of that slow and sublime task. Forgetting that the Master had bid her subdue the world by truth, she sought to govern it by the hand of might. She asked for that outward dominion which Jesus Himself had refused in the day of His temptation. She obtained it—by what craft, by what violence, by what persecution, you well know. I am aware that many pretend that the Church herself never oppressed souls, and that this responsibility must be cast upon civil power. But this mode of reasoning is simply a strange equivocation ; as for me, between the ecclesiastical power which gives up to the executioner, and the executioner himself, I see only the distance which separates the head that thinks from the arm that strikes, and, all things considered, I think that the arm which kills is less odious than the head that wills and orders the murder. Let us

be true! The Church has sought to rule by force; she has pretended to realise a universal theocracy. Ah! I know how much of true greatness there was in this dream; I know that she meant to save souls; I know that she said to the world: "Obey me, I am thy mother!" But the world was seized with a shudder of horror when it saw that mother's hands dyed in the blood of her wandering children. She thought thus to acquire supreme dominion over the nations. Of course success would not have justified her; but has she met with success? It may have seemed so when at certain epochs she contrived to stifle heresy, and to impose Catholic unity upon the nations crouching at her feet. But what has been overlooked is the fact, that from that very hour the missionary spirit which had characterised primitive Christianity was suddenly arrested; that at the close of the Middle Ages the Christian Church had witnessed the decline and fall of all the centres of life and light; of Carthage, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Constantinople, Athens; that the third part of her territory had escaped her even before the Reformation. That which is too much disregarded is the fact that it is in the midst of the races which have bowed longest beneath the yoke of that factitious unity that modern unbelief makes most ravages and provokes the most bitter hostilities against Christianity. That is what the Church has gained by wishing to govern the world by force, instead of subduing it by the Spirit.

Against this spectacle allow me to set another. One day, about two centuries and a half ago, a handful of exiles landed on a rock of the New England coast. They had come to seek a spot where, unmolested, they might pray the God of the Bible. There, in solitude, amidst all manner of privations, they raised the first refuge which ever was opened in the whole world for conscience freed

from the yoke of men. Slowly they grew. In that new society there was neither the authority of a secular hierarchy, nor altar protected by the sword, nor dominion assured to the clergy, nothing but Christian faith acting by its own inherent virtue, nothing but the salt of the earth permeating consciences with its strong savour; and some years ago, the nation which they thus founded presented to the world a magnificent spectacle before which Protestants and Catholics alike gazed with admiration. It was the spectacle of an immense people spontaneously bowing beneath the Divine hand, the spectacle of Christian faith sincerely, openly professed by the most illustrious chiefs, magistrates, and soldiers, who in their proclamations, in the senate as in the camp, affirmed the true God and His intervention in history, spoke of repentance and humiliation, joined in a common prayer, and thus closed the most gigantic struggle without one appeal to vengeance, without one attack against liberty. That is what we have seen, and in the words of a great Catholic orator, the sun of the nineteenth century never shone on anything more beautiful.

Therefore faith, Christian life, acting from soul to soul and thereby penetrating the world, is the only efficacious means of establishing the reign of God here below. Moreover, it is the only means we have still at our disposal, and I rejoice at this. I know that many believers turn a regretful glance upon the past, and dream for the Church of a return to those privileges, to those prerogatives which would anew ensure its dominion over souls. Vain regrets! That time has fled, and fled for ever. All your complaints will not bring it back again. Modern society will no longer accept the external yoke of a Church; it will never again give you what you ask of it. What surprises me is that faith should ever be shaken by such a fact. What! your faith falters be-

cause the Church is brought back again to the very conditions in which Christ had established it, because instead of imposing itself upon the world as a political institution, it must act in its bosom as the salt of the earth! Your faith totters because you can no longer obtain a dominion which would rest merely upon a factitious and soon hypocritical respect. Ah! look beyond this, and instead of claiming of this world the power and outward authority which it denies you, ask of the Head of the Church the secret of that invisible and spiritual power by which alone the world can be conquered.

We now understand what is the nature of the influence which Christians are to exercise upon the world. That influence is spiritual, and, in the second place, I add that it is individual; by this I mean that every believer is to exercise it. I insist upon this thought, and this is why. It is impossible not to be struck with the inclination we all have of shaking off the yoke of our religious responsibility, and of casting it upon a system or an institution. For the great majority of our fellow-men, faith consists in accepting what the Church does for them; the Church teaches, prays, confirms, absolves, sanctifies, guides the soul from the cradle to the grave, and the first of their duties towards it is docility. Well, I believe that this idea which favours our secret instincts of levity and moral apathy is directly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel. It is not of the Church Jesus spoke when He said: "Ye are the salt of the earth," neither was it of revealed truth, but of Christians. We must be made aware of this; no institution, no system, no book, not even the Bible, can fulfil the mission for which it has pleased God to call us. This is alarming, overpowering for our weakness, but it is so nevertheless. Ye are the salt of the earth. It has

pleased God that the truth, having become incarnate in His Son, should also in a certain measure become incarnate in every Christian, that in him it should transform itself into life, and thus, passing from heart to heart, convert the world. Christianity will be what Christians are. Vainly would you escape this solemn responsibility, vainly would you cast it upon others; no one has a right to take it from you, and you have no right to shake it off. Vainly would you, lay Christians, lay it upon us, your ministers; in the name of the Gospel I reject it, for here we may apply the words of the Apostle: "Every man shall bear his own burden." Whatever you do, you must be the salt of the earth, and the future of truth in the world depends upon each of you. How, then, shall we exercise that mighty influence? That is the question we have still to solve.

There are two modes by which we can act spiritually upon our brethren: by language, written or spoken, and by our life. In the first place, by language. Language! What power lies in human speech! The Word is the name by which St. John calls the Son of God Himself. Well! our words must be so thoroughly impregnated with the savour of the Gospel that they will bear within themselves a virtue. Is that your idea and your ambition? Alas! I know that for many of those who hear me, it is enough that the Christian word be heard from the pulpit, and to that quarter they look for the propagation of truth. Preaching! Ah! you can never say anything too lofty or too grand concerning it. Yes, when the words which are uttered from the Christian pulpit are truly penetrated with the salt of the Gospel, when they reach consciences and alarm them, when they trouble hearts and stir them, when they place before our eyes the realities of the invisible world so that they seem truly present to us, then indeed they are the two-edged

sword of which Scripture tells. Yes, were those words uncultured and rude, awkward and unpolished, if they issue from a deeply convinced heart, if they have that inimitable accent of authority which Christian faith gives, they are indeed a power which can transform the world. But how can we think, without a fearful heart-sinking, of what preaching becomes when the salt of the Gospel has lost its savour? A man ascends this pulpit which Christian faith has prepared for him, and this man, instead of looking to the God who sends him, thinks only of those who listen to his words; instead of being preoccupied with the message of which he is but the bearer, he thinks only of the ideas of his age which he is anxious to please; instead of troubling consciences, he aims only at quieting them, and people think they have sufficiently praised him when they have said that he is a successful and popular preacher. Popular! Ah! was St. Paul popular when his voice troubled sinners and scandalised the wise? Was Christ popular when He saw crowds murmuringly disperse and He was left well-nigh alone? Ah! God preserve us from such popularity as this! No! it is by another feature that you must recognise a faithful preaching, by this feature which a great monarch, too much accustomed to the low flattery of court preachers, pointed out in a single phrase: One day Louis XIV. said to a monk who had preached the Gospel without weakness, "Father, when I hear others preach, I am satisfied with their sermons; but when I hear you, I am dissatisfied with myself." He was right, and would to God that he had never heard any but such preaching! Would to God that, enlightened on his monstrous pride, he had spared his country the demoralising spectacle of a persecuting devotion joined to the most shameful pollution! Ah! would to God we also, in our turn, might send you away dissatisfied with yourselves! Would to God we might so



deeply stir your hearts that you would leave this sanctuary anxious, annoyed, it may be, but at least troubled and serious!

Nevertheless, do not be mistaken; preaching, were it the most faithful, will never suffice to propagate the Gospel. As for me, I confess with sorrow that I am struck with its impotence. Think of all that is displayed in our pulpits of energy, conviction, efforts, thoughts, and words, and for what mean results! What may be the cause of this? Habit, doubtless, and especially the idea, which is so deeply rooted in our midst, that pulpit language is more or less a conventional language. Everything is allowed to the pulpit. No one will be surprised if from it, in general terms, I oppose unbelief and worldliness, if I speak of the judgment of God, or of the necessity of repentance and conversion. On the contrary, people expect this. They expect and require it, and the unbeliever and worldling find it most natural; beforehand they know what they will hear, and after having heard it and given their appreciation of our discourse, they find it equally natural to resume, at the very door of our churches, their frivolous thoughts, their trivial conversations, and their worldliness. In vain do we summon all our energy, and beg of them to alter their life; they will perhaps say that the sermon was impressive, but not for an instant will they think that it referred to themselves, to their own salvation, to their eternal future. Oh, sorrowful thought! But now enter this court of justice, see that advocate who, without conviction, perhaps, pleads before a tribunal a cause with which important interests are connected. See how his client listens, see how his lustrous eyes, his compressed features, his whole attitude betrays the anxiety with which he follows the argument; for upon this pleading depends a fortune or an inheritance. Does this heir

whom passion absorbs think for a moment of the outward form of the discourse he hears, of its literary beauties, of the inflections of the voice or of the graceful attitude of his advocate? He cares very little indeed for all this. What he wishes is that it be proved that he has the law on his side; what he wishes is that his cause be victorious. His cause, do you hear? Yes, that injured right, that disputed heritage, that fortune upon which his happiness depends. Alas! and when we speak to you of the inheritance of the skies, of the salvation of your soul, and of the irrevocable sentence of the just Judge, you listen with more or less attention or curiosity, you sum up your critical impressions in a general judgment, and declare that, all things considered, the discourse was tame or that it was interesting.

That is why it is foolish to expect the diffusion of truth from preaching alone. But do you know the means of rendering these same truths efficacious and powerful? Preach them elsewhere. Try this, and you will see if the salt of the Gospel has lost its savour? Here you are, for instance, my young brother, in a circle of men of your own age, engaged in the same pursuits as you; around you all the questions of the day are discussed with the rashness and intrepidity of youth, which no problem arrests. The conversation soon turns upon religious matters; all you believe, all we preach to you here, is discussed, criticised, attacked, and perhaps ridiculed, in a few moments. You suffer; a secret uneasiness tortures you, but you remain silent. Yes, strange to say, men are cowards when they are called to confess their faith. Men who would affront death without shrinking, men who, for a political cause, will become impassioned and will brave raillery, such men will now be timid and fearful, trembling lest they should call forth a smile. Oh! if the question were simply to

declare in favour of this or that religious opinion, of the Pope's temporal power or against it, of the orthodox or the liberal party, they would not be embarrassed. But to open their hearts, to affirm what they believe in their intimate and hidden life, to speak of the God in whom they hope, that seems to them an impossibility. And yet if, triumphing over that natural cowardice, you dared to speak then, if without infatuation and in courageous, firm, and sincere accents you confessed your faith and your hopes, I affirm that in this there would be something more persuasive than in all our discourses. Were your words rejected or scoffed at, you would notwithstanding inevitably awaken in the minds of those who would hear you, a feeling of respect, and without confessing it, it may be, they would understand all there is of power in that faith which, when it passes by our mouth, scarce succeeds in moving them.

Oh! what power, brethren, in language thus placed at the service of truth, and how truly it is the salt of the earth! Yes, even though it seems to have been lost on the soil like a useless seed. Can you ever tell what a word of faith, truth, and love may bring forth? Do you know how far its mysterious action may extend? Do you know how many hearts it may reach? Does not history, in each of its pages, reveal the extraordinary influence of words uttered in secret, perhaps, and which, falling into a heart, have become the germ of a renewed life? In Egyptian tombs, grains of wheat have been found which had been deposited in the hands of the dead three thousand years ago. They have been cast in the ground and have germinated, and produced magnificent ears of corn. Yes, thirty centuries passing over those seeds buried in the depths of the grave, had not destroyed that prodigious vitality. And think you that God, who has endowed matter with so mighty a power of life, will allow those

words of faith, hope, and love which you cast into the vast field of the world to be wholly wasted away? Be undeceived: they can never die; they also will germinate in the depths where they are buried. Christians, ye who speak in the name of the living God, ye are the salt of the earth!

But what, after all, are words without action? And what influence can they exert if they are not the expression of our life? It is the honour of Christianity that it cannot progress if it be not realised by those who proclaim it. That the savour of the Gospel may be imparted to others, it must, first of all, have penetrated us. Other causes may succeed if pleaded by rhetoricians, by phrasemongers; that of the Gospel cannot. Suppose a Church possessing the most powerful orators, the most skilful apologists, the most profound reasoners, if that Church be without holiness, it will also remain without influence.

History furnishes us with a striking example of this. I know not if in any country or at any period of its history the Catholic Church possessed so great a number of noble minds and fine geniuses as towards the year 1700. What an age was that in which Bossuet, Fénelon, Massillon, Bourdaloue, each of whom would have sufficed to render his epoch illustrious, were heard in turns in the churches of Paris! Depth of thought, sublimity of expression, exactness of reasoning, penetrating unction, clearness, grace, poetry, all was there; if ever human language seemed likely to be efficacious, it surely was then; and yet, thirty years later, France, corrupted by the regency, was at the feet of Voltaire, and the eighteenth century was prepared. Now, if we have beheld that profound and unexampled fall, it is because in the Church that produced those great men, laxity of morals, venality, corruption had entered; it is because, in spite of Pascal,

casuistry reigned over conscience, a dull hypocrisy was secretly mining its foundations, unbelief was rapidly invading the clergy itself, so that, when philosophy swept over France like a stormy wind, it found no rampart whatever to arrest its progress. Ah! if for our happiness we had but possessed beside that brilliant constellation of distinguished men a humble, living, and faithful Church, impregnated with the Spirit of God, which had been for us the salt of the earth!

Let us come back to ourselves. If all we have said be true, it follows that our life, far more than our words, exercises a powerful influence around us. The action of words is intermittent; that of life is continuous. Now what is an intermittent power beside a permanent force? What is the blast of the most violent storm beside that law of tides which daily raises and lowers the ocean in an endless motion? What is the eruptive force which casts up to the sky the burning lava of a volcano compared with the power of gravitation which brings down to the centre all the elements of matter? Likewise what are our words, our prayers, our liveliest effusions of piety, beside that still and unostentatious preaching of our daily life? That is not all. The action of our life is involuntary, and therein lies its strength. Let us not be mistaken. It is not when we wish to act upon others that we best succeed; on the contrary, when our fellows discover our intention, they instinctively guard against us; they arm themselves with mistrust, and close their hearts to us; but how will they escape the influence of a life which daily, hourly, by the fruits it bears, proclaims the sentiment by which it is animated? Do you not see that under all its forms, and in every way it enters and penetrates minds, and leaves in them a savour which nothing can destroy, so that if you should ask me what is the most powerful, the most efficacious method of pro-

pagating saving truth, I would be forced to answer that the best means is to realise it fully in your life.

Besides, all are not called to speak; but show me the Christian who, in his own special way, cannot act upon the world by his life. He fills this mission, the man who, in presence of injustice, powerfully protests and startles as by a thunderbolt the conscience of his contemporaries; but she fills it also, the poor nurse who, in the wards of a hospital, breathing a murderous atmosphere, watches beside the couch of the victims of the dreaded pestilence. He fills this mission, the missionary who, far from all his heart could love, and in presence of a dull and stony indifference, prays, preaches, waits and glorifies God by his patience more than many another by his martyrdom; but he fills it also, the young man who, at the entrance of a brilliant career, called to take part in an unfair transaction, breaks all his future hopes and silently returns to the painful labour which will procure him his daily bread. He fills this mission, the scholar, the writer, who, indefatigable even to his old age, employs all his powers in defending the convictions upon which his soul lives; but she fills it too, the maiden who, at the age when the world calls her and surrounds her with its seductions and flattery, resists it, chooses a life of devotion and sacrifice, and displays the pure light of grace and beauty decked with a celestial reflection. He fills this mission, the man who, having received of God immense wealth, consecrates it with unwearied activity and perseverance to works of faith and charity; but he fills it also, the sick man who, upon his bed of pain and incapable of action, living upon charity perhaps, serves God uncomplainingly, bows his head beneath His paternal hand, and teaches us by the touching outbursts of his gratitude to blush at our own thanklessness. Well! all these visible or secret actions,

all these known or unknown acts of devotion, all these sufferings, all these sacrifices, all these are what sustains the Church, what causes the truth to progress, what saves the world. Suppress them all, and what will be left you wherewith to face the powers of evil? What force, what resistance will you have to oppose them? What would we become without that continued action of holiness, of Christian charity, which daily, hourly, fills the Church and the world with a renewed life? What would be the ocean if its waters, losing their powerful savour, became tasteless, insipid, nauseous, and left deadly miasma upon our shores after each of its tides? What would become of society deprived of the salt of the Gospel? What would become of that brilliant civilisation which bears in its midst so many elements of scepticism and dissolution? Ah! see how the ancient world expires, after forty centuries' existence, in the mire of despotism and of an unutterable corruption.

And here what I affirmed of the human language comes back to me with renewed force: words of truth, I have said, can never be lost. Now, do you think that an action of faith, of charity, can ever perish? No; it enters that immense *ensemble* of good which increases, and derives strength from each of our acts of devotion, from all our prayers, from all our sacrifices. Though ignored and despised, it serves nevertheless to the advancement of the reign of God upon earth. Each act of abnegation, of charity, is for the Church a victory and for the empire of evil a defeat. Each sacrifice which faith inspires renders the triumph of truth more certain. Some years ago, an English ship, the "London," perished in the Bay of Biscay, dragging down with it into the depths of the ocean more than two hundred human beings; but on this ship, amidst that fearful scene and

the roar of the storm, the voice of prayer was heard; in the supreme hour, when the only remaining boat was being detached from the side of the vessel, some of the shipwrecked were seen, oh, heroic spectacle! giving up their only chance of safety to others whose lives they considered more useful than their own; and when the boat rowed off from the deck of the ship, now almost buried beneath the waves, the wife of a missionary unfastened her cloak and flung it after the departing ones, that it might serve to protect some of them from the cold. Will this touching and sublime act of Christian charity die buried with her beneath the waves of the ocean which have swept over the bodies of those unfortunate beings? No, it remains, it has been added to that marvellous history of the sacrifices which the spirit of Christ produces here below; and in the unceasing struggle which Christian love wages against selfishness, it will be of more service towards the progress of truth than all our words.

I have shown what is the influence which every Christian life must exert on the world. Have you recognised yourselves in this picture, and are you sure that you exercise this penetrating action upon those who surround you?

The world is unanimous to-day in condemning the austere piety which dreads the contact of mankind, which feels no sympathy for the generous causes that inflame humanity, which keeps away from public life, from all the noble research of the human mind, and admits of no possible holiness save in the narrow circle wherein it confines itself. In all imaginable strains men say and repeat that the Christian must join in the preoccupations of his age, and that there is no sphere of human activity, whether politics, science, art, or literature, in which religion cannot find its place. So long as this general



principle is affirmed, no objection is raised. How could the natural heart look with anything but joy upon those paths which open to it? With joy it enters them, and thus returns to the world; but is it to permeate it with the spirit of Christ? That is the question. Ah! if it be to lose the stern savour of piety, to become converted to the ideas, sentiments, and language that reign in the world, better far had it been for it to remain in solitude; for solitude, in spite of its strange and gloomy aspects, is a power; by keeping apart from society, one may act upon it more powerfully than at first sight it would seem. We complain of the scarcity of individual convictions and of strong characters. Such convictions, such characters are not to be acquired in the world. It is not on the road-side, it is not in the dust of our public walks that we see the oak raising heavenward its gigantic trunk, and spreading its vigorous branches in all directions; neither is it in the enervating atmosphere of worldly circles that you will find truly virile souls capable of will and action. The greatest prophets have all dwelt in the desert; there is also a moral solitude which all who aim at being the witnesses of the truth must know. Society, even the best, weakens and unnerves us in the long run; we continually, though unawares, yield to the opinions of others; we often sacrifice to them what was most precious to us, the share of the truth which we were called to give to the world. I even dare to affirm that religious society may become unwholesome if the soul, in its midst, cannot enter into communion with God; there also we may fall into the prevailing current of ideas, of injustice, of prejudices as regards men and things; there also we may don I know not what pious livery which is the fashion of the day. What, then, will it be if the Christian imprudently associates with those who are strangers to his faith and

hopes? Foolish, indeed, must he be if he does not perceive that in this dangerous intercourse he will be the loser! See, in fact, how rapidly the world succeeds in robbing him of the convictions which were his strength! It employs all manner of means to attain this end—threats or flattery, promises or scorn; and the day comes when the salt loses its savour, and sorrowfully we question whether it will ever get it back again. How many Christian lives which, of yore, were full of the most austere fervour, have thus ended miserably! Vainly would they employ themselves in the service of God to-day. They can no longer do so. The world ensnares them more and more; it enchains and paralyses them. Do not look for any generous devotion on their part; charity becomes ever more foreign and sacrifice ever more impossible to them, and the service of God ceases to have any attraction in their sight. O God, keep us from such an end, and after having deposited Thy saving truth in our souls, grant that we may ever be its firm and faithful witnesses!

## XXIV.

*DISCOURAGEMENT.*

“I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought and in vain; yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.”—ISA. xlix. 4.

EACH epoch has its peculiar temptations and trials; the spiritual as well as the physical world is at certain times affected by general diseases which are all the more to be dreaded that, as everybody feels their influence, no one perceives the full danger. For the Christian in the present day, one of those maladies is discouragement.

Discouragement! Not under that demonstrative and passionate form which strikes us in the bitter and despairing complaints of the prophets and believers of bygone days. We rarely meet with such stirring dramas, with such explosions of grief on the part of noble souls whom the heart-rending spectacle of life and the world has deceived. We labour under a disease which is less violent, less dangerous apparently, but which is dull, slow, and treacherous.

We may account for this in many ways; the human mind in its onward march passes through successive stages of affirmation and doubt. There are times when men live upon generally accepted truths, which are all that is requisite for ordinary life and action. Thus it was, for instance, in the seventeenth century, when, in

the social order, monarchical traditions, and in the religious order, the authority of the Church for Roman Catholics and that of the Bible for Protestants, were the very elements of the common life. Thus also it was, though in a very different sense, at the close of the eighteenth century, when confidence in the supremacy of human reason, in man's native goodness, in his unlimited progress, intoxicated both heart and mind, until the day when the Reign of Terror, in its formidable explosion, disclosed what lurked beneath all these dreams. There are other times when, far from believing and affirming, man, having missed his way, stops and tries to find out the right path. What till then he had accepted is now insufficient for him. He would analyse everything, sift everything, call everything into question anew. This tendency in itself is lawful, but it has its dangers. The aim of analysis is to *decompose* the objects which it studies; now, it is evident that the analytical spirit, if it predominates exclusively, is fatal to the creative spirit, to enthusiasm, to religious faith, to all those sentiments by which the soul instinctively apprehends the most sublime truths. You may, therefore, be assured that whenever analysis is carried to an extreme, the vital powers of the soul grow feeble, and are in danger of dying away. Well, one of the first fruits of that tendency in religious souls is languor. How is it possible for the soul to love, to act, to believe, when each of its impulses is met by the phantom of a *peradventure*; when, behind the heart which feels and would live, rises inquiring reason with its arguments, negations, and sneers?

If this analytical spirit is injurious to individual inspiration, it acts more fatally still upon collective life. Nothing is rarer in the present day than energy in common impulses. The Church, as well as society, breaks up into fragments, each of which claims its inde-

pendence, its right of free inquiry, and in many cases party spirit alone takes the place of declining solidarity. I do not judge this tendency; I believe it providential and necessary. I believe that the external and wholly political bonds which hitherto have united souls in one and the same Church by right of birth and tradition, must be broken, and that henceforth it is on the ground of a common faith that unity must be sought. But, without developing this thought, which does not enter into my subject, I state that this latent process of decomposition shakes us all; that, born as we are to be members of one spiritual family, born to love, to believe, to suffer with sister-souls, and feeling as we do that all our powers are increased tenfold by sympathy, we do not traverse our epoch uninjured. Impulse fails us, and for want of being carried away by one of those mighty currents of life and ardour which have often swept through the world, we labour under atony and discouragement.

That is not all. Our epoch has another character; it is, it aims at being positive. The marvellous progress of certain sciences, the wonders of industry, attract minds with a strange force towards the lower world. Men believe in what they see, in what they feel. An ill-disguised scorn meets the research which goes beyond the world of sense or of pure logic. The supernatural is laid down as mysticism, and this word, in the eyes of many, is an irrevocable condemnation. This tendency reacts upon the Church. It is a fact not to be denied that utilitarianism invades it.

Men look for a religion of facts and sentiments. When we expound the grand doctrines of Christianity, when we point to the Divine and superhuman side of the revealed truths, they give us but a divided attention. Our hearers unwittingly prefer that we should tell them of man rather than of God; if we speak to them of

themselves, of their struggles and doubts, of their temptations and sorrows, we stir up their feelings and their sympathy; if we fathom the depths of the revealed doctrines, their interest flags. But allow me to tell you that this is fatal to the soul. It is neither good nor healthful for man to contemplate himself too long; it is not from this sight that he will derive strength and moral restoration. The Gospel teaches this admirably, for it always aims at raising our eyes on high towards "the hills from whence cometh our help;" on high, that is, towards the superior world, towards Him who upon earth has been the living image of the invisible God. The grand epochs of life, holiness, faith, and powerful action, have been those when the heavens have opened upon humanity. Man, by looking to himself alone, can at most become a stoic, but the last word of stoicism is despair and suicide. Now, whenever religion has been, and has aimed at being, purely human, it has produced discouragement.

These are some of the causes which explain the state in which so many souls languish to-day. Add to them the influence of peculiar dispositions of mind and temperament, and the purely physical causes which act in so mysterious yet powerful a manner upon our moral condition. Add to them the inclination which the most serious minds have of looking at the gloomy side of human things; add to them those tendencies which exist in every age, but which, amid the general dispositions I have mentioned, develop themselves far more strongly and rapidly, and you will understand why nothing is more rare in the present day than the joyous, heroic, and serene faith which has characterised other epochs; you will understand that discouragement is an enemy that must be opposed at any cost. All feel this, and mourn over such a state of things. In certain spheres, people

seek to escape falling into it by excesses of feverish ardour; they excite their imagination by the prospect of a speedy realisation of the promises of prophecy; they produce in this way an exaltation which is more or less sincere, but this galvanic excitement is soon followed by a prostration still more profound. Those factitious but fitful gleams do not long enlighten the soul's path, and those deceptions often result simply in changing its languor into unbelief. What then is to be done, you ask? I reply: Build up your life upon another foundation than that of your fleeting impressions; edify it upon the central and eternal truth which survives the fluctuations of opinions and beliefs; live in Jesus Christ, and, upon the heights where communion with Him raises you, breathe the vivifying air which alone can restore your strength. Then only will you be enabled to set faith against sight, that which is eternal against that which passes away, and thanksgiving against discouragement. But this is as much as to say that you are to be the children of God, that you are to become Christians, if you have never been, or if you have ceased to be such. Now, this remedy, which is the only one that can avail against the disease under which we all labour, cannot cure us in one day.

I admit this; consequently, now that I have pointed it out to you, I hasten to descend with you upon the ground of immediate action. Let us seek under what aspects discouragement most often seizes upon us, and with what weapons it must be repulsed. This invisible and gloomy enemy that attacks us secretly in the twilight of our waning faith, let us now bring it forth into the open day; let us look at it full in the face with a firm and steady gaze; for when it is well known, it is already half conquered.

When I look closely into it, I discover two principal

causes of discouragement for the Christian. The first is the importance of the task which God sets before him ; the second is his powerlessness to fulfil it.

I say, in the first place: the importance of the task which God sets before us. What ! will some enthusiastic soul, doubtless, object, is it not that very greatness which kindles in the Christian's heart an ambition that nothing can extinguish ? Yes, I admit this ; we are so wonderfully made that each time the ideal of love and holiness to which the Gospel calls us is presented to us in its sublime beauty, our heart thrills with deep assent, and we feel that for this indeed we have been created. But when we must cease to admire in order to act ; when we must no longer allow our imagination to be inflamed by a perfection which captivates it, but realise this perfection in our life, then with affright we measure the distance which separates us from it, and discouragement seizes upon our soul.

See what takes place in human things. Let a man having but an ordinary mind have in view an end as commonplace as himself, it will cost him but little effort to attain ; whether artist, thinker, or poet, he will be easily satisfied. But let a true genius catch but a glimpse of some sublime ideal and endeavour to reproduce it ; you will hear him bewail his failures ; each of his attempts will no doubt produce a masterpiece which will satisfy all the world but himself ; you will see the greatest poet of Rome order that his immortal work be burned after his death ; you will see, according to one of the most beautiful legends of the Middle Ages, Saint Cecilia breaking to pieces her musical instruments on the day when she hears the distant choir of the angels.

Now, suppose the Gospel had set before us no other end than worldly honesty, than that wholly external probity which looks to the outside of life, and is limited to



the worship of honour and propriety, all would doubtless tend towards it, for all would believe it easily attainable. But when the point in question is to be holy before God, and not only before men, to submit to the Divine will, not only one's actions, but one's intentions, and day by day, hour after hour, to bow beneath the sanctifying discipline of the Spirit of God, then the more we advance, the further the end seems to recede, and the very greatness of our task sometimes stands out before us like the gigantic wall over which a man, labouring under the terrors of nightmare, imagines he must leap at any cost.

Again, let us suppose that the Gospel had held out to us no other ideal of charity than love of the fatherland, and called us to seek in humanity nothing more than the progress of some political cause, or the triumph of some system, none would have shrunk from this task. But you well know that it requires of us more than this: you know that it enforces upon us not only that love for our fellow-men which, after all, is but an enlarged selfishness, so to speak, but charity, that charity which shrinks not from sacrifice; you know that it places before us all the miseries, all the sufferings of humanity as a field open to us; that it does not allow us to turn a deaf ear to the cries of distress which reach us from the extremities of the earth; you know that it forbids our falling asleep in the lap of luxury and in a satisfied egotism, that it renders us responsible to a certain extent for all the sorrows that surround us, that it cries to us as God did of old to Cain: "Where is Abel, thy brother?" and that, in presence of our cowardice, ever ready to shrink that sublime duty, it lifts, like an accusing image, the bleeding and Divine figure of crucified love.

Now, that is what alarms, what wounds and irritates us. Oh! how we would prefer a religion which would leave us to ourselves instead of invading our indepen-

dence to such a degree and thus placing its hand upon our heart. Shall I dare to say it? There are days when all the evil powers of our soul rebel against that law of love and holiness; days when we say to God: "Why hast Thou revealed it to me? Why, whilst so many others are unconcerned and joyous, carried away by the current of pleasure, interest, or lust, why hast Thou placed before me that task which overpowers me by its very greatness? Why hast Thou produced in my conscience that thirst after holiness which troubles all my evil joys? Why hast Thou deposited in my heart that love which envenoms all my pleasures and causes me to feel, in their very enjoyment, their bitterness and their vanity?"

Thus we utter our foolish complaints against God, and yet, what would we have had Him do? Ask less of us, set before us an ideal meaner than holiness, meaner than love? But what God would this be whom so little could satisfy? Ah! you would not believe in Him a single day, He would be inferior to you, and your conscience would require what He Himself would have ceased to demand of you. Brethren, you must choose between lowering the Divine law to the level of your own cowardly nature, or raising your nature to the level of the Divine law. Alas! you know how the great majority of our fellow-men live on gradually wearing away, in contact with the world, the image of God graven within their hearts, deforming their soul to shape it according to the morality of the day, stifling the voice of their conscience and of their heart. But you cannot do this. If for a moment I should counsel you to follow that course, if from this pulpit I should preach to you a low-toned morality which would flatter your selfishness, you would doubtless sound my praises, but in the depths of your soul there would be something which would despise my preaching. No, you are too well versed in these matters

to renounce the ideal to which God calls you ; all the arguments, all the sophisms of the world and of your own heart will vainly endeavour to deceive you ; a supreme, imperious voice cries loudly in your ears that your life must be referred to God, to the God whose you are by right of creation and by right of redemption. Instead of lowering the Divine law to the level of your nature, raise your nature to the level of the law of God, that is the only solution of this awful problem worthy of God and of you. But is this solution possible ? It is possible, for there is no other ; it is possible, for our conscience affirms it ; it is possible, for God declares it ; and He who knoweth our frame, He who knoweth our misery, our corruption, and our incurable weakness, places before us no other end than that of becoming like Himself. Dare to say that He is deceiving us, that He sets before us an end which we can never reach, that He makes sport of us in creating in our souls a desire without object, a hunger without satisfaction, an endless and fruitless search after truth ; or rather, believe in the God of the Gospel who sets the ideal before us, and urges us constantly towards its realisation ; in the God of the Gospel who calls, converts, and regenerates us, and who, after having commenced the work of our salvation, wishes to continue and to perfect it.

But I hear your objection. You admit with me that the end which the Gospel sets before us is the only one worthy of God and of yourselves ; but to this affirmation you oppose your experience ; you point me to your languid faith, to your useless life, to your fruitless efforts, and you are ready with the prophet to exclaim, "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." The non-success of his labour is, as we have already said, the second motive of discouragement for the Christian.

Before I answer, allow me to remind you of a fact which you will doubtless have observed as well as I. Do you know who are the Christians who most bitterly mourn over the failure of their efforts? They are almost always the most active and the most advanced. Yes; hear him, that man whose sanctified life is a pattern for you, who lives in the midst of the world as if he were not of the world, who preaches by his works far more than by his words, who, severe for himself, indulgent for others, astonishes you by his vigilance, his abnegation, and his charity. You will hear him bewail his weakness, his lukewarmness, his want of zeal; you will hear him speak with sincere terror of all the mercies which God has accumulated upon him for so many years, of the responsibility which weighs upon his soul, of the time he has wasted, of the opportunities he has allowed to slip; you will hear him without affectation apply to himself the most humiliating passages of Scripture, and ask God to forgive him, even those of his good works in which His discerning eye has detected the tares mingled with the wheat, and the dross mixed up with the pure gold. Or again, draw near to those giants of the spiritual order, to those of God's workmen who, at various epochs, have called themselves El jah, St. Paul, Chrysostom, St. Bernard, Luther, or Whitefield, and who bewilder us by the immensity of the work they have accomplished, you will hear them mourn over the feeble results of their labours. Elijah cries to God: "Take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." Isaiah utters the words of my text: "I have spent my strength for nought and in vain." St. Paul trembles lest he be found to have been a useless servant. St. Bernard in his last letters expresses the distressing sentiment of having accomplished nothing of importance. Calvin, dying, says to those who surround him, "All I have done has been worthless. The wicked will rejoice at

these words. But again I say that all I have done is worthless, and that I am a miserable creature." What are we to infer from this? That these men have been inactive? No; but that in presence of the ideal which God had put it into their hearts to realise, their work has seemed to them well-nigh lost; for, in fact, it enters into the Divine plan to conceal almost always from us the results of the works we accomplish for God. In other domains, the success of truth is often visible and striking. Here, it seems as though the seed were lost, as though the bread were swallowed up beneath the waters upon the surface of which it had been cast; as though, in a word, all our labour remains fruitless.

Why does God permit this? Ah! first of all, that our faith may be tried. Picture to yourselves, were it but for a moment, a Christian life in which every effort would bear its fruits, in which the answer would immediately follow the prayer, in which sowing time would be rapidly succeeded by harvest, and long and painful sacrifices by the joy of deliverance. Who would not long to be a Christian on such conditions? All would become such from motives of interest, first of all, and the kingdom of God would be peopled with hirelings. But where would be the sublime spectacle of a faith that hopes, waits, and acts though it sees not? and how could God be glorified in it? Now God will not be served by mercenaries; He often hides from His children the fruit of their labours that it may be for Him they toil, and not for themselves; He hides it from them that they may seek their reward in Him, and not in the results of their work, nor in the outward success which would supply the place of His approbation, nor even in the progress of a sanctified life, for, if separated from God, perfection itself may become an idol.

But it is not only to strengthen our faith that God

treats us thus, it is also to humble us. Ah! they are few those who can bear success without tottering beneath its weight. You have perhaps admired some great man at a distance; so long as you have been acquainted with his works only he has appeared to you raised upon a lofty pedestal and surrounded with a pure halo of glory; everything in him seemed to be equal to his genius, and you believed him exalted far above all the petty passions of mankind. So you thought till the day when you came into closer relations with him; then you have been dismayed at finding in the soul of that scholar, artist, or writer, all the baseness which excited self-love and vanity can call up; you have seen him yield to envy, disparage his rivals, deny the genius of others, join pedantry to ostentation; you have seen the finest talents associated with the meanest character, and you have suffered for the human race. Is this an imaginary picture, or is it not, on the contrary, a most notorious fact? That is because there is in success a fascination and an intoxication which very few can bear.

Therefore picture to yourselves success in a Divine work thus becoming a source of seduction for the man who obtains it, exciting his mind, inflating his heart, and filling it with the most unworthy vanity in the very hour when he is speaking of what is grandest and most sacred in the world. Picture to yourselves, O blasphemy! a St. Paul full of self-conceit, intoxicated with his own glory, seeking to win for himself a name, labouring only for the furtherance of his own schemes. Now, that is the scandal which God has wished to spare His Church, and whilst in all other dominions the deepest selfishness and the most arrogant pride often obtain the grandest results, it has pleased God that, in His kingdom, the dominion of souls should belong only to those who are capable of self-denial. Accordingly, to save His ser-

vants from the temptations of success, it pleases Him to hide from them the results of their labour, and to send them, in the midst of the most fruitful activity, the most bitter motives of discouragement. Severe discipline of love by which He chastens those He loves, and corrects those of whom He makes His choice instruments!

At this school He teaches them not only humility but meekness and compassion. Success alone would never develop these virtues. Success gives strength. Strength! ah, that is much, doubtless, but something more than strength is needed to do good here below. If there are hours when a powerful arm is necessary, there are others when what is especially required is a soft and delicate hand that will not break the bruised reed. When Jesus pronounced these sublime words: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," He did not add: "Come unto Me, for I am strong;" He said: "Come unto Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart;" admirable expression, which shows all the power of humble and obscure virtues, of tenderness and compassion! He possessed those virtues in their fulness, He whom the Bible calls in turn the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God; but He will create them, O wonder of wonders! in the soul of a former Pharisee, of Saul of Tarsus; He will make of this hero of faith, of this giant, of this indomitable combatant, a man who will be able to speak to the Galatians "as to his own dear children;" He will produce in that rude, lofty, arrogant nature the finest features of the most exquisite charity. How will He do so? By breaking his strength, by leaving him a thorn in the flesh, by placing him under the stern discipline of patience. Is not that what alone can explain the gentleness of Paul and the tender solicitude for the feeble which breathes throughout all his epistles?

I appeal to your own experience; when you suffer,

when your soul falters beneath the oppression of doubt, what you want, is it simply one of those firm souls whose serene and never disturbed faith cannot enter into your perplexities? No, you want a soul which, like yours, has sorrowed, which has felt the sufferings and the doubts that oppress you, which has trod your own dark paths. Oh! you who like us have known the anguish of discouragement, you who have prayed in vain, you who have laboured for nought, what has been most comforting to you in those bitter hours? Has it not been confessions like that of our text? When you have heard Elijah complain at having toiled in vain, or Isaiah exclaim, "I have spent my strength for nought and in vain," have you not blessed those sister-souls in which you discovered your own struggles, your own deceptions, your own griefs; and have you not felt your heart grow calm and your faith grow firm at the thought that, though separated from them by the distance of centuries, you are merely passing through the trials out of which those mighty believers of the past came forth triumphant?

That is why, so far at least as we are able to understand the Divine purposes, God hides from us the results of our labour. Nevertheless, these results are simply hidden, they will appear in their own time. No, none in serving the Lord has the right to say: "I have laboured for nought." He may say so, the man whom success has always attended, and who has thought only of self, the man who has seen his coffers filled, his projects realised, his cup overflowing with prosperity. He may say so, even though crowds should surround him with congratulations upon his immense labours, upon his well-employed life, upon his prodigious success; for as he has worked for himself alone, his work is indeed a work of vanity. But the believer who has referred his life to God never



has the right to say, "In vain have I laboured;" no, not though he had merely accomplished in secret the lowliest of tasks, not though he had merely bewailed his inutility in the forced inaction of sickness. There is no work, however insignificant it be, but God gathers and rewards, if its principle has been an impulse of love for Him. You never can tell how much good you do when you do what is right. Did they know, those heroes of the Bible, who, faithful to duty, humbly died in performing it, did they know all they would leave behind them of strength, courage, and edification, as an inheritance for all coming ages? Did he know—he, St. Stephen, the first of the martyrs—when, falling beneath the blows of those that stoned him, he turned towards heaven an angelic glance and prayed for his murderers—did he know that this look and this prayer would produce an ineffaceable impression on the conscience of one of the witnesses of that scene, and that, by a marvellous solidarity, the magnificent apostleship of Paul would be connected with his death? And you, when you utter a firm and humble word in testimony of the truth, do you know whither the wind will bear that precious seed, and in what heart it will germinate? Do you know what that sacrifice which has been misjudged, what that act of devotion which has been sneered at, what that seemingly fruitless but patient love will one day bring forth?

And even though no traces of them would be left upon earth, even though your labours and sacrifices would seem to be for ever buried beneath the world's indifference, still would the prophet's consolation be yours: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God." Yes, in this lies the never-failing strength of the Christian. Solitary, forsaken, despised of men, he has as his witness, as his approver, as his judge, the invisible Master whom nothing escapes and who forgets

nothing. God has seen him, that is enough for him; he has not lost his reward.

Does this mean that, in an indirect manner, I wish to appeal to interested motives, and exhort you to labour in view of an assured salary? Many cast this reproach at us. I hear an arrogant philosophy tell us that, after all, we labour merely for success; I hear our modern stoics, from the heights of their serenity, attack our hope in a supreme retribution. They tell us, these would-be sages, they repeat again and again, that the approbation of conscience is sufficient, and that the honest man requires nothing more. What do they mean by this? That the right must be loved for its own sake, and not from any outward motive; that God must be served, not because He rewards, but because He is truth itself? Is that their idea? But it has been ours long before, and a thousand times, in the name of the Gospel, we have opposed that servile, interested motive which seeks itself while pretending to serve God. But if we condemn that vulgar motive, that low attraction of reward, shall we go so far as to say that the approbation of conscience is sufficient? No, to affirm this would be to take a mistaken view of human nature, to wound it in its noblest instincts. We cannot be our own aim, our own judge, or our own reward. We need a witness of our actions, a look to encourage us, a heart to understand us. This is claimed likewise by the imperious desire for justice which demands that good may never be lost, but that it may find its sanction in the will and approbation of the universal Judge. If you leave man nothing but his conscience, you will have the grand but desperate spectacle of stoicism committing suicide to escape the triumph of evil; if, on the contrary, you point us to a God who understands and encourages us, who numbers all our sighs and tears and sacrifices, you will kindle in the heart of humanity a

courage which nothing will ever destroy, no, not even the most cruel failure! Count, if you can, all the souls which this mere sentiment prevents from falling into despair!

Oft on the Sabbath morning when we unite in song and prayer, and feel that our faith is strengthened in brotherly communion, I think of those to whom these blessings are denied; I think of that lonely pastor, painfully pursuing his ministry in the midst of an indifferent, or, it may be, hostile population, praying without answer, working without success, and compelled to say, as he casts a retrospective glance upon the past: "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength in vain, and for nought." I think of that missionary in a distant heathen land, gathering about him a few proselytes who scarce understand him, and feeling that all the enthusiasm of his heart will be met by an icy indifference or by a dull and stupid opposition. For them each of these Sabbaths, which are the festivals of the Church, are like a new trial by which their faith is to be exercised, and in which the bitter sentiment of the vanity of their efforts haunts them unceasingly. Ah! those are the heroes of faith! The world often looks to those ministries which are rendered easy by success, and exclaims: "What ardour; what zeal!" And I, I will tell you, like Jesus Christ, "See ye all these things?" Is it so grand a task or so difficult a mission to speak to sympathetic hearts and minds, to preach the truth to a congregation whose attention and approval one is sure to obtain? Ah! if God in His Divine wisdom did not take care to mingle with such a ministry some secret crosses, some unknown humiliations, it were indeed to be feared that those who pursue it would walk by sight rather than by faith, and place the approbation of men above the approbation of God! No, the true combatants, the true heroes, are there in

those unknown and inglorious posts, alone in presence of an unbelieving world, alone to believe, to hope, to love, called by a severe dispensation to sow without reaping, and scoffed at perhaps by infidelity which casts at them these words of the Psalm, "Where is thy God!" Ah! I know that God who sees them and knows their anguish has secret compensations in store for them; I know that, in their loneliness, they enter more deeply than we do in the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ, and that they feel more closely united to the crucified Witness of condemned Truth who, He also, saw His ministry despised, who stretched out His arms towards a rebellious people, who wept over Jerusalem, and whose dying eyes beheld nought but a cursing multitude. But what would they do, I ask, if they had not this refuge? What would they do if they could not say with the prophet: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God?"

But why should I choose such extreme examples? Look at the question closely and you will see that we all have to bear this trial if we are truly the disciples of Christ. The best portion of our life escapes the eyes of the world, for the world sees only what is external. There are virtues and sacrifices which are already here below rewarded by gratitude and love. But these are few. Do you know what maintains life in the world and saves humanity? It is those thousands of obscure actions, of silent sacrifices of which God alone is the witness and which would never have been performed without Him. Yes, if there are Christian nations which are the bearers of the world's future, that is, of progress, liberty, faith, and hope; if there is upon earth an asylum open to suffering souls; if there is a Church in which the Gospel may be preached, all this has become possible only by dint of heroism in the past, of sacrifices buried in oblivion. Like those Roman walls which are composed

of tiny stones joined together by an indestructible cement, and which have braved the efforts of centuries, so the foundations of the Church consist of little virtues which none can ever count. We are the heirs of eighteen centuries of devotion, and the world sees but an insignificant portion of all this wealth. No ear hath heard, no voice can ever tell all the anguish, but also all the sublime firmness and courage which have been displayed in those dungeons, in those oubliettes where the martyrs of faith have perished by thousands; neither can any one tell all that Christian faith daily obtains around us of forgiveness, of generous forgetfulness of the past, of acts of self-denial, of victories over the flesh and over pride. But these triumphs so dearly bought and which often cost so many tears, how would they ever be possible if the Christian could not say: "My judgment is with the Lord, and my work is with my God?"

At work, then, ye discouraged souls. Shake off that dull apathy which paralyses you, that unwholesome melancholy in which you seem to delight. At work! and to so many days wasted in the past add not days wasted in the future in useless regrets. At work! since your work is with your God, since He is pleased in His mercy to count your slightest efforts without disdainning one. Ah! why should you not bring to the service of that adorable Master as much of your time, heart, and life as the worldly know how to devote to the vanities that are losing them! Is it not in the service of the world that one may say: "I have laboured in vain; I have wasted my strength for nought, and in vain?" And if they cannot say so to-day while their eyes are still dazzled by its passing splendours, will they not be compelled to admit it in the fearful hour when illusions will vanish, when death will speak, when the world will have neither hope nor consolation for them, when they

will have to give God an account of the talents with which He has entrusted them? O despair! O misery! to have lived for self alone; to have perhaps acted a great part, attained a high position, gained a fortune and a name, and after all be forced to acknowledge that their lives have been wasted, and that they have forgotten the essential! To learn all this, but too late; to see the night of their agony illumined by the light of the Gospel as by the lurid glare of lightning, and to understand how they should have lived in the hour when they are about to die!

You, my brother, do not dread so fearful a surprise. You know what is the direction of your life, for towards eternity it tends, and whatever be your trials, you have the ineffable joy of serving the living and faithful God. And it is you who know all the greatness, all the beauty of a Christian life, you who believe that not one of your efforts is lost, you who add your stone to the edifice which God is raising from age to age, it is you who mourn, you who walk with a bowed head, you who allow your arms to droop with fatigue and your heart to fail! You believe in the triumph of redeeming love, and it is you who give the world the spectacle of a languishing and melancholy piety, of a joyless religion, of an extinguished hope! And what success, what victory do you pretend to gain, what proselytism do you expect to exercise? No, no, it is not by contemplating yourselves alone, it is not by contemplating your fruitless labours, but by looking to the Author and Finisher of faith that you will feel strengthened. Safety, strength, salvation, victory lie in the sight of the Sun of Righteousness that riseth with healing in its wings. Look heavenward, ye disciples of Jesus Christ! Set the ineffable beauty of heavenly blessings over against all the ills of nature, against all the sorrows of the soul, against all the decep-

tions of earth. Above this world which misjudges and despises you, see the eye of your God resting upon you ; hear the applause of the saints. Rejoice even for those who sneer at your efforts, for they will be the heirs of your sacrifices ; and if anything can save them, it will be your unwavering fidelity, your unwearied love. Courage ! and after all your failures and defeats, repeat these words of faith : “ My judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God.”

## XXV.

*LAZARUS AT THE RICH MAN'S GATE.*

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores.”—LUKE xvi. 20, 21.

ARE you not amazed at the striking contrast contained in these simple words? They were uttered eighteen centuries ago. Have they lost their actuality? Wealth, misery! ever in presence, now as then, and so constantly in presence that the conflict between them is, of all social questions, the greatest and most difficult, the darkest and the most pregnant with dismal forebodings for the future. And yet for this terrible problem many a solution has been proposed. “Down with the rich!” some have said, and we have heard the crowds repeating that senseless cry. “Down with the rich! Let us strike down opulence, let us attack capital, let us destroy the right of inheritance!” and men have not seen that, in this way, they aimed a deadly blow against liberty, and with liberty against energy, and with energy against labour itself, and left us nothing but the equality of savages, who, without laying up anything for the morrow, unconcernedly fall asleep until hunger again rouses them and sends them forth in search of their prey. “No more poverty!” other voices have exclaimed;



and in this age a loud echo has repeated:—"No more poverty!" Ah! if this had been a mere desire, a mere impulse of charity! but it has become a motto, a promise. No more poverty! and some said, "The State must provide labour for all;" others, "The State will feed the needy;" and men saw not that they assigned to the State an impossible part, and created the most artificial and the most tyrannical utopia; they saw not that they were mistaken concerning human nature, for to decree that there will be no more misery comes to enacting that there will be no more idleness, no more vice, no more passions, no more sin. But whilst all these theories succeeded one another, and led into the most delusive and cruel dreams multitudes whom they were to leave without consolation and without bread, the social evil pursued its slow and fatal march. No more rich, no more poor! See what takes place in England, in that classical land of philanthropy and social economy; there, beside the most colossal opulence derived from all parts of the world, you will find the most squalid pauperism which, after having exhibited its more than heathen degradation in the full light of day, repairs at night to haunts of which a generous-hearted man who visited them once said, in a famous article, that Sodom alone could have sheltered the infamy he had seen. That is the state of things in the days in which we live. The rich, the poor, in presence as in the words of our text; and if the abundance and resources of the former have increased in reason of the progress of eighteen centuries' civilisation, the misery of the latter is as real, as appalling as ever.

What social remedy is to be applied to this evil? That enters not into my subject; such a question it is not my part to decide. I do not mean to analyse systems; I take humanity such as I find it. Now,

before me I see two classes of men, the rich and the poor; I believe these two classes will exist to-morrow as they existed yesterday, and, in the name of the Gospel, I come once more to remind the former of their duties towards the latter. The subject is not new, I admit; it is as ancient as suffering itself. I will, doubtless, repeat only what you have a hundred times heard. But what matters? From the day when selfishness will have died away in our midst, I promise, brethren, never to speak to you again of charity or sacrifice.

Here, then, is Lazarus lying at the rich man's gate. Well! what I ask, in the first place, is that the rich man cast his eyes upon Lazarus. Here I mean by the rich man all who have beneath them some Lazarus, all who have it in their power to succour and comfort him.

To look upon Lazarus! But understand me well. The question is not to be stirred, in passing, by the account of some misfortune. To cast one's alms at it, to act a certain part in some charitable work, and after having thus quieted one's conscience, to comfort oneself by saying that this age is an eminently philanthropic and generous age. The question is to look at suffering in the face, and become acquainted with it. That is what I call looking upon Lazarus. Do you think that is what men do? Our age is the age of systems of charity, of associations, of institutions. Grand progress! some will say. Yes, but fatal progress too, if it should prevent the immediate contact between rich and poor, between the happy and the wretched, which the Gospel enforces in each of its pages, and whose salutary action no institution could ever replace.

I know what objection people bring forward; they say, "Time fails us!" and I am not of those who disdain this excuse. In all vocations, life is becoming more

and more like a forced march; everybody wishes to arrive first at the goal. Every career is crowded, the new-comers press forward impatiently, anxious to find their place. It is a struggle, a rush, through which all must advance on pain of being very soon supplanted. Never, perhaps, since the law of labour exists, has work been so intense, so crushing. Men no longer walk, they run. Woe betide him who stops too long to take breath! But is it always duty which thus straitens life? I ask it of those to whom God has given a certain measure of ease and fortune. Is it true that you can never in any way find a few spare hours? Now, in a society in which reigns, I will not say the Christian spirit, but mere justice, do you not think that the leisure hours of the well-to-do providentially belong to those whom daily labour fully absorbs? Of this spare time what share do you give Lazarus, what portion of your life do you devote to the poor and the suffering? Ah! leisure thus consecrated is indeed a sublime mission, an immense boon for the unfortunate and for yourselves too! We shall, therefore, see you set to work; and the humble and the lowly who are overpowered by toil, and chained to their post by the necessity of earning their daily bread, will henceforth rely upon you to whom God has allotted the most privileged of all portions. Alas! it might be so, were it not for the ambition, selfishness, and worldliness which take up all this leisure and absorb it completely.

I take an example, and I choose it amongst the class which is continually brought into contact with the sufferings of the masses, and which cannot justify itself by pleading its ignorance of them.

Here is a great manufacturer whose fortune well-nigh reaches opulence; in his mills and factories the operatives are numbered by thousands; all these hands, wills,

energies are his, and from morn to night they obey him ; he has disciplined these creative forces, and by dint of skill and experiments he has contrived to obtain from them all they were capable of giving. But in these factories men suffer : the air is tainted, faces grow pale and thin ; then men and women all work together in one confused mass ; the moral atmosphere is foul, baneful and corrupt ; the apprentice to whom the law insures at least the rest of the Sabbath, is often deprived of it, as is the case in most of the great manufactories in Paris ; and there, bent over his loom, stupefied by a precocious and unremitting labour, deprived more and more of religious and moral life, he droops, the victim of a vitiated blood and of the general decay of mind and body.

But the man on whom this serious responsibility rests, this man, the life and soul of that industry, what is he then that he should pass coldly beside those sufferings which he might assuage by applying to them, were it but for one moment, that penetrating glance, that clear-sightedness, that resolute action which he brings to bear upon all he undertakes ? Brethren, he has no time ! . . . To look upon Lazarus, he ! and do you not see what engrosses his attention, what wrinkles his brow, what fills his heart and his thoughts ? Yonder, before him, see those rivals whom he must still outrun, see those fortunes whose colossal amount seems a perpetual insult to his own, see that opulence, that splendour which float before his imagination ! This end, he must attain it ; he must march on, press on, run on, without losing a moment. But this man, has he not a Christian wife, has he no Christian daughters capable of feeling for those thousands of beings whose existence and happiness are so closely connected with him ? They have a pious soul, a sensitive heart ; they have shed torrents of tears at the touching accounts of imaginary woes, they have

mourned, like you, over the lot of the people, over those poor children so early degraded and deprived of all which ours possess in abundance. They will, no doubt, set to work; they will visit those families, look closely into all those sorrows, hold out a helping hand to those women, to those miserable young girls. Ah! this might have been but for worldliness! To look upon Lazarus! They! But their heart is elsewhere. Between the pleasures of to-day and those of to-morrow, between the last ball and the next concert, between the recollections of the past and the preoccupations of dress for the coming season, between all these ambitions, all these jealousies, all these questions of self-love, how do you think they can find time to care for what goes on yonder, in the suburb, within those bare and gloomy walls, amongst that needy, irreligious, and miserable population? The suburb, why, they will pass through it one day, proud, decked out in bright jewels, borne swiftly away by their fiery horses, and so will the people learn to know them. Then the following Sabbath, seated, like you, my sisters, in their pew, they will condemn, like you also, the rich man in the parable who leaves Lazarus to suffer abandoned at the gate of his palace!

Let us go further and say on this point what everybody knows and what everybody thinks. If there are many who, to-day, will not look at Lazarus, it is because they are no strangers to his misery, and because their conscience could not but find in this sight a subject of remorse. The Gospel tells us of unrighteous wealth. What name must we give to much of that which is being acquired to-day? A man enters upon an enterprise which, if it be not thoroughly evil, is at least exposed to fearful chances of failure. What matters? He will launch into it; once undertaken, it must be carried on; the ordinary means present themselves un-

looked for; without any effort on his part, he will simply allow them to follow their habitual course; soon enticing announcements fill all the newspapers; the most pressing solicitations, the most brilliant promises lay before the eyes of the most ignorant all the attractions of an easy, rapid, and certain gain. Alas! poor wretches! they come, they give up for this tempting speculation, the one the hard-earned savings of his life, the other the marriage-portion of his children and their daily bread. And why should they not come? Who warns them, who enlightens them? They come, then, and with all these spoils extorted from honest labour, the capital goes on increasing till the hour when suddenly the whole fabric totters and crumbles. Now, miserable fathers; now, unfortunate servants, who for thirty or forty years had faithfully fulfilled your duty; now, poor needlewomen who, refusing yourselves necessaries, had carefully laid by a small treasure for the evil days; go now and seek the fruit of your labours; claim it of those sumptuous buildings rising as by magic, claim it of all those splendours which dazzle your eyes, of all that wealth against which Christ would have thundered forth His anathemas! Is this fiction? Is it not the true and distressing tale of thousands of unfortunate beings? And you who hear me, are you sure, before God who sees you, that you have never, directly or indirectly, shared in these iniquities? Have you decried and denounced them by your attitude and your example? Who will do so, if not Christians? Who will rouse modern conscience which is so lenient, so tolerant for the evil which is crowned with success? Who will remind it that God reigns, that He counts the sufferings of the poor, that He hears the complaints of the oppressed, and that the lot of the rich man in the parable is a hundred times to be preferred to that of those who

themselves have laid Lazarus upon his bed of poverty and abjection ?

Therefore, to look upon Lazarus, to become acquainted with his sufferings, such is our first duty. But that is not all. We must do more. We must draw near to him, he must feel our presence, hear our voice. I have already said that charity exercised at a distance will not suffice. Moreover, it is this charity which is often mistaken and often deceived ; it is this charity which encourages the vice and intrigue that skilfully cover themselves with the rags of poverty. Nothing can replace a direct and personal intercourse with those who suffer. Accordingly, in each of its pages, the Gospel bids us visit the poor and comfort them directly. And what exhortation can have the same value as the beautiful example which Jesus Christ has left us ?

Have you never remarked the brief and striking feature which accompanies almost all the cures and deeds of mercy wrought by the Saviour ? “ Jesus drew near, *touchèd* the sick man or the leper, and said, ‘ Be thou clean, go in peace.’ ” He *touchèd* them, and this reminds me of a word pronounced by the most learned of the modern adversaries of Christian faith. “ What ! ” says Strauss, in his criticism of the Gospels, “ Jesus touches the sick, and when He wishes, He can cure them at a distance ! Do you not see in this the thaumaturgist who aims at acting upon the popular imagination ? ” No ! learned doctor, we see in this only the partiality of your criticism and the shallowness of your soul. Jesus can cure at a distance, but He will not do so ; it pleases Him to touch with His divine hands those lepers, those sinners, those demoniacs from whom everybody fled with disgust ; and it is precisely in this fact that we recognise the miracle of miracles, that of a charity which the world

had no conception of. Admirable example which we must imitate if we would follow Jesus Christ !

I do not hesitate to say that sympathy thus understood is a great step towards the restoration of the suffering classes. You cannot avoid having been struck with one of the consequences which inevitably follow extreme want and misery. The wretch, as he falls lower and lower, believes he sees the whole of society turn against him ; it seems to him that he is excluded and banished, as it were, from its midst, and that he is treated as an outcast. A wall rises, so to speak, between himself and the rest of mankind. Thence those bitter accusations against the world, against society, against the Church, which escape him, as if that world, that society, that Church, did not contain beings who suffer as he does, and who, they also, are subject to this strange hallucination of excessive grief. Well ! suppose that, while indulging in those angry feelings, that miserable creature sees one of those prosperous and privileged ones, whom fatality appears to have spared, come and sit at his bedside, suppose he feels your hand grasp his own, suppose he hears words of sympathy fall from your lips, do you think his evil dreams will not soon be dispelled ? That is not all ; as he listens to you, he will perhaps learn that sorrow can dwell in the heart of those who seem to him happy ; he will see by your mourning garb that fortune does not save from the most cruel trials, and in that ulcerated heart compassion for you will perhaps be awakened by the thought that you also have wept. Do you remember what happened some years ago in England ? A fearful explosion had buried in the bowels of the earth more than two hundred unfortunate miners ; there, upon the yawning chasm, their widows and mothers lamented, seeking their dead, and asking themselves with bitter anguish whence would come the bread for the morrow. It came ; the morrow's bread,



it was assured them for the future, and she who sent it joined to her gift these words: "From a widow." A widow! This widow was the Queen; but on that day she had descended from her royal state to weep with them that wept. The Queen! What! yonder, upon that throne, in those palaces, in the midst of that wealth, of that splendour, there is a widow who weeps with us, who mourns as we mourn! I dare affirm that the children of those poor widows will never learn to hate or despise the rich, and none can tell how much of bitterness and revolt that cry, that simple cry issuing from the heart, has stayed and rendered for ever impossible!

Those who suffer must, therefore, learn to know you. It must be so for themselves, it must be so because God commands it, it must be so for your own good. You will never know what life should be so long as you will not have seen misery face to face. There are things which can only be learned there, and which nevertheless must be known. When you, for instance, who rejoice at the birth of a little child, will have seen, beneath another roof than your own, the entrance of an infant into the world looked upon as a cause of sorrow and anxious grief, when you will have seen this little child hold out its tiny arms confidently and joyously towards a world which rejects it; when you, who mourn over the death of a father or mother, will have seen a sorrow such as yours comforted by a brutal and cynical word expressive only of delight at being relieved of too heavy a burden, then you will learn what is the world; you will question whether it be right for you to live in it in unconcern and pleasure, and you will know what it is to yearn after the reign of righteousness and love. Such is the lesson which misery teaches. Do we understand it? Alas! when to-day, by a hideous reversal, I see the upper classes turn their looks, not towards honest suffering, but

towards vile corruption, borrow its fashions, its manners, its very language, or its slang, rather, I question what must be the effect of this monstrous spectacle upon the suffering and labouring classes, and towards what nameless abjection it is dragging them down. But of what avail is our indignation, I ask, if we do not oppose to the spread of corruption the spread of charity? We must set to work, we must descend to those low grounds, we must learn to look evil closely and unflinchingly in the face.

I know that this contact is painful; there are sights that wound our delicacy; extreme poverty hurts our sensibility; it requires a certain amount of bravery to face it. A filthy and winding staircase, a low and narrow room in which one breathes a close, foul atmosphere, and that undefinable smell which misery imparts to whatever it touches; children in tatters, a pallet upon which a sick man moans, and upon the table food, the very sight of which is sickening; all this is hard to bear. Moreover, confess it, it troubles and saddens us, for it preaches in such heart-stirring accents the necessity of sacrifice! How can one think of gratifying one's fancies in presence of beings who have not so much as the barest necessities of life? How can one allow one's thoughts to dwell upon a handsome dress when one is surrounded by creatures who have not even the luxury of a little linen? How can one reflect upon the enjoyments of a banquet when one sees the unpalatable remains with which a whole family will satisfy its hunger? You suffer at this sight, and beforehand you are anxious to avoid it. But who are you that you should refuse to suffer? Is the service of God always easy? Is it by a sinuous, gentle, and shady path that heaven is to be reached? Christians, you to whom God has spared the persecutions and the bloody sacrifices re-

quired of your fathers, do you find your lot so hard that you would retrench from it even the acts of self-denial which charity involves? You follow Jesus Christ, but who is your Saviour? In that vague and gentle figure that leads you only upon the ideal heights of a poetical reverie, I recognise indeed the Christ whom our age has moulded in its own image, but it is no longer the Man of Sorrows, it is no longer the Christ of publicans and outcasts, it is no longer He who sought out vice and sorrow, however low they had fallen. You suffer in contact with want! Well! what is your suffering compared with that of the beings who must live and die in that atmosphere which you cannot for a moment breathe without disgust? If the mere sight of wretchedness appals you, what then must be the condition of those who cannot escape it for a single instant? You suffer, but to efface your painful impressions, you have in summer your parks and shady bowers; in winter your comfortable dwellings, and your hearth in which a bright fire sparkles; while they have only their four bare and murky walls, their attics in which they suffer the extremes of heat and cold, their fireless hearth, the spectacle of other woes as repulsive as their own, and in their mind the incessant and cruel anxiety of the daily gain—of that gain without which, at the first touch of disease, their last refuge will fail them. The sight of their destitution is painful to you; your increasing ease and luxury keep you so completely enchained that you can no longer obey God who sends you towards those who suffer; but how will you dare appear before God and give an account of your task? What will you have to answer if God, in His turn, rejects you? Will you be surprised if your selfishness, your cowardice, your idleness, are offensive to supreme love? Do you think you are a more attractive spectacle in His sight than the wretchedness of the in-

digent is in yours? Do you think that, even under the most lovely appearances, a heart without charity is not in the eyes of the Supreme Judge an object of just aversion? Do you think you will be able to justify yourselves by alleging your native delicacy and your instinctive sensibility? Answer—or rather, obey that secret voice which troubles and annoys you, and cries out loudly that there is no salvation without sorrow, no eternal felicity without sacrifice.

Have I exhausted my subject, and to have gained my cause, is it enough to have placed you in presence of suffering? Yes, if the heart were upright, if it followed the instructive logic of devotion and charity. But such is not the case, and even in presence of sorrow, it argues, it negotiates, it disputes love every inch of ground. You acknowledge that the task is immense, that it imposes itself upon you; but who knows if, at the first appeal of charity, you will not silence us with these simple words, "I cannot?" I cannot! This answer, I hope, is not lightly given, neither will I accept it lightly. No, I will not judge you; if, before God, you cannot, that is enough for me. I know that there are limits to everything, I know that liberty must be respected, and I will respect it. And what would we become, I pray you, without that mutual respect which the Gospel enforces? What should we become if the spirit of judgment should, under pretence of charity, allow itself full scope and exact a certain amount of abnegation from each? I will respect your answer, but nevertheless permit me to beg of you, ere you reply, to examine whether you are sincere and in earnest. You cannot! And why cannot you? Might it not be because the world has invaded everything, even the portion which should have belonged to the poor? Might it not be because you also have yielded to that tide of luxury

which nothing ere long will be able to resist? Ah! it was to the world you should have said, "I cannot!" You should have answered this firmly and bravely when it required of you that useless expense, that extravagance of dress and furniture, those refinements of delicacy to which your vanity so readily consented. What would you have lost by this? A triumph of self-love which, while it has excited the envy of others, has merely straitened your own heart. Suppose even you had been judged, suppose you had been accused of rigour and sternness, could you not have accepted this? Will there be henceforth no distinction between the Christian and the worldly dwelling, and must we make up our mind to see those who profess Christianity follow docilely upon the track of a world whose approbation is a snare and whose applause is a danger? But though you have not dared to oppose the world, you are now compelled to say no to your Saviour. It is to your Saviour you will reply, "I cannot!" to your Saviour, whose kingdom progresses but slowly, and whose needy members are neglected. It is for your Saviour that you have kept the courage of a refusal. Oh! you are not afraid to grieve Him. His approval, His blame, what are these to you? True, He has redeemed you at the price of an unutterable sorrow; true, He comes to you with His crown of thorns, with His pierced hands and feet; true, in your dying hour, when the world will have no charm for you, you will call Him to walk with you through the gloomy valley and to appear with you before the eternal tribunal. It matters not! to-day, coldly, after having given the world its share, you will say to Him, "I have nothing left for Thee!"

I will not conclude without unmasking a sophism beneath which it is fashionable to-day to conceal luxury and worldliness. Men tell us, "Rather than give to the poor, spend money and enjoy yourselves. Your luxury

is the people's labour; your expenses are their profit. The more costly your garments will be, the more heavily laden with delicacies will be your table, the more ornamented will be your dwelling, the more hands also will work, the greater number of families also will be snatched from misery." This is indeed a charming remedy, an admirable process which men do not always dare to affirm, but by means of which they often lull their conscience to sleep when they intend to yield to their tastes or to gratify their fancies.

Well, is this excuse valid, and does it rest upon a solid basis? That is what remains to be examined.

The best way to test the truth of a principle is to see how far it may lead. You say that luxury is the redeemer of misery. Well, if you are right, spend, spend on, exhaust your wealth in extravagant fancies, invent new pleasures and unparalleled refinements. Ye apostles of a new charity, at work, at work then for the redemption of mankind! Oh! how convenient, in truth, is this religion, and how well it answers to the secret instincts of our nature! How it will be gladly hailed everywhere! Away with that gloomy piety that preached sacrifice and abnegation! Luxury, give us luxury, more and more, and when you shall swim in an opulence which had not its equal in Rome or Babylon, then the people, saved by you, will for evermore ignore suffering, and heaven will be begun upon earth!

You smile, but beware. If the principle proposed to us be true, that will be its direct and legitimate consequence; but if this consequence is absurd and cruel, must we not come to the conclusion that the principle is an absurdity? Common sense, in harmony with experience, has long since told us that the expenses of luxury are absolutely unprofitable, that the greater the amount of the vital forces consecrated to the production of what is

superfluous, the smaller the portion that is left for the production of necessaries. When you will have torn a hundred thousand labourers from our rural districts to cast them into the workshops where your palaces are being prepared, or into the factories where your sumptuous materials are being woven, is it not most certain that, to obtain an unproductive luxury, you will have lessened, in the same proportion, the fecundity of your native soil? When you will have transformed heaps of gold into jewels or delicate ornaments, is it not most sure that you will not have added one farthing to the capital upon which humanity lives? Your principle, therefore, is false; false and cruel, for its final result would be famine. You would soon see this on the first occasion of a social commotion. When, at the first alarm of a revolution or of some unforeseen crisis, all this purely conventional wealth would dwindle away in an instant, what would become of those hundreds and thousands of men torn by your luxury from the manly and healthful labours of agriculture? Cast out of employment in your large towns, accustomed to an easily acquired and as easily expended gain, they would become for you a real danger, and all the more to be dreaded that, having become acquainted with your senseless luxury, their hearts would be torn by envy and hatred at sight of their own wretchedness.

That is not all. Not only is this principle cruel, but it is immoral. It is immoral for yourselves; for luxury, after all, is enjoyment, and unlimited enjoyment, however refined it be, is the degradation of soul and will, the satisfaction of selfishness, and by a natural consequence, the narrowing of the heart. It is immoral also for those to whom your example is a lesson. Beside you, the workman who sees your life will say, he also: "Why should I not enjoy? why should I not shake off the stern and cruel law of abnegation?" And he will enjoy, and he

will waste in coarse pleasures his daily earnings. Instead of your refined delights, he will seek the cynical joys of the gin palace or of the haunts of vice. I defy you to prevent this consequence. Suppose it extending more and more. Ere long, from the depths of convulsed society will rise, like the dismal sound of the storm, the voice of an immense people exclaiming: "Enjoyment is the right of all! Paradise, O ye Christians, you tell me that it is in heaven, but you lie, for I have seen you seek it upon earth! I have seen you, would-be religious men, cull here below all the pleasures, all the refinements, all the delights that my toil could provide. Well! I, too, must have my Paradise on earth. I must have it to-morrow; I must have it to-day. Long enough you have pointed it out to me beyond the grave; but science has instructed me, and I will no longer waste my sweat and my tears for what is a mere intangible nothing. I am weary of waiting. I must have happiness; I must have it in this life, of which hitherto I have known nought but the self-denial. My happiness is luxury also, it is wealth, it is pleasure, it is the produce of the earth which was given to me as well as to you. My happiness is there, before me—I may take it when I will. Woe to him who would stay my hand! Woe to him who would stand across my path! Enjoyment is the last word of life. I must enjoy, I will enjoy, for my name is legion. Upon my robust arms I bear the whole of society. With a lift of my finger, when the time is ripe, I will overthrow it!"

That is what the masses will say if it be true that the enjoyment of some redeems the misery of others. You will be unable to escape this terrible logic. God grant that our country may never witness its fearful demonstration! Moreover, I do not expect you to be moved by such arguments. If fear alone was to be your motive for



doing good, I would prefer descending from this pulpit whence another language, more elevated, more worthy of God and of yourselves should be heard. To succour misery I will propose but one remedy—the spirit of Christ; that spirit which is at the same time righteousness and love. At work in that spirit, brethren!—at work to-day, to-morrow, ever, so long as there will be upon earth a misery to alleviate or a sorrow to comfort!

THE END.



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